

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Osmund's Church of England Voluntary Aided Middle School

Barnes Way,
Rothesay Road,
Dorchester,
DT1 2DZ

Diocese of Salisbury

Local authority: Dorset

Date of inspection: 28 February, 2008

Date of last inspection: April 2003

Type of School: VA School's URN: 113892

Headteacher: Mr Ron Jenkinson

SIAS Inspector: Revd Richard Peers (N.S. 125)

School context

St Osmund's is a larger than average middle school serving the town of Dorchester and its area. Most pupils are of White British heritage with around 6% from other ethnic backgrounds including a significant group of Muslim pupils. Most pupils are from generally advantaged socio-economic area. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is average and the proportion with a statement of special educational need below average. Pupils' attainment on entry is broadly average. There are currently 620 pupils on roll.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Osmund's School as a Church of England school are outstanding

St Osmund's is a high attaining school where pupils do well because they are happy, feel safe and develop real character. Behaviour is outstanding because pupils understand the benefits of treating others with respect. Pupils benefit from an astounding range of extra-curricular activities and from the care of highly committed staff and governors.

Established strengths

- The outstanding spiritual leadership of the Headteacher
- The skills and experience of the Governing Body
- The outstanding teaching in Religious Education
- Links with a variety of Christian denominations

Focus for development

- To develop a broad understanding of prayer and embed prayer in the daily life of the school
- To develop pupils' understanding of being at an Anglican school through the liturgy and links with the parish, diocese and Cathedral
- To use ritual and music, including singing, to further embed worship in the life of the school

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

Pupils are rightly extremely proud of their school and all it does for them, they know that they attend an outstanding school and are taught by outstanding teachers. They describe learning as fun as they describe how they don't understand why 'people on television criticise schools'.

The school provides an astounding range of extra-curricular and curriculum enrichment activities and staff must give generously of their time to enable this. Pupils recognise that their teachers do this because they care about them.

The school environment is of the highest possible quality. Displays are outstanding and often reflect the school's core Christian values. Art is being used very effectively to show that God can be 'found' in beauty. Pupils value their involvement in the selection of the sculpture for the 'RE:Z' outside area and could explain its meaning. Pupils also worked on a mosaic on the Water of Life theme and they know that this comes from Jesus' description of himself. They were able to explain how the 'I am' statements are Jesus telling His disciples the nature of his being. Pupils, parents and staff described the school as 'a family that cares for everyone' and difference was celebrated in an outstanding assembly seen. Pupils talked about the importance of Peer Mentors as people they could talk to if they were worried about things. They also described the 'Feelings Box' in the school's Quiet Room as an important way of expressing difficult emotions.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective Worship has an extremely important place in the life of the school and pupils recognise that the opportunity for the whole school to worship together gives them a sense of belonging to a community. The Collective Worship leader has a good understanding of ways in which worship needs to develop. The weekly Whole School worship takes place in the Sports' Hall and pupils remove their shoes and sit on the floor. Pupils recognise that it does not have the sense of holiness that a church has. Worship on other days is in the school hall or tutor rooms, pupils were not able to identify elements of ritual or prayer that are constant to worship in all of these places.

Pupils spoke very clearly about the importance of 'reflection' and taking moments to think and be quiet. They spoke about how important the "RE:Z" garden area and the Quiet Room and library are in providing a place to be quiet. They found it more difficult to recognise the moments of reflection in tutor groups and to distinguish this from lessons. They were also less able to talk about prayer. They value the recent introduction of the 'prayer book' (where they can record items needing prayer) and the opportunities to read prayers in assembly but did not speak about prayer as a relationship with God or talk about how it might be more than words.

The Eucharist is celebrated for each Year 8 however pupils were not able to explain much about the Eucharist, its meaning or the words used, or how it fits into the life of the school.

Music in the school is outstanding and performances enhance the school's worship. It does not, however, form a strong part of the worship in enabling pupils to sing regularly. Pupils spoke very positively of singing Christmas carols but could not name much else that they sing.

Pupils are able to identify times when they have recognised the presence of God in their life in school. One pupil spoke very movingly of talking with a teaching assistant and being offered the chance to write in the prayer book. Others spoke of the way they are treated with love and respect as being how God is present.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Standards in RE are extremely high. Teaching is consistently outstanding and challenges pupils to evaluate evidence and synthesise information. The leadership of the Subject Leader is inspirational and she has an excellent understanding of her subject. Pupils enjoy RE lessons and are enthusiastic to learn about people's religious beliefs and also to apply these to their own lives.

Pupils know what level they are working and what they need to do to progress to the next level.

Assessment within lessons is outstanding and is used very effectively as a part of learning.

Both lessons seen were outstanding in enabling pupils to develop skills of empathy and recognise the religious consequences of events. Pupils made outstanding progress in both lessons and knew they had.

The RE Scheme of Work is outstanding and extremely well resourced it balances learning about religion with learning from religion. It is well resourced and together with the Head of Department's leadership skills has enabled the large team of mainly non-specialists to work very well.

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

The leadership of the head teacher as resident theologian and spiritual leader is outstanding. He is described by his colleagues as a gentle man and he is clearly leading the school in a gentle but purposeful manner. Parents spoke enormously positively of the head teacher's leadership describing him as being an inspirational team builder and holding the staff team together.

Staff feel valued and cared for and believe that their views are heard. The staff work well together and leadership is well distributed and springs from a real belief in leaders as servants.

The School Council meets regularly and pupils believe they are well listened to. The rights and responsibilities worked out with staff and students is understood by students as the 'least we can do' to match the high level of teaching they receive. Together with the '7 C's' (caring, considerate, communicative, courteous, co-operative, conscientious, confident) these are outstanding examples of applying Christian values in a way that can be accessed by people of any faith and none. The link with Scripture through Galatians 5 is explicit and known by pupils.

Governors bring an outstanding level of skills and experience to their work. They give sacrificially of their time and spend much time in school. While they report on their visits evaluation is less well developed. Governors' meetings begin with prayer and governors are committed to further developing the school's distinctively Christian and Anglican character.

The school makes good use of one of the parish churches and pupils recognise that it is a special place where they can know something of the presence of God. Pupils and parents said they would like to use the church more often. Pupils know their Rector and that he is someone who can tell them about God and to whom they could talk. Pupils were less able to talk about what else happens in the churches or about the congregations who worship there.

Pupils and parents said they would like to see the local clergy in school more often.

Links with other Christian churches are extremely well developed and pupils talked enthusiastically about a Year 8 Retreat Day led by all the Churches in the town.