



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St Andrew's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Benslow Lane, Hitchin SG4 9RD

Diocese: St Albans

Previous SIAS Grade: Outstanding

Local authority: Hertfordshire

Dates of inspection: 13–14 October 2014

Date of last inspection: 5 May 2009

School's unique reference number: 117467

Headteacher: Deborah Fenn

Inspector's name and number: Lilian Weatherley 42

School context

St Andrew's C of E Primary School is a popular, average sized primary school in the town of Hitchin and the Parish of Holy Saviour. Most pupils are of white, British heritage with a very small minority of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. This has decreased in recent years as the population of Hitchin has changed. The proportion of disabled pupils or those with special educational needs is in line with the national average. The turnover of staff in recent months has been untypically high with six new staff joining in September. The attached nursery enables a seamless transfer into the main school.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Andrew's C of E Primary School as a Church of England school are good.

- The high profile given to pupil voice and the ways in which the pupils' views are contributing to the effectiveness of the school's distinctive Christian character
- The school's Christian values programme and the significant impact on pupil behaviour and achievement
- The high profile given to Christian worship and prayer and the significant impact this is having on pupils' understanding of the Anglican tradition and their spiritual development

Areas to improve

- Raise standards in RE to 'outstanding' by deepening teachers' knowledge and understanding of key religious ideas and concepts
- Make use of the spiritual areas in each classroom as vehicles for prayer and reflection to further develop pupils' spiritual development across the curriculum
- Audit and extend the provision for pupils' cultural development across the curriculum to include the diversity of the world wide Christian tradition and give pupils a greater understanding of diverse faiths and cultures

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

The wellbeing of pupils stands at the heart of this school and its Christian character. Standards of achievement are above average in reading, writing and mathematics and pupils make good progress in these areas. The recent focus on Christian values is a strength and has had a significant impact on the behaviour and achievement of the pupils. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. Pupils actively exemplify the values of respect and Koinonia. They move around in a calm manner, are quick to open doors for adults and show respect to adults and each other at all times. All members of the school community actively promote these values and because each one is linked to a Bible story pupils are able to make links to its theological background. Much is in place for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development to become outstanding. The recent focus on pupil voice has had a major effect on pupils feeling confident to talk about their concerns, raise questions about their learning and discuss what might be considered as controversial issues. The recent introduction of worship rangers, spiritual rangers and eco-warriors has given pupils a sense of ownership and developed their confidence and leadership skills. Pupils were eager to show their badges and explain their roles. Relationships across the school are excellent. Pupils speak highly of the school and are getting to know the new staff. They enjoy school, are happy and feel safe and cared for. The displays around the school are exemplary and reflect the distinctive Christian character of the school. Pupils appreciate the reflective learning environment. The Reggio approach integral to the EYFS learning environment is having a significant impact on the younger pupils. Pupils speak with enthusiasm about the natural products such as branches and lighting used to create a calm atmosphere for learning. Pupils are also eager to talk about the creation of their class spiritual areas and the new spiritual garden with its prayer pebbles. They explained how each one painted a stone and contributed ideas for the final pattern. Pupils at St Andrew's are taught to think and question. Several pupils discussed how the inside spiritual areas could be improved. 'We need a spiritual place inside like the garden where we can go and pray.' Several suggested that the class areas could be used more and improved. Pupils' cultural development is less secure. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of Christianity as a world faith is less secure and the exploration of diverse cultures and communities is often confused. The school is looking to form links with another school with a different culture. Pupils do, however, have a good awareness of global and local needs and regularly support charitable events. The role of specialist teachers is also contributing to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The artwork produced during the weekly enrichment curriculum, as well as the specialist music tuition is all of an excellent standard. Pupils were eager to talk about these areas. The pottery bowl created during the inspection from pupil hands and exemplifying the values of 'Koinonia and Respect' was exceptional.

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

Since the appointment of the new headteacher the school has worked hard to improve the quality of the collective worship. Worship has a high profile in the school and is closely linked to the Christian values programme. Pupils know and understand these values and are able to talk about the ways in which the current values of Respect and Koinonia effect their personal lives and the lives of others. For example; Year 3 pupils were able to link the value of respect to the story of Jesus throwing out the money changers in the temple and question whether or not Jesus showed respect in his actions. The recent initiative of having worship and spiritual rangers has given the pupils leadership roles and responsibilities for these areas. The newly formed rangers are proud of their role and were eager to explain the symbolism of the silver doves and crosses on their badges. The worship rangers work closely with the staff and the incumbent to choose suitable stories and Bible readings to express the values of the month. The introduction of the rangers has increased pupils' interest in and understanding of prayer and worship. All pupils have positive attitudes and hymn singing is excellent. In both worships observed pupils took a key role in leading the worship and the prayers. The silent atmosphere created for the worship, chosen by the pupils,

was calm and respectful. In the class worship the use of 'prayer scrolls' written by the class and then chosen and read by a pupil enhanced the service and enabled all of the pupils to feel part of the preparation for the worship. This is now common practice across the school. In the whole school worship the worship rangers lead the worship. They process with candles and a cross, read the prayers, dramatise the Bible story and give the final blessing 'In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'. All pupils know the Lord's prayer, are able to respond to Christian greetings such as 'Firmly I believe and Truly', 'God is three and God is one', gaining a greater understanding of the Trinity and the rituals of the Anglican tradition.

