

Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St John's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
Hertford Road, Digswell, Welwyn AL6 0BX

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection: 27th September 2011
Previous S48 Inspection: 22nd 23rd April 2008
URN: 117460
Headteacher: Mr Robert Price
SIAS Inspector Name: Mrs Mel Adams
SIAS Inspector No: 58

School Context

St John's is an average sized one form entry primary school. Children are largely from White British backgrounds with a small but increasing proportion from a range of ethnic minorities. One third of the pupils come from Digswell itself, the rest travelling from neighbouring villages or Welwyn Garden City. Clergy from the united benefice work closely with the school and are involved as Governors and in leading worship both in school and in the churches.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St John's Digswell as a Church of England school are good.

With a clear commitment to its Christian foundation, St John's is a setting steered by Christian values which enable the school community to learn and play together harmoniously. As children move through the school, they develop good spiritual and moral awareness, giving them an understanding of their own needs and those of others, and an awareness of Christianity and other faiths and cultures. Supported by the churches of the united benefice, the school celebrates its church school identity which is appreciated and valued by all stakeholders.

Established strengths

- The good working relationships between the school and its partner churches which supports all members of the school community.
- The extent to which school leaders, including governors and senior staff are steered by Christian values

Focus for development

- For the Governing Body to develop their vision for the schools distinctive Christian character by continuing to explore how the school reflects the gospel of Christ.
- To raise standards in RE by ensuring that learning objectives include both learning about and learning from religion so that independent learning tasks enable children to record their religious understanding.
- To further raise standards in RE in both Key stages by more consistent use of assessment for learning including effective feedback related to religious concepts.

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

Children, staff, parents and governors are able to identify how the values inherent in the daily experiences enable them to work, play and worship together. As a result children's behaviour is very good as is the level of caring between children across the age range. Parents are appreciative of the schools Christian character and the impact on their children, illustrated by a parent who wrote, 'The ethos of the school is inclusive and caring, Parents are made very welcome at all collective acts of worship and Christian values are upheld'. Social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is also good as children are able to apply these principles not only within the school community but also to their links with the local community. Through partnerships with schools in the UK and Africa and through a developing understanding of the variety of faiths and cultures in the UK they have a good understanding of themselves in relation to national and global communities. Relationships throughout the school are good and based on forgiveness and reconciliation as observed by a governor who said that the children are always ready to apologise and move on. Strongly held Christian values inform and steer strategic decision making by governors and senior leaders. Throughout the school its distinctive identity is evident though displays including church and clergy news, the Kalomo school which it supports, RE displays in classrooms supporting learning and a digital display in the entrance hall showing many aspects of church school life.

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

The impact of collective worship is outstanding because children are able to articulate a range of values experienced day by day which they learn about during worship. They describe having fun and being treated by peers and staff with kindness and fairness. Peer support though peace pals is helping children to apply their values in mediation. Children say they enjoy worship in school and the opportunities they have in each of the churches which work with the school. In both key stages children enter respectfully and then confidently take part through singing and reading their own prayers. They listen well and respond to questions which help to develop their understanding. One child was able to identify that the story of Noah helped him to understand God's hope for the world. Children then were able to say what their own hopes are. Worship is valued by all members of the school community and all staff attend. Children identified the importance of prayer, not only during collective worship times but at other set times of the day, and said that they would appreciate further opportunities for personal prayer and reflection. Anglican tradition and practice are a clear aspect of daily experience, enhanced by the ecumenical Methodist-Anglican partnership in the village church. Children understand a number of festivals and speak of how their learning in RE prepares them for worship at times such as Christmas or Easter. Regular school Eucharist and occasions such as Ash Wednesday are spoken of with reverence as very special times for thinking about God. Many of the staff are confident in leading worship and are embracing the new planning for values led worship. Some evaluation by staff, governors and children has taken place but has yet to inform other aspects of future planning.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good.

Religious education is good overall as children make good progress by the end of Key stage 2. The school is developing assessment in RE. This is beginning to have an impact on improving achievement and progress where children have the opportunity to self assess and where feedback is related to developing religious understanding. This enabled one child to compare 'God being there but not seen' to air or salt in water. Opportunities for developing religious understanding are lost where feedback is not focussed on religious concepts. RE lessons can be outstanding where children are challenged and their new understanding enables them to relate their findings to their own experience, as in the year 6 class where studies on Buddhism enabled children to identify that the inner qualities of a person is more important than what they may look like. Well planned lessons and independent learning tasks enable children to progress as in the year 4 lesson where children were able to handle and discuss Hindu artefacts. Where lesson objectives and tasks are not clearly linked to RE concepts learning is limited. Children are developing an understanding of faith and religious practice, and are able to discuss this with confidence as observed in the inspection where a child was able to share confidently from his personal religious experience and faith. Children have a good understanding of Christianity and have a real appreciation of different faiths and practices which one child said makes them open and respectful to different faiths. Senior leaders are ensuring that RE continues as a priority in the school and are investing in training and developing resources.

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

Governors and senior leaders are quite clear about the importance of Christian values in the day to day experiences of both children and staff. The Head teacher is committed to making Christian values more explicit and has recently introduced a more systematic approach in Collective worship to which children are already responding. Children are appreciative of how through worship and understanding gained in RE they are able to use these values day to day. Consultation with parents indicates their appreciation as expressed by one parent who wrote: 'children are taught Christian values and the wider concepts of religion as part of their daily lives'. Partnership with parents is good and staff and governors are readily available. Governors also are committed to exploring how the school reflects the gospel of Christ and say this is sharpening their vision for the school as a distinctive and effective church school. Evaluations can be seen to be steering some aspects of church school development. The Head teacher and senior leaders are committed to ensuring that the day to day provision for children is developed and through thoughtful succession planning are working together to ensure continuity of leadership. Staff and clergy speak of how they are able to benefit from pastoral and spiritual support, including regular prayer support from the churches, as well as opportunities for professional development. There are very good relationships between the school and the churches of the united benefice and through their established link with a school in Kalomo children have an awareness of the worldwide church. Many links with the local community provide children with opportunities to share through activities such as music and drama.