

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

### **Dorchester St Birinus Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School**

Queen Street,  
Dorchester-on-Thames,  
Wallingford,  
OX10 7HR

#### **Diocese of Oxford**

Local Authority: Oxfordshire

Dates of inspection: 25<sup>th</sup> September 2009

Date of last inspection: 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2006

School's Unique reference number: 281409

Name of Headteacher: Melissa Fry

Inspector's name and NS inspector's number: Lynne Chillingworth NS 429

#### **Context**

St Birinus is a small school where almost all pupils are of White British heritage. The school serves the villages of Dorchester on Thames and Drayton St Leonard and draws a significant proportion of pupils from other local villages. The school enjoys long established and mutually supportive links with Dorchester Abbey. The headteacher has been in post since September 2008.

#### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Dorchester St Birinus as a Church of England school are good**

#### **Established strengths**

- The leadership of the headteacher in renewing the school's vision, which has the potential to underpin all aspects of the development of the distinctive Christian character of the school
- Strong relationships throughout the school effectively support the caring ethos
- Pupils' good personal, moral and spiritual development
- A strong and mutually supportive relationship with the church and the local community

#### **Focus for development**

- Foundation governors should ensure that the distinctively Christian vision for the school becomes fully embedded in all aspects of its life and work and that the outcomes of systematic evaluation of its implementation inform strategic planning

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

Christian values underpin all aspects of this school and contribute significantly to the good personal, moral and spiritual development of the pupils who demonstrate that they feel nurtured and valued because their achievements are celebrated. Most pupils, however, are unsure of what it means to belong to a church school, although many were able to articulate what makes their school special including being good friends and caring for one another. All staff support the school's ethos and provide good role models for pupils. Behaviour is good and conflicts are quickly resolved, demonstrating an implicit understanding of fairness, forgiveness and reconciliation, however, few pupils yet recognise these values as distinctively Christian. Strong and affirming relationships throughout the school contribute significantly to pupils' sense of well being and positive self image, effectively supporting their good personal, moral and spiritual development. Pupils make good academic progress and this is well matched by their achievements in religious education, which contributes effectively to their developing knowledge and understanding of Christianity and other faiths and cultures. They demonstrate a good understanding of major Christian festivals and older pupils are confident to discuss spiritual issues. Attractive interactive displays of work celebrate learning in religious education. Pupils discuss these with interest and developing understanding. The school's involvement with church and community activities significantly supports pupils'

awareness of their developing roles and responsibilities in the local community. On the day of the inspection they were enthusiastically preparing harvest baskets to deliver to members of the local community. Pupils care well for themselves and their environment and are proud of their Eco school status. The recent addition of colourful new crosses displayed throughout the school effectively reflect the school's Christian foundation. Pupils show great interest in these and some are able to explain their significance as a reminder of Jesus.

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

The daily act of collective worship is based on distinctively Christian values. It contributes effectively to underpinning the Christian ethos and values of the school and to pupils' good personal, spiritual and moral development. It is imaginatively planned to be accessible to the needs and ages of the pupils who enjoy the visual stimuli that are frequently used to engage their interest. Most pupils say they enjoy assemblies, particularly mentioning listening to stories and singing a range of Christian songs. Pupils are able to reflect on recent themes and discuss how they have applied them to their lives and relationships. Prayer is given a place of importance in collective worship and by saying grace before lunch. Some pupils respond to the opportunity to write prayers and prayer requests to be read out in assembly. Christian signs and symbols, together with attractive displays provide an effective focal point for worship and quiet music contributes effectively to a worshipful atmosphere, supporting well the pupils' appreciation of worship as a special time. Older pupils enjoy serving by helping with the practical arrangements. Worship is usually led by the headteacher and by members of the clergy who plan themes together, however, pupils are beginning to be given opportunities to plan, lead and evaluate worship. They are very enthusiastic about this and would welcome further opportunities to be actively involved. Staff present in worship on the day of the inspection effectively supported the concentration of pupils. However, the decision for staff not to be present on all occasions detracts from the sense of importance of worship as central to the life of the school and of a community worshipping together. Weekly class-based worship often follows the planned value or theme but many pupils do not recognise these occasions as worship. The headteacher has benefited from diocesan training and this has positively influenced her planning, evaluation and leadership of worship. Training for other staff has appropriately been identified as a priority. Worship in Dorchester Abbey to celebrate Christian festivals as well as the leavers' service is enjoyed by pupils and is always well attended and appreciated by parents. The strong links with Dorchester Abbey and significant input from members of the clergy significantly support pupils' understanding of Anglican tradition and practice. Knowledge of the worldwide church is as yet underdeveloped, however, self evaluation has identified development of a wider global perspective as a priority.

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

Well established and implicitly Christian values have traditionally underpinned the life and work of this school. However the Christian vision and leadership of the headteacher, working in partnership with the Rector who is also a foundation governor, is a considerable strength in developing and celebrating the distinctive Christian character of the school. Governors have completed a significant piece of work to agree a shared vision statement that, in the time available, has begun to have a positive impact on the work of the school. The implementation of the vision is a priority in the current strategic plan and has the potential to ensure that distinctive and explicit Christian values become fully embedded in all aspects of the life and work of the school. Staff feel highly valued and are supportive of the headteacher in applying Christian values to the work of the school. The self-evaluation process in preparation for this inspection has appropriately identified the need to prioritise spiritual development opportunities for staff and governors. The prospectus acknowledges the Christian foundation and ethos of the school but, as yet, public documentation misses the opportunity to explain the distinctive Christian values that are at the heart of its work. The opportunity to highlight the centrality of collective worship and the distinctively Christian values on which it is based as a discreet section of the prospectus has been missed. Religious education is given appropriate priority in the school. Resources are good and effective records are kept of pupil attainment and progress. The coordinator has benefited from diocesan training. Parents confirm that implicit Christian values have a positive influence on all aspects of the work of the school and are very appreciative of the impact of these on the personal and moral development of their children. As yet, however, few recognise the explicitly Christian values promoted by the school through collective worship. Self-evaluation of the effectiveness of the Christian character of the school is developing and beginning to influence strategic planning, including some informal opportunities for pupils and parents to

contribute although this is not yet consistent or systematic. The school enjoys a strong and mutually supportive relationship with Dorchester Abbey and the local community. The school benefits from and appreciates the support of the diocese. The Rector is a well-informed and active foundation governor. She provides greatly valued personal and spiritual support for the head teacher and staff. Good progress is being made in addressing issues raised at the previous inspection. Under the leadership of the headteacher and foundation governors there is very good potential for further development and celebration of the distinctiveness and effectiveness of this church school.

SIAS report September 2009 St Birinus Church of England School, Dorchester on Thames, OX10  
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