

Christ the Sower Ecumenical Primary School (Voluntary Aided)

Singleton Drive
Grange Farm
Milton Keynes
MK8 0PZ

Diocese: Oxford

Local authority: Milton Keynes

Dates of inspection: 22nd May 2012

Date of last inspection: 18th March 2009

School's unique reference number: 131164

Headteacher: Huw Humphreys

Inspector's name and number: Gillian Allison NS142

School context

This larger than average-sized primary school serves a fast growing residential area. A significant number of pupils join the school during the academic year. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is above average, as is the proportion who speak English as a foreign language. The headteacher took up post in April 2011, following a period with two interim headteachers. The school is supported by an inter-church partnership of four denominations.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Christ the Sower Ecumenical Primary School as a church school are good

A refreshed vision is strengthening the church school ethos and determining its direction, so that distinctively Christian values inspire policies and practices. The school's service to the whole community springs from values of love and respect. Spiritual development is very effectively promoted to support the growth of the whole child.

Established strengths

- The leadership and vision of the headteacher, supported by a strong staff team and governors
- Pastoral support for children, families and staff, inspired by Christian ideals
- High expectations of staff and children which are effectively promoted across the school

Focus for development

- To raise levels of achievement in religious education
- To develop pupils' responsibility for delivering collective worship

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

All are aware of the Christian foundation and the core Gospel values which motivate the work of the headteacher and his staff. Staff are clear about what this means and how it is expressed, so that they work as a team in applying the principles. As a result, children's personal development is good and this is helping their learning. This is exemplified in the application of the maturity initiative, through which self respect and respect for others is promoted. Explanatory diagrams, largely directed at adults and older children, are displayed about the school, with appropriate biblical texts, a reminder of Christian inspiration and how it can be applied. In this and other ways the environment nurtures spirituality, through spaces for reflection and with celebratory and thought provoking displays. Increasingly, worship themes are drawn into curriculum plans, reinforcing children's spiritual understanding. Parents describe a refreshed church school ethos and note the consistent application of the values 'which are lived everyday'. The living out of the values is attractive to all families, whatever their faith background, because it is the basis of a cohesive community and a caring setting for learning. Children also show good awareness of the wider community, through partnerships with church led organisations and a church school. Support for moral development is good. The exploration of moral questions in worship, circle time and RE is linked to Christian values and children often refer to these when discussing personal and general choices. In the classroom this is increasingly evident in independence of thought. These values underpin the Golden Rules which guide conduct and children show good understanding of these when they devise their class rules. The living out of these rules translates into improved standards of behaviour.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Children readily discuss collective worship because what they experience is relevant to their lives. They say it is important to be together as a community, children and adults, especially when they celebrate. Because staff involve themselves in the worship, children explore the teachings throughout the school day, and this means there are very good opportunities for spiritual and moral development. Through very effective planning the school's key Christian values are explored, so that children understand the biblical origins and link the issues to their own and others' lives. This was evident in the hall display of children's contributions to earlier worship discussion. Prayer and time for reflection, respectfully observed by all, strengthen spiritual growth. The inclusive nature of worship means that children from all faiths and none feel part of worship. As one parent commented, "You are not preached at but encouraged to share values across the school." Children are positive about worship; they respond well and often discuss experiences in school and at home. The chaplain's role in worship is much valued and exemplifies Christian service to the community. Prayer groups in school and in the partner churches focus on the school themes to strengthen the spiritual contribution. The rhythms and symbols of worship are familiar and encourage all to participate. Many reflect aspects of Christian worship, strengthening understanding of Christian tradition. There is huge enthusiasm for worship through song and story. Pupils enjoy responsibility for worship and would relish more opportunities, something the school recognises and plans to develop.

The effectiveness of the religious education is satisfactory

The school's evaluation of RE is focussed and analytical. This means that leaders understand standards and progress in RE and what is needed to raise those levels from satisfactory to consistently good. This plan is underway, well resourced because it is included in school development planning, demonstrating the value governors place on RE. Subject leaders undertake professional development in RE and this is shared in regular staff training. An effective partnership with an established church school is strengthening the development. The impact on standards is already being felt as classes make above average progress. The shift to a whole school approach in implementing the new locally agreed syllabus is affecting teaching and learning positively. Because teachers feel confident in delivering the syllabus, they enjoy teaching RE and children's responses are positive. Teachers correctly assess where pupils are in their learning and plan lessons to engage their interest, using up-to-date resources and approaches. Children particularly enjoy challenging questions, discussion and debate. They show good spiritual and moral understanding of issues about Christianity and other faiths. There are good, relevant links with collective worship and the chaplain's involvement with both RE and worship contributes to the deepening understanding of Christian faith. Children from all faith backgrounds benefit from visits to places of worship and from meeting believers from a range of faiths. This highlights the relevance of religion in the local and wider community. One example of this is the impact of the Moving Stories Project, with outcomes graphically described by a Key Stage 2 pupil and illustrated in display around the school.

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

The headteacher, supported by senior staff and governors, has a clear vision for this church school serving this community. This clarity is evident in the increasingly influential dialogue with stakeholders about ways in which distinctive Christian values play their part in almost all aspects of school life. Within the school and the wider community there is good understanding of the distinctive ethos because it is lived out, as well as being written and talked about. Newcomers, children, staff and governors, benefit from appropriate induction so that they understand the school's values. Governors and leaders now use self-evaluation effectively to review and develop church school distinctiveness. In the last two years this has focussed on strengthening the Christian ethos, so that this is now a priority in the School Development Plan. Strong leadership of collective worship and of RE is supporting that aim. In rebuilding the church school ethos, the school is helping staff and governors' understanding of church school leadership. The good provision of appropriate professional training for staff and governors, in, for example Restorative Practice, also supports future leadership. Several of the school's most beneficial partnerships are characteristic of the church school. Chief among these is the support within the Watling Valley Ecumenical Partnership, of which the school is a full member. Clergy and lay members bring practical and pastoral support, including the annual holiday club which strengthens links between the school, parents and the church. Good partnership with parents strengthens the school community. Diocesan links, especially school partnerships, enrich school development.