

Blue Coat Church of England (Aided) Infant School

Hanch Place
Walsall
WS1 3AF

Diocese: Lichfield

Local authority: Walsall
Date of inspection: 23 October 2008
Date of last inspection: January 2006
School's unique reference number: 104231
Headteacher: Mrs Janet Davies
Inspector's name and number: Dr David Gentle 209

School context

Blue Coat C of E Infant School, with 297 pupils, is bigger than most infant schools. Most pupils live locally although some travel from further afield. Around 40% pupils come from a Christian background, 30% from a Muslim background and the remainder from other faiths or no faith background. Pupils come from a wide variety of different ethnic backgrounds including Pakistani, Black Caribbean, Bangladeshi and increasing numbers of Eastern European.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Blue Coat C of E Infant School as a Church of England school are outstanding

Pupils of all faith backgrounds make exceptional spiritual and social progress in a school where they are made to feel special. This progress derives from the very strong Christian ethos that is immediately apparent. The highly distinctive and effective learning environment arises from the strong leadership of the headteacher and exceptional commitment of staff and governors.

Established strengths

- A distinctive and highly effective Christian ethos.
- The exceptional spiritual development of all pupils.
- Excellent teaching strategies and learning in religious education (RE).
- The effectiveness of collective worship through pupils' involvement and enjoyment.

Focus for development

- Strengthen measures of impact and involve governors in evaluation of evidence.

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

Pupils make excellent progress within a school ethos that is overtly Christian. Pupils consciously and successfully strive to 'make good choices', stating that they 'obey God's rules' and 'consider what God would think'. Parents of all beliefs are confident that their children have made exceptional progress. This excellent progress is equally evident in the case of children who had previously experienced difficulties. Pupils and parents speak of the caring, 'family' school ethos within which a strong emphasis on praise promotes confidence and self-esteem. Pupils know that they are cared for within the school and speak freely of their love and respect for others and particularly for God. Pupils know the school is a safe and secure environment where 'God is always with us', enabling them to flourish spiritually, socially and academically. Virtually all pupils give examples, such as football, netball, writing, art, French and street dancing, where the school supports them to develop a talent and make them feel special as if they were 'the only pupil in the school'. Pupils speak of the 'nice teachers' who encourage them through kindness and dedication. Superb displays contribute

to a vibrant school environment that strongly encourages spiritual development. The 'footprints' display across the whole school is an excellent example of a creative and innovative project that draws pupils to prayer. All pupils derive benefit from a special area, including thinking stones and a reflection table, that is a focus in every room.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship, with excellent pupil participation, is central to the life of the school. The Harvest Service is an example of outstanding collective worship. Every year group, including reception, contributes enthusiastically and meaningfully through hymns, action songs, drama and readings. Artefacts, props and generous donations of produce support clear messages such as giving to others. A large number of parents attend, speaking enthusiastically about how their children, and in many cases themselves, have gained spiritual strength. Good planning and excellent relationships ensure that pupils thoroughly enjoy collective worship. Pupils are guided well by caring and dedicated staff, enabling the worship to have maximum impact. Response to prayer is enthusiastic with pupils speaking of how they feel personally involved when saying 'amen'. Weekly visits by local clergy to take collective worship and regular church services strengthen pupils' spiritual development. Pupils, even very young ones, can speak with remarkable eloquence about their profound understanding of issues such as the crucifixion, communion and prayer. The school council is effectively involved in planning and delivering collective worship, an issue for development from the last inspection.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Highly skilful teaching enables pupils to make exceptional progress within RE. Teaching and learning methods are varied, appropriate and effective. The use of aids such as thinking stones, a cross and lit candles help to create an environment that is conducive to the very profound levels of reflection demonstrated by pupils. Pupils constantly refer to God's laws to inform their thoughts and actions. Very effective use is made of puppets in the learning process, particularly to prompt impressive thought and discussion about appropriate choices of behaviour. Pupils clearly benefit from a cohesive and personalised approach to the curriculum as typified by strong attention within RE to the synthetic phonics programme and the introduction of signing in response to pupil need. As a consequence of the well structured learning programme within RE, pupils have a deep respect of Christian values and beliefs whilst also developing an excellent understanding of other faiths. Tracking of pupils' progress in RE is excellent with particularly outstanding practice in tracking spiritual development. The subject leader gives excellent support to staff within the school and, in response to the previous inspection, is helping in the development of the school as a centre of excellence.

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

The very strong leadership of the headteacher together with the commitment and dedication of staff and governors ensures that the distinctive Christian ethos pervades everything. The headteacher and staff know every child and many parents well and respond personally to every family. This excellent support for families is an element of the strong programme to promote community cohesion. Self-evaluation at school level is excellent with some very good practice in measuring impact, particularly in RE. Governors are fully aware of self-evaluation findings and validate these through their strong personal involvement in the school, particularly by observing pupil response in collective worship and through the link governor system in RE that includes work scrutiny. Governors are proud of the school's traditions and effectively challenge the school to maintain and strengthen its distinctiveness. Links with the local churches are very strong being particularly effective in maintaining the strong impact of collective worship. Members of the school council speak proudly of their role. They have contributed to the improvement of the environment and are actively involved in resolving minor disputes. All parents have absolute confidence in the school and recognise the 'welcoming Christian faith' that 'underpins everything in the school'. This was an issue for development from the previous inspection that is unquestionably outstanding.