

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

### **Sonning Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School**

Liguge Way

Sonning

Reading

RG4 6XF

#### **Diocese of Oxford**

Local Authority: Wokingham

Date of inspection: 4<sup>th</sup> December 2007

Date of last inspection: May 2003

School's Unique reference number: 110016

Name of Headteacher: Mrs Lesley Green

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

#### **Context**

Sonning is a small school that serves a relatively advantaged catchment area. Most pupils are white British with a small number coming from other ethnic backgrounds.

#### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Sonning as a Church of England school are good**

Sonning Church of England School is a good school that has many strengths in the way it promotes Christian values within its caring family ethos. This has a deep impact on the academic and personal development of its pupils. They have a clear understanding of Christian belief in action.

#### **Established strengths**

- The impact of the caring family ethos on the lives of the school community.
- The commitment of the head, staff and governing body to the development of the school.
- The impact of the links with the church on the life of the school.

#### **Focus for development**

- Involve pupils more in planning and leading Collective Worship
- Ensure pupils achieve as well in RE as in other subjects by further developing thinking skills and by colleague lesson observations.

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

The school motto displayed in the entrance 'We will do our best and what is right as Jesus taught us', is a clear indication of the caring ethos of the school. It reflects the commitment to academic and personal development of all members of the community. There are good relationships between adults and children and these help pupils to respond to the challenges in lessons. Pupils are confident, articulate and well behaved. They show a sound understanding of the impact of a church school on their lives. They describe how their code of conduct, which is based on the teaching of Jesus, 'teaches us the difference between right and wrong'. They are confident that school prepares them for life because 'we will still remember how to behave and believe in God.' They understand the significance of the Christian signs and symbols around the school, especially the painting of 'Jesus the light of the world' by a local pre Raphaelite artist. They explain how forgiveness is essential in keeping good friends. Older pupils show responsibility towards others by being 'peer mediators' who 'help other pupils to negotiate' and when walking to church holding the hand of a younger pupil. This increases the friendship links between children of different ages. Pupils show compassion in their support of charities, such as 'Operation Christmas Child'. Effective links between religious education and collective worship, use of the environment and visits promote good spiritual moral social and cultural development of pupils. A slide presentation in the entrance area successfully illustrates the range of spiritual opportunities found across the curriculum, but this is not consistently reinforced in displays around the school.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is good**

The school has revised the thematic approach to worship to give the opportunity to explore themes in greater depth in both whole school, class worship and candle time. A Biblical verse relating to each theme reinforces this in the hall and classrooms. Some pupils enjoy the challenge of learning these verses. Pupils recognize worship as a time of quiet, to speak to God and say thank you. The school includes pupils of other faith groups by acknowledging their major festivals and uses stories from other faiths that reflect and reinforce core values. Pupils have a clear understanding of the meaning of 'Jesus the light of the world' as an example of the way to follow in life. Although pupils often have an active role in writing prayers and reading from the Bible, their commitment and knowledge suggests they are capable of taking a greater role in the planning and leading of worship. Pupils gain a broad experience of Christian leaders through the input to worship provided by members of the church and governing body. The presence of the vicar as an occasional worshipper as well as a leader reinforces the value of worship. The church is used for festival services by school but this is only part of the joint activities for worship. Pupils are often involved in Sunday worship in church and play a significant role in special services such as 'Remembrance Sunday'. The school serves its community by hosting a monthly family service, in which parents unable to attend Sunday worship can attend with their children.

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is good**

The head and subject co-ordinator are committed to raising standards so that they are in line with other core subjects. This is being achieved through a cycle of lesson monitoring and work levelling. The implementation of a new agreed syllabus and a creative approach to teaching are helping support this. Pupils enjoy the range of teaching strategies being used such as freeze-frame that 'make learning fun and helps you to understand without being told.' They have a clear understanding of the difference between religious education where they learn about other religions and worship that focuses on Christian teaching. Teaching is often good or better because teachers' subject knowledge is secure and they develop higher level thinking skills in pupils. For example, a Year Four class was involved in discussing where to put figures in a Nativity Advent calendar. There was unanimous decision as to Jesus being on Christmas Eve, but the paired discussion gave a range of logically argued alternatives for others. When teacher knowledge and confidence is less secure, teaching is satisfactory. The school has identified in its action plans an in-service day and peer observation as means of addressing this issue. Pupils have a good knowledge of Christian festivals and are aware for example of the relevance of Old Testament prophets in foretelling the 'Messiah'. Parents readily describe the impact of religious education and worship on their children as giving them opportunities to ask and explore big questions at home as well as at school. Marking of written work is often related to pupils learning and the school is beginning to explore ways to record progress when creative teaching results in discussion and drama.

### **The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school are good**

The head has a clear vision for the development of this church school and has developed this jointly with staff, governors and parents. Pupils have their own child friendly version of the school aims to allow them to understand the foundation of the school. Similarly, all groups have been involved in exploring distinctiveness as a church school and the results collated to inform self-assessment. The school has an accurate view of its strengths and the capacity for future development is good because of the way it responds to the findings of analysis. The governing body is supportive of the school, beginning meetings with a prayer, using Christian values to inform decisions and making decisions with the impact on learners as the heart of the decision. Foundation governors show their commitment to the school by regularly leading school and family worship. The vicar is a critical friend and a strong pastoral presence in the school. There is clear evidence that the well-being of staff and pupils is a high priority and the school is constantly sensitive to the needs of others in times of difficulty. Parents appreciate the approachability of the staff and appreciate the way school reinforces the values they share. The school benefits from the supportive links of the local cluster of schools, with whom it shares ideas and practice, as well as from diocesan and local authority training and advice.