Improving the quality of prayer and worship for all stakeholders is a key focus for the school. All staff lead worship and parents attend on regular intervals both in school and in the church. One parent wrote 'Thank you for the lovely assembly yesterday. You had clearly worked hard to organise it'.

The incumbent is a regular visitor to the school. He has worked with the worship rangers and regularly evaluated the collective worship. The worship rangers explained how the incumbent has talked to the pupils about the Eucharist and how their views had contributed to the planning of Eucharistic worship for staff, parents and pupils later in the year.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good.

Standards in religious education for the majority of learners are good and statutory requirements are met. Pupil progress in the lesson observed was good and pupils talked with confidence about the religion studied, making comparisons between Buddhism and Christianity. Progress over time for the majority of pupils is good or better but for some pupils is less secure. When questioned, some pupils were less confident in their knowledge and understanding of religious ideas and concepts and there is an element of confusion between the faiths studied. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of Bible stories linked to Christian values is good. In June Ofsted judged the quality of teaching across the school to be good or better but, in line with the recent Church of England report, subject knowledge for RE is an issue. A scrutiny of work revealed that standards are in line with other subject areas but there is an inconsistency across the school. Some tasks set do not have sufficient religious focus to consolidate pupils' learning. Where teaching in RE is good or better and teachers' subject knowledge of the RE topic is good, books reveal a high level of thinking and the tasks set offer sufficient rigour and challenge. Where teaching is less secure pupils are set tasks that do not fully challenge their thinking and understanding of religious concepts. There is no RE specialist on the staff and good to outstanding class teachers do not all have the detailed RE subject knowledge or theological background required to offer these bright, articulate and thoughtful pupils a deeper knowledge and understanding of key religious concepts and to consolidate their learning.

All staff teach RE and a new assessment procedure without levels is being trialled alongside the original eight levels. This is working well. The newly appointed subject leader who is part of the senior leadership team is eager to give RE the high profile required for an aided church school and to ensure that there is continuity of practice across the staff. The publication of 'Making a Difference', the Church of England review of religious education, is enabling the subject leader to re-evaluate practice and consider barriers to raising standards. The subject leader has a detailed action plan and is a member of the diocesan working party on RE. As part of the aspiring heads programme the subject leader also plans to visit RE lessons in 'outstanding' church schools with the RE governor.

Visits are made annually to the Sikh Gurdwara in Hitchin, St Albans Abbey and a Buddhist temple. Parents from other faith communities visit the school to share their own practice with the pupils. Older pupils were able to make links with their work on Buddhism and younger pupils were excited by their planned visits later in the year.

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

Although in the previous SIAS report the school was judged to be 'outstanding' there has been much change for the school in recent years; a new SIAMS framework, a new national curriculum, a change of leadership, new governors, two new builds and several staff changes. The headteacher has been in place for two years and school is now entering a period of stability with a more rigorous and accurate self-evaluation in place. All stakeholders are able to articulate the Christian vision for the school; 'The school takes as its inspiration and cornerstone the life and teaching of Jesus Christ and actively seeks to uphold and encourage Christian values'. All agree that the school is already a different and better church school than it was five years ago. To quote the chair of governors, 'We are much better now at developing the whole child. Children are encouraged to express their opinions and are given a range of opportunities to show and develop their personalities including a range of leadership roles'.

St Andrew's is a rapidly improving school. Teachers have high expectations of all learners and issues from the most recent Ofsted report in June 2014 have already been addressed. The rigorous induction of new staff ensures that all staff are committed to the distinctive nature of a church school. They all lead worship, teach RE and work together to support each other and develop a Christian vision for the school. As this inspection took place during the first half-term of the school year not everything planned is fully in place or shows consistency of practice. For example, the school currently lacks a clear audit of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development across the curriculum.

Governors are proud of their school and take an active part in evaluating the school's distinctive Christian character. There are comprehensive reports of governing body visits and monitoring and evaluation sessions which all play a key role in moving the school forward. For example, governors, staff, pupils and parents all monitor the quality of the worship. The recent governor review on how the Christian character of the school impacts on pupil achievement outlines five key areas including 'Christian input at home and church reinforces the school's values and sets expectations of progress'.

Succession planning is in place. There is an ongoing programme of staff development and each member of the senior leadership team takes a key role in developing the school's distinctive character. There are close links with the parish clergy and the Diocese of St Albans to support this.

Issues about links with parents from the June Ofsted report have been addressed and strategies are in place for ongoing improvement in communication. All parents now feel involved and able to express their views or concerns. The school vision statement of 'Living, Learning and Worshipping Together' clearly underpins the distinctive Christian character of this school.

SIAMS report October 2014 St Andrew's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Hitchin SG4 9RD