



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

**Layston Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School
The Causeway, Buntingford. Hertfordshire. SG9 9EU**

Diocese of St Albans

LA:	Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection:	08 June 2009
Previous S23 Inspection:	19 June 2006
URN:	117390
Headteacher:	Mrs Jane Sherwood
SIAS Inspector Name:	Ms Chris Westgarth
SIAS Inspector No:	44

School Context

Layston Church of England First school, in the small rural town of Buntingford, has 139 pupils. The majority of pupils are from white British descent. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and the proportion of children known to be entitled to free school meals are below average.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Layston School as a Church of England school are outstanding

Christian values underpin its work and the experiences provided for the pupils. Each child is viewed as being special and encouraged to grow in responsibility and respect, surrounded with love.

Established strengths

- The outstanding Christian ethos which enables all learners to feel valued and included
- The strong and effective links with the local churches

Focus for development

- Strengthen Anglican practices/traditions in Collective Worship, by introducing simple responses and coloured cloths linking with the Christian calendar

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

There is an atmosphere and ethos of love, care and support within which each person is regarded as an individual and therefore unique. The behaviour of the children is exemplary. Children are polite and welcoming. They report that they feel safe and secure and as a result there are good levels of self-esteem. Learners flourish and fulfil their potential, whatever their gifts or talents. Relationships between learners and staff are strong. The use of SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) and the linking of Christian Values and themes enrich Spiritual development. The delightful grounds, the school playing field and the covered areas/outdoor classroom are obvious assets to the school. The whole school environment is clean, tidy and well cared for, thus reinforcing the Christian ethos of care and respect for the surroundings and the world we live in. The Eco-warriors readily talk about their roles and responsibilities. The school council has evolved into 'Talking Circles' and each learner takes part. This enables all children to be included in the decision making, which is very positive. Lunchtimes are calm and orderly with a good family atmosphere. There is a strong emphasis on Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural values across the whole school curriculum. As a result whatever their religious faith, learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Layston provides a full and rich curriculum and this is further enhanced by a wide variety of after school activities. High quality learning walls (displays) further improve the school environment. Charitable giving is strong and learners speak enthusiastically about giving through the 'Lenten Promises' and their support of the charity in Nepal. The school makes a strong and positive contribution to community cohesion, locally and Internationally, through its links with 3 schools. Prayer and Christian values permeate the whole school and learners speak openly about these values.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding.

Learners speak positively about 'Assemblies' and one said '*I like assemblies they're good – you have time to stop and think*'. There are good levels of community and whole staff involvement. Collective worship is well planned and delivered. Effective strategies, with good involvement from the Governing body, staff and learners, are used to monitor and evaluate the impact of collective worship. A proportion of the resource budget is allocated to Collective Worship recognising the importance of this area in the life of the school. Learners are willing to answer questions and make suggestions. Learners speak openly about Bible Stories and prayer. They ask searching questions which inspires thinking and greater perception. As a result their knowledge and understanding of Christian stories are strong and they are able to recall and articulate well what they have learnt and experienced in worship times. Pupils enter and exit the hall quietly. Learners enjoy worshipping in church and by holding special Services. Pupils say worship helps them to understand the meaning of Christian values. Learners from other faiths and backgrounds are fully integrated. There is a good balance of singing, music and use of ICT. The lighting of the candle provides a focal point during prayer and reflection. On some occasions prayers by the pupils are used and all pupils are able to contribute to the prayer box or the class prayer books.

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

The Headteacher and Governors have a clear vision of the distinctive Christian Character of the school. All are valued and respected, the staff feel their views and ideas are important and there is a strong inclusive ethos. The clear leadership of the Headteacher and senior teachers provides an example of care and concern for all members of the school family. As a result of this leadership, learners follow this role model to promote excellent relationships, good attitudes to learning and a sense of responsibility. The Headteacher reports regularly on Christian Distinctiveness to Governors. The governors have effective and robust systems in place for monitoring and hold the school to account. The school has highly efficient and supportive links with the local church community. The curate and the new Incumbent will play a pivotal role in continuing and developing the very good relationship with the new headteacher. The previous S23 report said 'the school needed to improve pupils' understanding of cultural diversity through greater links with other faiths and cultures'. The school has worked hard to address this and strong links are being forged with a school in Leeds and another in France. The positive links to ongoing work in Nepal is to be commended. Learners spoke enthusiastically about speaking on the phone to the school in Nepal. The new 'Talking Circles initiative for parents' is a positive way of ensuring that all parents have the opportunity to voice concerns and further enhances the very good relationship the school has with parents and carers.