



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St John's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Digswell

Diocese of St Albans

LEA:	Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection :	22nd and 23rd April 2008
Previous S23 Inspection:	4th and 9th July 2003
URN:	117460
Headteacher:	Mr Robert Price
SIAS Inspector :	Mrs Judith Ruff
SIAS Inspector No.	528

Context

St John's C of E Primary school is of average size, with 215 pupils on roll. The school is growing in popularity, with approximately half of pupils coming from the village of Digswell. The remaining pupils travel from places such as the outskirts of Welwyn Garden City, selecting the school for its church foundation and the caring provision for all pupils, including those with social, emotional and learning difficulties. Nearly all pupils come from White British backgrounds. Approximately 4% of pupils receive a free school meal. Pupils with special educational needs make up 6.5% of the school's population. This includes one statemented child.

Summary Judgement

Overall distinctiveness and effectiveness of the school as a Church of England School

St John's C of E Primary School is outstanding in the many successful ways in which the school's church foundation is celebrated and valued. Relationships throughout the school are excellent and the team of local clergy is well known to the children, who are able to ask difficult questions confidently about faith and religion in the secure knowledge that adults will provide honest answers. Throughout the school, signage, logos, displays and Christian posters and artefacts, emphasise the importance of the Christian foundation in the life of the school community. Pupils are enabled to feel valued and special through the ways in which their achievements are celebrated. All pupils interviewed were proud of their efforts and understood that Friday assembly was a time for joint celebration and acknowledgement of their successes. Effective links with African schools reinforce the fact that Christianity is a multi-cultural faith. Pupils are developing an understanding of the range of issues and challenges which face their Christian brothers and sisters on another continent.

Established strengths

- Excellent relationships throughout the school and with the local church communities
- Teaching of RE is sensitive and often imaginative
- Good emphasis on the importance of prayer in worship and school life

Focus for development

- Formulate a policy for Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development
- Provide training through Diocesan staff for Collective Worship and RE for staff
- Develop methods of evaluating Collective Worship by the different groups of participants
- Ensure that RE is regularly monitored and evaluated by the Foundation Governors

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

Pupils at the school know that they are special. This message is conveyed through many effective pastoral systems, such as the hugely valued 'Buddy system' between reception children and Year 6 pupils. All staff care deeply about the children. They want them to be successful and demonstrate great levels of patience and sensitivity, whilst supporting their classes to learn and develop. Christian values impact significantly on the ways in which adults and pupils interact and grow to respect and understand each other. The school community creates an ideal environment in which young people can be nurtured as individuals, valued for their unique skills, talents and personalities. Although the school's ethos supports the spiritual, moral and social development of all learners, the ways in which these aspects are developed would benefit from being formally recorded in a policy document, so that practices can be safeguarded for future pupils. Displays around the school show clearly that RE work and the Church festivals, such as Easter, are celebrated well, with pupils being given many opportunities to fully involve themselves in the learning opportunities on offer.

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

Collective worship is an important part of school life. The input of the clergy team members is extremely valuable, particularly through their welcoming approach to school services in the respective churches, curriculum input and as celebrants for the half termly school Eucharist service. Pupils say that they enjoy collective worship, but that sometimes pupils arrive late for the worship and this can cause interruptions to concentration. The need to evaluate school worship by all participants is an area which will enable the school to improve the spiritual experiences of all even further. The development of themes and pieces of music for the week will also add to the quality of the experience offered. The creation of focal points for worship, such as the use of candles to give a visual stimulus to indicate that worship has started would be helpful to create a greater ambience for worship. Prayer plays an important part in the worship and pupils' add significantly to the thoughts and reflections of these intercessions. Staff would benefit from diocesan training for Collective Worship to enhance provision even further.

The effectiveness of Religious Education is good

Standards in Religious Education (RE) are good and pupils make good progress in their understanding of Christianity and other world faiths, in particular where teaching is imaginative and uses first hand experiences. For example, the use of artefacts from different religions as observed in the use of the Puja trays in the Year 6 RE lesson looking at Hindu worshipping practices. Pupils are encouraged to articulate their thinking and question adults about difficult issues of belief and justice. Teachers are building levels of confidence in assessing pupils' progress against the expectations of the Hertfordshire Agreed Syllabus. However, there is still more work to be done in making the levels of assessment accessible to pupils and in tracking levels of progress across the school. Teachers and other staff involved in the teaching of RE would benefit from further training in these areas. The RE Subject Leader has developed good practice in assessment, which now requires cascading within other classes. A scrutiny of pupils' work across all year groups shows that RE has a high profile within the teaching curriculum and pupils are encouraged to present their work with pride and to a high standard. RE contributes very well to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all learners. The RE work successfully promotes the distinctive Christian character of the school together with engendering a sympathetic understanding of other faiths.

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

Responses to parental surveys show a high number are positive about the school's Christian vision and are very appreciative of the impact of this in terms of care and commitment to the Gospel values. The school's Christian character is clear from its key documentation and visual signs and symbols around the school building. The partnership between local clergy, headteacher, senior leaders and other staff is excellent. A high level of dedication and expertise is given freely to the clear benefit of the pupils and the whole school community. The school staff members demonstrate that they are committed to putting the Christian vision into practice through their energy and time commitment, which is well beyond expected classroom hours. For example, the production of 'Crikey Moses' showed staff engaged in playing piano and guitar, assisting with costumes and learning lines, as well as showing pride and belief in the pupils' achievements. Parents demonstrate support for the school and their children by attending church services, school Eucharists and working within the classes, as well as being very active on the Parents' Association and the Governing Body. The school intends to extend opportunities for pupils to become an active part of the evaluation of the school's work as a church school. Pupils are encouraged to think of others less fortunate than themselves through a range of charitable giving, including to two African schools which also have Christian foundations. However, Foundation Governors need to ensure that RE is monitored and evaluated regularly.

The school meets the statutory requirements for Collective Worship.	Yes
The school meets the statutory requirements for Religious Education.	Yes