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| Pulford VA Lower School Pulford Road, Leighton Buzzard. LU7 1AB | |
| LEA: | Bedfordshire |
| SIAS Inspection: | 11 th January 2011 |
| Previous S48 Inspection: | 16 th January 2007 |
| URN: | 109619 |
| Headteacher: | David Heather |
| SIAS Inspector: | David Morton |
| Inspector No: | 515 |

School context

Pulford VA Lower School is the oldest school in the town of Leighton Buzzard having recently celebrated its 300th anniversary. The school is situated in parkland, within the town centre, adjoining a local middle school and church. Pupils come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds and their achievements are above those expected nationally.

Summary Judgement

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Pulford VA Lower School as a Church of England School is outstanding.

An inclusive Christian school Pulford VA Lower School continues to be a valued member of the local community where it is recognised for the quality of its Christian values, and relationships.

Established strengths

- A strong Christian ethos that pervades every aspect of school life
- The inclusive, caring environment underpinned by Christian values and high quality relationships
- The quality of Collective Worship
- The impact of the relationship between church and school on pupils' spiritual development

Focus for development

- Formalise systems for monitoring, evaluating and recording the effectiveness of Religious Education
- Ensure evaluation of the effectiveness of the school as a church school is recorded and communicated to all stakeholders

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

Characterised by a warm, family centred environment Pulford VA Lower School has a strong Christian ethos that pervades every aspect of school life. Relationships across the whole school community are outstanding and are a strength of the school. Pupils enjoy all aspects of school life and are keen to come to school. Staff, governors and parents work together to ensure that pupils benefit from a daily routine that is rooted in Christian values. This is demonstrated in the school's redemptive culture that offers a second chance to pupils from other schools needing a fresh start. Pupils' spiritual development is also outstanding. Parents comment warmly about the range, depth and quality of friendships their children experience and clearly link this to the school's ethos and values programme. Pulford VA Lower School is an outstanding community school. Children show active Christian concern for others and demonstrate this through fundraising and through the established relationship that exists with elderly residents in the locality, who are welcomed to tea parties and other events as a regular part of the school calendar. The school environment is good having benefitted from significant improvements in recent years. The school has responded effectively to areas identified in the previous S48 inspection and display throughout the school now contributes well to pupils' spiritual development.

The impact of Collective Worship on the school community is outstanding.

Worship clearly holds an important place in the life of Pulford VA Lower School. It is thoughtfully planned, recorded and evaluated and this has a positive impact on its quality. The observed act of worship was outstanding. Conducted in a quiet, reverential atmosphere pupils participated throughout, sharing in and leading a wide range of prayers, including the Lord's Prayer. The use of a hand puppet helped to deliver the core message with clarity and humour, something that was appreciated by pupils. The worshipping environment created by the school is also outstanding. A purpose built worship area including altar and banners provide a strong focal point for worship and this is further enhanced by displays and the sensitive use of music and singing as pupils enter the hall. Daily acts of worship are linked to the schools values programme and are led by a range of staff and parish clergy. Excellent use is made of the parish church to enhance the worshipping life of the school and this reflects the excellent relationship that exists between the school and its foundation church.

The effectiveness of Religious Education is good.

Pupils evidently enjoy RE and benefit from good specialist teaching that uses art, music, drama and theme days to enhance learning. Children are encouraged to question, discuss and reflect and as a result their contribution to lessons is good. In one observed lesson young children were provided with well tailored activities that reinforced their primary learning objective. This was good practice as it enabled children to respond and reflect at a level appropriate to their ability. Use of visits and visitors is also good and makes a significant contribution to pupils' experience and knowledge of Christianity and other world religions and enables the school to effectively implement the local agreed syllabus. Religious education is well led and managed and the school has responded to issues identified in the last S48 inspection. Improvement is evident and there is significant capacity to improve further. Newly introduced assessment systems are good and are starting to impact on standards which currently range between satisfactory and good. Monitoring and evaluation of RE is in place. The governor responsible for RE meets regularly with the head teacher and RE coordinator. However, much of the school's current evaluation of the effectiveness of RE is undertaken informally and steps should be taken to systematically record targets for improvement and evaluate the effectiveness of current provision.

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

This is a school with a clear Christian vision that is implemented in every area of school life. This vision and its accompanying ethos and values are cherished by the school community and those in the local area. The school is heavily oversubscribed and contributes widely to local community life. The leadership of the head teacher, who has been in post for two years, is outstanding. Since his arrival he has nurtured and developed the relationship with the local parish church to the point where it is described as being 'the best it has ever been'. His vision, drive and personal Christian commitment has led to improvements across the school and has maintained and enhanced what was already a distinctive Christian environment. The head teacher is ably supported by an effective group of governors who strongly support the schools Christian ethos. One parent described being 'absorbed' into the life of the school and this accurately reflects the sense of Christian community, fostered by the school governors, that exists across the school. Relationships with the local parish church and its clergy are also outstanding. Based on the strong working relationship that exists between the head teacher and parish clergy the impact on the whole school community is outstanding. Evidence of this is found in events such as the 'Easter Labyrinth' theme day hosted by the parish church which was described as 'deeply moving' and having a lasting impact on pupils and parents alike. Self evaluation of the school's effectiveness as a church school is good although most evaluation occurs informally during regular discussions that occur between governors and the school's senior leadership team. Although this has not held the school back from improving it should be addressed to ensure that areas for improvement and progress are communicated to, and celebrated with, all stakeholders.