

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Riseley Church of England Voluntary Aided Lower School

Church Lane

Riseley

Bedford

MK44 1EL

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Bedfordshire

SIAS Inspection: 24th January 2007

Previous S23 Inspection: May 2001

URN: 109624

Headteacher: Lindsay Fraser

SIAS Inspector Name: Lyn Field 151

School Context

This is a smaller than average school serving a wide area of surrounding villages. Children come from a mix of social backgrounds. The number of pupils with special educational needs is above average and attainment on entry is below. There has been a stable staff team for several years.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Riseley Lower School as a Church of England school are outstanding

This school fully engages with the challenge of the Christian gospel to love your neighbour as yourself. Children grow in self-esteem and spiritual understanding and through this, develop lifelong skills in caring for each other. The staff team lives out the values of the school and provides exceptional care for pupils.

Established strengths

- The headteacher gives inspirational leadership
- The governing body ensures the Christian foundation is instrumental in the success of the school
- Collective worship touches the lives of individuals and strengthens the whole community
- Children's progress in their personal development enables them to achieve their best

Focus for development

There are no areas identified as a focus for development because the school is constantly evaluating what it does and any issues identified receive immediate response.

The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is outstanding at meeting the needs of all learners.

The exceptional work of the school in spiritual and emotional development is central to children achieving their best. Much work has been done on the development of language skills and strategies to improve thinking and emotional literacy. Children now talk sensitively about faith and can articulate their own feelings. The staff have developed specialist skills to support children experiencing significant change and loss in their lives. They help these children to integrate into their community as they regain self-confidence and the ability to establish relationships. Children clearly understand what fairness and justice mean in their school because they see it in action. They explain that people need different kinds of help but believe they are all equally valued.

Governors and the headteacher continually ask themselves if any new development meets the scrutiny of Christian values. This achieves exceptional consistency in all aspects of teaching and learning. A Christian approach is clear in Year 1 where the teacher explains to children that they are valued and loved for the person they are even when their behaviour needs to change. The monitoring of children's development is rigorous. It has led teachers and governors to develop a system of tracking progress in spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in parallel with progress in academic targets. This work is demanding but the headteacher, in her role as spiritual leader, makes sure that the adults are equally cared for as they are constantly challenged to improve their skills still further.

Pupils are proud of their achievements because they are encouraged to take decisions and put them into place. This has long-term impact because they, like the staff, constantly evaluate changes. They are already working out how to retain the special atmosphere surrounding the newly developed spiritual garden. A creative curriculum fosters a love of learning and develops leadership skills. In producing a stunning book on the Caribbean, for example, children have learned to work collaboratively and negotiate with printers.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding.

Collective worship is at the heart of the school because it is the setting in which key moments in people's lives are recognised and held in prayer. This brings the community together and reinforces its Christian commitment to go the extra mile in meeting the particular needs of each individual. One example of many is the special services when a child is to be adopted which help the families involved and the whole community to cope with endings and new beginnings.

The themes for worship are linked to the programme for social and emotional learning. This ensures Christian values underpin teaching and learning because teachers can reinforce what is explored in worship back in the classroom and the playground. Children have developed a spiritual language that they draw on to ponder the big issues they personally face. This helps them to make good use of the times of quiet reflection. Children trust the adults in school and know where to go for help when reflection identifies feelings that make it hard to cope. Prayer is a thread that links worship in church and school because the prayers placed in the prayer boxes will be received and when appropriate, offered in church. All the pupils enjoy worship and there is real anticipation before it begins because leaders show a good understanding of how children learn. The vicar makes a huge impact because he leads children step by step to an understanding of key Christian teaching. Patterns of worship are well established from Foundation stage because the headteacher skilfully weaves prayer and reflection into the acting out of Bible stories. Children have a real sense of being part of a larger worshipping community because the staff are equally engaged in worship and parents are keen to attend services in church.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding.

Children have an excellent knowledge of Christianity. Standards are well above average and at least as high as those in the core subjects. In Year 1 children can explain the symbolism contained in the service of baptism and have a real sense of the special times, special places and special people that denote the Christian faith. By Year 4 pupils can accurately draw on the central message of parables to explain the values that are important in the life of the school. They have a good theological understanding because the Christian teaching that happens in collective worship enhances the learning in RE lessons. The celebration of festivals such as Christmas and Easter in no way diminish this understanding because activities are directly focused on the key Christian beliefs. Children are set tasks that help them make connections to human experience so they can learn about the impact of faith in people's lives. In one way this is limited because the school's syllabus covers little about other faiths. The richness of the curriculum, however, means that teachers are able to compensate for this through the links they make to religious faith in projects about World War 2, the Caribbean and Ethiopia. As a result children have a very mature understanding of issues such as persecution, prejudice and slavery in human history. RE therefore has a significant impact on the moral and cultural development of children.

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

The teaching and care of pupils is outstanding because there is constant challenge to live out Christian principles in the leadership and management of the school. This is clearly linked to the achievement of pupils because the Governing body has reviewed its aims in the light of the Every Child Matters agenda. This discussion examined how the care of each child should be rooted in Christian values. The creative dialogue the headteacher enjoys with the chair of governors and the vicar lies at the heart of this because she understands how to translate the shared vision into practice on a day-to-day basis. The commitment of a skilled and stable staff team means that together they have developed a culture where they are constantly evaluating what they do and why they do it. Staff and governors fully understand the complex needs of the community they serve. The monitoring the governors undertake is meaningful because they understand what progress looks like at both an academic and personal level. This involves conversations with children about their progress and the work of the school that makes pupils feel valued and motivates them to be involved in their community. Parents support the strong moral ethos the church foundation provides and feel it challenges pupils to consider their own behaviour and attitudes towards others. The school's evaluation of itself as a church school is modest because it focuses too strongly on measurable targets. It does not fully recognise that the strength of this school lies in the journey it has undertaken to understand the implications of its Christian foundation for the children in its care.