

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Littledean Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Church Street,
Littledean,
Cinderford
Gloucestershire
GL14 3NL

Diocese of Gloucester

LA: Gloucestershire
Date of inspection: June 17th 2010
Date of last inspection: July 4th 2007
School's URN: 115632
Headteacher: Mrs Valerie Huggett
Inspector: Mr Andrew Rickett, NS 201

School Context

Littledean CE VC Primary School is a smaller than average primary school with 94 children. The majority of children are drawn from the local village and surrounding rural area and come from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds. The majority of children come from a white British heritage. The number of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average and a high number have statements of educational needs. The number of pupils on role has risen significantly in the last two years.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Littledean CE VC as a church school are good

Littledean is a good church school with a developing Christian ethos which has progressed since the last inspection. The school carefully nurtures children within an environment of respect for their individuality and this has created a community in which children grow in self-worth and are encouraged to have aspirations for their own futures.

Established strengths

- The openness with which children talk about matters of faith and belief.
- The care that children and adults show towards each other.
- The commitment of the leadership and management to develop the impact of the Christian distinctiveness.

Focus for development

- Ensure that children acquire the language and ideas through which they can express their growing spirituality.
- Introduce regular evaluation of the impact of the messages heard in collective worship on the lives of the children.
- Involve governors to a greater extent in the practical monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the Christian ethos.

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

The successful impact of the Christian ethos is displayed in the emphasis placed on nurturing respect for one another and acceptance of the individual. This is evident through the ongoing conversations that adults have with children, for example about a fresh beginning and 'wiping the slate clean'. Children understand and appreciate this aspect of school life and talk passionately about the importance of forgiveness. Older children are developing a mature understanding that whereas God always forgives, it can sometimes be a much harder thing for us to do. The emphasis on respect and forgiveness makes an important contribution to the children's personal development and has an impact on the way that children deal with relationships. The school has a clear understanding that spirituality focuses on 'connecting' with people. As the headteacher explained, her understanding of spirituality is that 'it is about liberating children to make choices' through respect for themselves and others. The school promotes this very well by recognising that children need time to explore what it means to be spiritually aware. This was seen in a religious education lesson with older children who were encouraged to explore the meaning of Bible passages. Children talk maturely and have the confidence to express their views but also listen to those of others. Some children were able to express how friendship should be based on trust and how important perseverance is in supporting friends. Although these are good examples with children generally able to express themselves at a certain level, they unfortunately then lack the language through which to articulate their thoughts and ideas further. Children are very happy in the school and say that they feel safe and can talk openly with adults when they have a problem.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Acts of worship are a distinct and special time in the school day. Children refer to them as times of worship and have a good understanding that they come together to be with God. As one child explained, 'it is a time to have a relationship with God'. Collective worship at Littledean encourages children to be with God either through the stories they hear from the Bible or through the opportunity to reflect and pray. Children take these opportunities seriously; they say that they are an important part of what makes them a church school. Worship is effectively delivered using the 'Values for Life' material supplemented with 'Open the Book', led by an ecumenical team. The major festivals are celebrated at the appropriate times in the Christian calendar, often in the parish church. This variety gives children a good balance of experiences of Christian teaching. Individual acts of worship have clear messages that are delivered in exciting ways that often involve children in drama. Feedback on worship from children is normally gained through their immediate responses but mainly focussed on their engagement. More needs to be done to work with children to monitor the extent to which they understand the relevance of worship messages in their daily lives and their ability to apply them. However, opportunities for children to reflect are good. Children respond very well to these opportunities and are keen to offer their thoughts as well as participate. Prayer is a central part of worship at the school. Children have a good understanding that prayer is a time when they can talk with God to give thanks or ask for forgiveness.

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

The leaders and managers are very aware that the school's Christian character can make a difference to the lives of the children and this helps to ensure that the Christian ethos is always taken into consideration when making strategic decisions about the development of the school. The headteacher is assiduous in her commitment to promote the Christian distinctiveness and under her leadership this has moved forward. This is a development that has been appreciated by both parents and governors. The headteacher is very ably supported by her deputy. Together they are growing in their understanding of the purpose of being a church school. They show a great willingness to explore this and therefore the school is very well placed for the impact of its Christian foundation to continue growing. The governors are very committed to the school's Christian character and support this in many practical ways through their involvement in the life of the school. Foundation governors in particular have a secure understanding of the nature of a church school and have had some involvement in its monitoring and evaluation. However, as the leadership and management's understanding of church schools continues to grow, so there needs to be a greater involvement of the governors in its evaluation. Governors recognise this and are very enthusiastic to become more practically involved. A strength of the school is its strong links with local ecumenical partnerships as well as the close ties with the parish church which are being maintained through the ongoing interregnum. The Salvation Army, for example, is committed to being involved with the school and makes a valuable contribution to its spiritual life. These ecumenical links provides many opportunities for the school to have a role in the wider local community. Parents are very happy with the way that the school approaches its Christian character. They consider that the links with the parish church are important and appreciate that the school allows their children to explore matters of faith but leaves them to make up their own minds. Parents particularly appreciate the openness of the adults in school and the care that they show towards their children every day.