

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Dr Radcliffe's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Steeple Aston, Bicester Oxon OX25 4SF

Diocese: Oxford

Local authority: Oxfordshire

Date of inspection: 13th March 2013

Date of last inspection: 10th May 2007

School's unique reference number: 123210

Headteacher: Frances Brown

Inspector's name and number: Robin Sharples 398

School context

Dr Radcliffe's is a village school in a rural location to the north of Oxford. The 208 pupils are taught in seven classes in very well maintained and attractive buildings. The school benefits from well developed, extensive grounds which include play areas, amphitheatre and woodland. The children are largely of white, British heritage with a lower than average number of children with special needs.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Dr Radcliffe's CE VA Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding

The children at Dr Radcliffe's School thrive in an industrious atmosphere which stimulates learning and creativity. There is a strong Christian ethos which is clearly articulated through distinct Christian values. The school has very secure self-evaluation on which to base future developments.

Established strengths

- The strongly motivated, courteous and creative children
- Strong, productive links with the local church and community
- The close work of staff and governor team in the leadership and daily life of the school
- The visionary and sensitive leadership of the headteacher

Focus for development

- To further develop the spiritual experience and growth of the children through an enriched set of activities such as keeping spiritual journals
- To seek support for staff in order to extend the impact of religious education (RE), especially for the more able learners

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

The Christian character of Dr Radcliffe's is apparent from the moment you enter the school. Attractive displays demonstrate the school's links with the local church and the importance of faith in the children's learning. There is a carefully identified set of core values which children readily relate to the school's Christian and Church context and classroom displays bring out Biblical background to the values. These values are found throughout the daily life of the school being very well modelled by the staff; this is appreciated by the children who speak of the teachers as being *'one of the best things [in] our amazing school'*. The children demonstrate very high standards in all their work, high standards being expected by teachers who provide a range of activities and approaches to promote learners' thinking; indeed the children themselves say the school *'gives us challenges which make you think'*. The school's environment is stimulating and lively, echoing both the promotion of children's learning and the celebration of children's work. Faith is a prominent part in these displays and each class has a focus for reflection, such as the class 4 *'Tree of Life'* and links to the school's Christian values. The significance of these values is not only seen in reflection but also in action such as the children's attitude to charitable giving. The school council plays a significant part in this and makes direct connection between charity and the school's ethos saying – *'it is a nice thing to do and it links to our Christian values...'*

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship has a very important place in school life. The children gather for worship with a sense of expectancy which leads them to participate with great enthusiasm. The daily

worship acts as a powerful model which children are able to use in their final year as a basis from which to create and lead their own worship. Worship successfully blends aspects of Anglican worship such as responses and liturgical colours with the creative work of the school; this has led to worship which takes account of children's needs. The local clergy play an important role in school worship and in recent years have established very positive and productive relationships with staff and children. The act of worship seen during the inspection was quite outstanding, particularly in the way in which response to the message was encouraged through reflection, prayer and superb two-part singing. Worship is carefully planned and children are being increasingly included in the evaluation of worship. Children readily identify the significance of worship as both an expression *of* and a response *to* faith, and discuss this fluently in the context of Christian values. The dimension of response has been very positively driven by the introduction of the idea of children '*seeking a space within themselves*'. The success of this has created the opportunity for the powerful extension of spiritual development across the whole of school life. While some work has been done in this regard, in younger children's spiritual reflections of forest activities, the school has recognised a need for a more systematic and appropriately formalised pattern of activities and recording.

The impact of Religious Education on the school community is good

Children at Dr Radcliffe's are very enthusiastic about their learning in RE. The school bases its work on the Oxfordshire Agreed Syllabus but enriches this limited framework with, for example, ideas from Philosophy for Children (P4C) and reflective times in Forest School. This has led to some work of excellent quality such as found in a display based on anger and the story of Jesus overturning the temple tables. The impact of this was seen during the inspection in a discussion with children which compared Christian values with values found in the gospel narratives – children were able to explore the nature of 'happiness' in this context and showed keen insight into how the concept might be understood. Teaching of RE during the inspection was consistently good. Children were motivated and focussed clearly on the planned learning outcomes. However it was clear in discussion with children, and subsequently staff, that the provision for more able children did not always provide appropriate challenge or extension into higher order thinking. The standard of work in RE is broadly comparable with work in other curricular areas and the staff are developing marking which is directly linked to RE and suggests appropriate questions and next steps. The school has been particularly successful in promoting spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development through RE. Children have a very good understanding of other faiths and world cultures, a commendable achievement given the limited access children have to examples of these cultures.

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

The headteacher is a very strong leader in the school both governors and staff indicating their respect for her leadership and the creation of what the staff refer to as '*teaching heaven*'. The school is very well led with a sense of clear teamwork focussed powerfully on the learning environment of the children. Governors involve themselves constructively in the life of the school and have a very good relationship with leaders within the staff group. Governors have been an integral element in the self-evaluation of the school as a Church school, including addressing the foci for development from the previous SIAS inspection (2007). They have contributed significantly to the outstanding character of the school, working closely with the incumbent. They are well prepared for the imminent interregnum but are (understandably) concerned about the impact of this on the school. While the staff and governors readily express the distinctive Christian character of the school this is less clear in the current documentation and website – these are, however, being revised and will shortly reflect the coherent approach of the school leadership. The school responds quickly and effectively to parents' difficulties and concerns with teachers and headteacher being easily accessible for consultation. Parents show great confidence in the school saying that children particularly appreciate the creative opportunities, worship, the school's outdoor environment and, as several parents said, phonics!