

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

The Palmer Church of England Voluntary Aided Junior School

Norreys Avenue
Wokingham
RG40 1UX

Diocese of Oxford

Local Authority: Wokingham

Date of inspection: 7th May 2008

Date of last inspection: 17th May 2004

School's Unique reference number: 109992

Name of Headteacher: Tina Norman

Inspector's name and NS inspector's number: Alan Thornsby 137

Context

The Palmer school is a smaller than average junior school with a Resource Unit for pupils with physical disabilities. Most pupils are of white British heritage, with some pupils from minority ethnic groups and Romany Gypsy families. Pupils come from mixed socio-economic backgrounds. For the last two years the head has been associate head of the infant school that shares the same site. There has been much effort working towards the amalgamation of the two schools as All Saints Church of England Aided School due to open in September 2008.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of The Palmer Junior as a Church of England school are good.

Palmer Junior is a school that shows care and respect in action in its daily life. Discussions by all stakeholders, often relating to the amalgamation with the infant school, have given opportunities to identify strengths and areas for development and have had a positive impact. They have created a secure foundation for the future of the school.

Established strengths

- The positive impact of the vision and work of the clergy team for the development of a church school
- The commitment of the staff and governors to a distinctive church school
- The inclusive ethos that promotes care and respect

Focus for development

- Make effective use of displays to explore values and provoke thoughtful reflection
- Involve the governing body in monitoring and evaluation of worship
- Consolidate assessment in religious education in order to raise standards

The school through its distinctive Christian character is good at meeting the needs of all learners

This school has a determined commitment to serving the community by meeting the needs of its children and their families. The highly successful integration of pupils from the resource unit into mainstream classes illustrates in very practical terms the impact of the Christian values of care and respect that are key to this school. This is enhanced by the provision of 'The Palmer Peaceful Place' and a 'thinking space' within school to withdraw and reflect, as well as an opportunity to leave a contact message for a member of the clergy. Pupils are friendly, articulate and generally well behaved. They convey their understanding of the ethos of the school with comments such as 'anyone can come here, we all get on with each other.' Relationships throughout the school community are good and staff provide role models in their daily routines for pupils to copy. All pupils feel the school challenges and supports them to academic and personal success. This is encouraged and recognised by a range of

rewards systems. Most pupils recognise the benefits of these and speak positively about sharing each other's successes. Pupils take responsibility in caring for others, also reflected in their commitment to fund raising for charities as well as to improving their own environment. The school uses the grounds particularly well to develop spirituality and is developing an outdoor area to complement the Palmer Peaceful Place. Although there are many examples of good displays throughout the school, the school does not yet make full use of these to promote its values or ethos, or to encourage reflection.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

The clergy team has made a significant impact on worship in school. Pupils enjoy their presence, and have established strong relationships with them. This is very clear when the curate arrives and takes a long time to cross the playground greeting and talking to many individuals. They describe worship as 'a time to learn about God in a fun way' and a time to learn 'to treat each other with respect.' Themes planned by the senior management team and clergy are linked to the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning, school values and Bible stories. Appropriate music and songs are selected to give a meaningful context to pupils. Pupils understand the significance of the lighted candle commenting that 'We know that God is there for us'. Each theme is introduced by a 'launch assembly' and a later follow up assembly enables pupils to share work and ideas. This makes it clear that they have understood the messages of the assemblies. The school is aware of the need to address formal evaluation of worship. Prayer has a high profile in school and pupils understand the different types of prayer. They describe prayer as 'a time to talk to God and give him a message.' The church is used for calendar festivals and pupils write prayers for these services. Although pupils are involved in role play and some readings especially in church, they have few opportunities to be involved in leading worship within school.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good.

Religious education has a good impact because of the introduction of the new syllabus has raised the quality of teaching. It is becoming embedded under the guidance of the enthusiastic co-ordinator. She monitors the planning of lessons and the quality of pupils' work. Careful records are kept to know progress is being made. Discussion amongst staff suggests that pupils do as well as in other subjects. Assessment is not yet systematic enough to track the progress made by pupils. Teaching is good because there are good links with other subjects. For example, Judaism is studied as part of a World War II topic and Sikhism as a part of a topic on India. The way teachers ask questions helps pupils to engage with 'big questions'. This is sometimes made even better by using philosophical questioning guided by 'de Bono's thinking hats'. Creative teaching, using for example food samples and ICT gives first hand experience of a Seder meal and an understanding of its significance to members of the Jewish faith. Religious art is very well used to engage and challenge pupils' knowledge and understanding of Christianity. Pupils value the opportunities to explore the beliefs and rituals of other faiths because 'if you go to another place of worship, you learn how to behave and respect what they believe.' Written work is often well presented. When teachers mark work they comment on the learning of pupils or suggest things to develop pupils' thinking. The school does not yet make the best use of displays to reinforce or extend pupils' learning.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is good.

The church and the headteacher have a well-communicated vision for the creation of a school that serves the needs of its community. This has resulted in a committed governing body that is effective in understanding its role. Foundation governors have worked extremely hard to extend and secure links with the church community. This reflects the passion for the place of the school within the community. The involvement of staff and governors in the exploration of church school distinctiveness and subsequent development plans has resulted in a realistic view of the present position of the school. All are aware of the strengths and areas of development that will enable the ethos to grow further. There is clearly good capacity for future development and enthusiasm and ability to make this happen. Staff feel valued by the recognition and acknowledgement of their work by the governing body. Parents are justly proud of the work of the school that 'serves its community to create well rounded pupils'. Parents show their commitment to the school's foundation by recognising or taking part in a weekly prayer group that meets in school to share their own and sometimes pupils' prayers. The links with the church are reflected in the pastoral involvement of the clergy team, especially the curate, and the members of the congregation who listen to children read. The school has good links with other local schools for sports

and musical events. These enable social and support networks for pupils and staff. Pupils from the resource unit enjoy opportunities such as the Kennet Games and horse riding in Windsor Great Park.

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