



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St James CofE VA Lower School
Main Road, Biddenham, Bedford MK40 4BD

Diocese of St Albans

LA:	Bedfordshire
SIAS Inspection:	07 October 2008
Previous S48 Inspection:	17 and 18 January 2006
URN:	109614
Headteacher:	Karen Luscombe
SIAS Inspector Name:	Bob Hopcraft
SIAS Inspector No:	484

School Context

St James is a smaller than average lower school, set in pleasant surroundings in the village of Biddenham. The village is close to the large conurbation of Bedford and the school attracts pupils from both the immediate locality and further afield. The percentage of pupils who require additional help due to learning difficulties or disabilities is below the national average, as is the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. There is a greater than average proportion of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds, which gives the school a rich and vibrant mix.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St James CofE VA Lower School as a Church of England school are good.

Significant thought has been put into the school's development since the previous inspection and the headteacher, staff and governors have worked hard to promote the school's Christian character. As a result, St James is now judged to be a good Church school, with some outstanding aspects. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent and their knowledge and understanding of the Christian and other world faiths is underpinned by good provision for collective worship and RE. Provision is further enhanced by the outstanding links with the local Church and community.

Established strengths

- The vision of the headteacher, staff and governors for the development of the school as a Church school;
- The excellent relationships and teamwork at all levels;
- The good provision for collective worship and RE;
- The outstanding links with the local Church, parish and community.

Focus for development

- Develop ways to monitor and evaluate the quality and impact of collective worship;
- Ensure that the current good practice in assessment in RE is developed to involve pupils more closely in assessing their own work and identifying next steps in learning;
- Involve the full range of stakeholders in the school's self-evaluation as a Church school.

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

This is because pupils feel secure, valued and special. As a result, they enjoy their work and make good progress. All treat one another with respect, reflecting the positive impact of the school's programme of values education which underpins its work. Pupils display maturity and a care for one another and their school environment. They display high levels of self esteem and confidence and have many opportunities to take responsibility during the school year. Good examples of these are opportunities to be part of the very effective school council and to become playground buddies to support younger and less confident children. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and is a strength of the school. The many opportunities for quiet and thoughtful reflection observed during the inspection show that spiritual development lies at the heart of the school's ethos, as does its cultural programme, reflected in its global outlook and its holding of the *International School Award*. Relationships and teamwork are outstanding at all levels and co-operation and collaboration are tangible at every turn. As a result, behaviour is very good and every opportunity is taken to celebrate this, notably through the *Tree-mendous Tree*. The school's Church school status is clear to all who visit and the bright, vibrant environment and displays provide opportunity for reflection and support general learning well. Evidence of its Christian character is now clear throughout the school and this aspect of development has progressed well since the previous Section 48 inspection.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Worship is central to the life of the school and underpins its Christian character. As a result, the varied and stimulating acts of worship support pupils' spiritual development well: they are able to talk with confidence about key Christian values and how these impact on their everyday lives. Daily acts of worship are well planned and recorded; however, they are not yet evaluated rigorously enough in terms of their quality and impact on pupils. Pupils respond very positively to worship and enjoy participating at every opportunity. Staff often lead worship and say that worship at St James is "... a joy, not a duty". Good use is made of prayer, both within worship and beyond and the saying of grace at lunchtime, the prayer box and the closing prayer at the end of the day encourages the thread of worship to run throughout the school day. Pupils recognise the importance of worship to their everyday lives and say that they learn a lot from the experience; as a result, their knowledge of key Christian festivals and the Church year is good. The Lord's Prayer is used regularly as part of worship and pupils sing a range of songs and hymns with gusto. Very good use is made of links with the church and other religious organisations, such as *Open the Book* and *Bedford Area Schools Christian Support Trust*, to enhance and develop worship. Pupils talk with particular affection about the Church services in which they are involved on a regular basis.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Standards in RE are above the expected level and pupils' written work reflects the high status and value placed on religious studies. Teaching is good and the specialist teaching undertaken by the headteacher provides continuity and consistency throughout the school. As a result, pupils make good progress in RE and thoroughly enjoy their RE lessons. The lesson observed during the inspection in the Reception class about Puddles the Cat and his adventures in the Church at Harvest Festival time, illustrates this well. This engaged pupils in a very special way and encouraged a good deal of reflection about behaviour, right and wrong. The good teaching encourages pupils to reflect on the meaning of what they are learning and relate this to their everyday lives. Assessment in RE is developing, but does not as yet involve pupils closely enough in assessing their own progress and the next steps they need to take in order to improve. The school's rich cultural mix is used well to ensure that pupils develop a good understanding of other cultures and faiths and visits and trips are used well to enhance learning. A good example of this is the recent visit to complete the *Queens Park Faith Tour*. There are very good resources to support RE and the headteacher leads the subject with passion and enthusiasm.

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

This is because the school's Christian vision is clear and is shared by all. It is both explicit in all the school's published literature and implicit in the everyday actions of all who work and play here. The headteacher has played a significant role in promoting this aspect of the school's development since the previous inspection and in this she has been supported by staff and governors. Significant improvements in the quality of collective worship and RE have been noted since the last inspection as a result of strong and focused leadership. The school's evaluation of itself as a Church school is developing well, but this does not yet involve the full range of stakeholders. St James is a school which is fully inclusive on all levels – it is an environment where every child and adult really does matter. Parents recognise the strong impact that the school has on their children's development, moving one parent to write of "... the strong sense of community and values for living that are brought to life throughout the school day, providing a strong moral code for the future". Links with the local Church and community are outstanding and further enhance the school's Christian character. Pupils have many opportunities to be involved in charitable giving and to give thought to those less fortunate than themselves.