



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report



St Nicholas Elstree Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
St Nicholas Close, Elstree, Hertfordshire WD6 3EW

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection: Thursday 9 December 2010
Previous S48 Inspection: 30 January 2008
URN: 117431
Headteacher: Kate Johnston-Grant
SIAS Inspector Name: Bob Hopcraft
SIAS Inspector No: 484

School Context

St Nicholas is an average sized primary school set in an urban environment, adjacent to the local church. It benefits from spacious grounds and modern, bright buildings. About half of pupils come from beyond the immediate area. The school takes every opportunity to celebrate the diverse ethnic and social nature of its pupil population and their families.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Nicholas as a Church of England school are good.

St Nicholas is a good church school with many strengths of which it can be justly proud. A strong Christian ethos has remained at the heart of the school's work through a period of relative instability and change. The headteacher has worked very effectively with the parish, staff and governors to promote this aspect of its work since her appointment in September 2009. All areas for development identified in the previous SIAS report have been effectively addressed.

Established strengths

- The central role played by the headteacher and vicar in promoting the very positive Christian ethos which lies at the heart of the daily life of the school;
- Good quality acts of worship which play an important role in promoting pupils' spiritual development;
- Outstanding relationships at all levels and a strong family ethos;
- Effective links with the local clergy, parish and community.

Focus for development

- Improve further the teaching and learning of RE by:
 - Embedding developments in assessment to ensure that pupils of all abilities are challenged;
 - Increasing opportunities for pupils to reflect on the meaning of the stories and concepts they learn and to apply these to their everyday lives;
 - Ensuring that all staff have the opportunity to engage in professional development activities to support and develop their understanding of RE.
- Devise and implement a strategic plan for the future development of the school *as a church school* to ensure that areas for development identified through school self-evaluation are effectively addressed.

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

This is because Christian values lie at the heart of the day to day life of the school, enabling all pupils to flourish as individuals. As a result, pupils show exceptional care and thought for others and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and at times outstanding. The recently implemented *Sunshine* programme to support behaviour, though relatively new, has engaged pupils effectively, enabling them to understand the importance of good relationships and that forgiveness is central to the resolution of conflict. This concept is supported at every turn throughout the school by posters and displays, which encourage good behaviour and interpersonal skills, "*Tomorrow is another day – we can start afresh*" being typical of these. The school promotes an effective understanding of other cultures and takes every opportunity to celebrate the diversity of its population. Regular opportunities for reflection and discussion nurture pupils' spiritual development, as do the regular opportunities to engage in prayer throughout the school day. Opportunities to participate in the School Council and the Eco Council enable pupils to develop an understanding of the importance of citizenship and promote opportunities for decision-making and leadership. Relationships are outstanding at all levels and staff model Christian values for pupils at every turn. The commitment to inclusion results in a strong family ethos and team ethic. As a result, pupils are very proud of their school and say that it is a happy and caring place to be. Staff and school leaders have developed a bright and supportive learning environment which benefits all groups of learners. Children's work is celebrated and excellent use is made of symbols and displays throughout the school to promote and celebrate the school's Christian character.

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

Pupils thoroughly enjoy worship because they have many opportunities to participate actively. This is reflected in the positive comments from parents and children, for example one parent said that her child "*...thoroughly enjoys assemblies and talks about them often at home*". The good act of worship observed during the inspection encouraged active participation, posing a range of open ended questions to draw out pupils' thinking in relation to the theme of *Hope*. The commitment to a range of worship activities, including the relatively new class assemblies, ensures that there are good opportunities for parents and the wider community to engage in worship alongside pupils. Worship is inclusive and well matched to the age and ability of learners and the central focus on values ensures that worship has every opportunity to impact on pupils' day to day lives and development. Very good use of symbols such as the lighting of a candle ensures that worship is clearly identified as a special part of the school day. Good use is made of prayer, song and responses to engage pupils in a deeper understanding of Anglican tradition and the recent introduction of *Messy Mass* has further strengthened this. Worship is well planned and provision is further enhanced by the very strong links between the church and the school. Regular services are held in the church and the vicar is strongly committed to the continuing development of the school as part of the local Christian community. The development of a more consistent system of monitoring by both governors and pupils since the last inspection has enabled the school to be secure about the quality and impact of its provision.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good.

Standards in RE are good throughout the school. Pupils make good progress because of the consistently good teaching they receive and the clear learning objectives that are now evident in all lessons. As a result, they demonstrate a good knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith and a range of major world religions. Effective use has been made of parents, visitors and visits to enhance provision in RE and the range of activities on offer to pupils has improved significantly since the last inspection. During the inspection, the use of art, discussion, drama and paired writing were all seen as a means of recording and extending thinking in RE. As a result, pupils enjoy RE and are able to discuss religious issues openly and to make links between Christianity and other faiths in an informed way. Parents are clear about the enjoyment their children gain from RE and say that it has a very positive impact on their everyday lives. Assessment is developing well; however, school leaders are aware that this does not yet provide them with sufficient information to ensure that all groups of learners are consistently challenged to move their learning forward still further. RE is well led by enthusiastic and well-informed co-ordinators, who are aware that more opportunities for teachers to engage in ongoing professional development would support even better progress in pupils' learning and understanding.

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

This is because school leaders, and in particular the headteacher and the vicar, are committed to promoting and affirming the Christian values that lie at the heart of the daily lives of all who work and play at St Nicholas. No one can be in any doubt that this is a church school and of the key importance that this has for all members of the school community. Governors have been closely involved alongside staff in revisiting and reaffirming the school's ethos statement, which encapsulates the key aspects of the school's Christian vision, and have shared this openly with the whole school community. As a result there is a strong shared commitment and understanding of the school's ethos amongst all sections of the community. Adults and children talk openly about the key Christian values that underpin the school's ethos and what these mean in the context of their daily lives. School leaders have completed a robust and detailed self-evaluation of its development as a church school and have identified clear strengths and areas for future development. However, they have not, as yet, established a strategic plan for plotting how areas identified for development are to be improved. Very good relationships with the local church and the local community are evident at every turn, as is the children's commitment to charitable giving, in which they play an active role.