

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Ardeley St Lawrence Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

School Lane
Ardeley
Stevenage
SG2 7AJ

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority:	Hertfordshire
Date of inspection:	13 September 2012
Date of last inspection:	22 March 2007
School's unique reference number:	117420
Headteacher:	Jenny Dingley
Inspector's name and number:	Bob Hopcraft (484)

School context

St Lawrence is a much smaller than average-sized primary school, which is set in impressive rural surroundings in the village of Ardeley. It serves the local village and takes an increasing proportion of its pupils from the large town of Stevenage. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs or disabilities is above the national average, while the number eligible for free school meals is below. The large majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. Most pupils leave at the end of Year 4 to attend middle schools in the north-east of Hertfordshire.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Lawrence CofE VA Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding.

St Lawrence is an outstanding church school. Pupils, parents, staff and governors are all clear that the values it teaches enable those who work and play there to grow into well-rounded citizens. Relationships are outstanding and the school benefits from excellent links with the church and the local community.

Established strengths

- The leadership of the headteacher in promoting the school's Christian ethos and the extent to which she has engaged all stakeholders in this;
- Outstanding relationships at all levels, which enable all to model and live out Christian values;
- Continuing excellent links with the church and the local community.

Focus for development

- Provide increased opportunities for pupils to plan and lead acts of worship;
- Implement effectively the new agreed syllabus for RE in line with the school's development plan, so as to raise standards still further;
- Seek increased training and development opportunities for staff, to support their understanding and full implementation of the new agreed syllabus.

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

This is because Christian values play a key role in the day to day life of the school. These play a central part in the lives of pupils, who can talk about the values they learn and are able to relate them to Christian teaching. As a result, pupils and staff model Christian values, enabling them to bring the school's motto "*Loving and Learning in Fellowship and Faith*" to life. Pupils' spiritual development is very well supported through the many opportunities for prayer and quiet reflection provided during the school day. Their moral, social and cultural development is also very well provided for, enabling them to develop as citizens, to support one another and to help others both locally and internationally, for example through the developing contacts with Kenya. They show a keen understanding of the importance of looking after the world that God has entrusted to them and demonstrate this in a number of ways, for example through growing vegetables which provide ingredients for school lunch at appropriate times of the year. Relationships are outstanding at all levels, leading pupils to talk about the important part played by friendship and trust in building the school into "*one big happy family*". Vibrant displays and signs and symbols of the Christian faith are visible throughout the building, leaving no-one in any doubt that St Lawrence is a school that wears its Christian clothes with pride. As one governor put it: "*...it's in the bones of the place*".

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

Pupils respond very positively to collective worship. They say that they enjoy it and that it gives them the opportunity to "talk to God". Lively and well-planned acts of worship provide many opportunities for pupils to take an active part, although as yet there are only limited opportunities for pupils to plan and lead acts of worship independently. Parents are also very positive, as illustrated by more than 65% of them who have attended acts of worship over the past year. This, alongside regular attendance by staff, means that worship is a community event, allowing all to share in this important part of the school day, including reception class pupils who have been fully included since the last inspection. Worship provides clear Christian messages, enabling pupils to discuss the cycle of the church year in some depth. The hall provides a space that is highly conducive to worship and the use of the prayer table and candles makes it a special time. This, alongside the use of traditional prayers, responses and the termly Eucharist enables the school to demonstrate and celebrate its Anglican heritage. Excellent support is received from the clergy and links with the church remain a significant strength. Through the review group and regular monitoring, the school demonstrates its commitment to worship as a living, growing and developing aspect of provision.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good.

This is because pupils speak confidently about Christianity and other world religions, demonstrating knowledge and understanding that is above average for their age. Lessons seen during the inspection were well planned and provided many opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding through interesting activities and challenging discussion. As a result, pupils make good progress in RE. The recent adoption of the new agreed syllabus for RE has further improved provision, but has not yet had sufficient time to embed in practice and to impact on standards. Effective use is made of visits and visitors to enhance pupils' enjoyment, enabling them to talk animatedly about these experiences. Opportunities for reflection and thought are also provided, supporting pupils' spiritual development effectively; a good example of this was seen during the inspection, with staff encouraging pupils to reflect on their ideas of what God means to them. RE benefits from strong subject leadership and is well resourced. Good use has been made of opportunities for training and professional development; however, the recent introduction of a new syllabus and changes to staff mean that this should remain a priority in the school's development.

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

All school leaders, including governors, are strongly committed to the school's Christian ethos, enabling the development of an environment where Christian distinctiveness is evident at every turn. This is reflected in the universally positive views of parents, who speak highly of the values and opportunities it promotes. *As one put it: "The school provides a caring environment that allows our child to explore their spiritual self"*. Many speak of the school as "a family" and "a community" in which all can participate, for example through the recent very successful *Easter Labyrinth* experience. Governors and school leaders have a clear strategic view of the school's development as a church school, which has been honed through rigorous and honest self-evaluation, with well-charted action plans for improvement within the school development plan. As a result, they are able to implement improvements which impact effectively on the lives of pupils and their families. Relationships between the school and the Church are excellent, enabling both to sit firmly at the heart of the community.