



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report



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

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection: 30 January 2008
Previous S23 Inspection: 16-17 June 2003
URN: 117431
Headteacher: Mrs Jane Cogan
SIAS Inspector Name: Mrs Lindsay Fraser
SIAS Inspector No: 107

School context

St Nicholas CE VA Primary School is a below average sized school whose pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds. Pupils' mobility is higher than the national average. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is above average. The number of pupils identified with learning difficulties is in line with national averages.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Nicholas CE VA Primary School are good.

The Christian context within which this school operates is clearly articulated and recognised by pupils, staff and governors and lived out in the day to day relationships between all members of the school community. Pupils are supported in their learning by the caring ethos and positive values and attitudes which are evident throughout the school.

Established strengths

- The clear vision and strong commitment of the Headteacher and local vicar in promoting a distinctive Christian vision
- The impact of Christian values on children's personal development and their relationships with each other.
- The extremely strong, supportive and effective links with the local church and local community

Focus for development

- Ensure that clear learning objectives are set in Religious Education lessons, enabling a clear focus for formative assessment.
- Incorporate a wider range of activities into Religious Education lessons.
- Involve members of staff and members of the Governing Body in monitoring and evaluating Collective Worship

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

The theology of both the school and the local church is based on the understanding that there is something of God in all people and that this should be reflected in the way that people relate to one another. The Christian ethos and practices in the school are therefore very strong and enable all learners to feel valued and special. Learners speak of their appreciation of and respect for the beliefs of those of different faiths and those of no faith. Parents refer to their own growing understanding about other faiths, and their own, as result of their children's learning. Behaviour is very good and both learners and their parents state that this is as a result of the Christian ethos in the school and the emphasis put on respect throughout the school. Children speak of being proud because it is a Christian school and that 'you can trust everybody'. Learners themselves value the special bond between the staff which 'is a good example to us'. New pupils refer to being made welcome and appreciate the buddy system.

The vicar plays a prominent role in supporting the school and sees this as an important and integral part of her ministry

The Christian ethos plays a large part in developing the Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education of all children. For example, there are good links with the three residential homes in Elstree and children sing at each of these at Christmas time as well as helping residents at one of the homes with their gardening. The elderly are also invited to a Harvest Tea and Entertainment. Raising money for a variety of local and national initiatives is considered very important by the children as a result of the emphasis on helping others less fortunate than themselves.

Display is used throughout the school, both to show value for the children's work and to emphasise the Christian ethos. For example, an art display demonstrated the way in which artists portrayed relationships between people and children had contributed their own interpretations. Prayers also figure prominently throughout the building.

The impact of collective worship on the school is good.

Worship is central to the life of the school and underpins its Christian character. Collective worship is well planned by the headteacher in collaboration with the local vicar, taking into account the major festivals, the liturgical calendar and the needs of the children. Pupils' understanding of Anglican faith and practice is well developed as a result of this and as a result of such things as children receiving the ash cross on their foreheads on Ash Wednesday. Children are also familiar with the liturgical responses for the beginning and end of services. St Nicholas Church is used for regular worship to which parents are invited. Children feel at ease in the church through the familiarity of the Church surroundings. Collective Worship also develops children's respect for those of other faiths such as the joint leadership for Holocaust Day led by the vicar and the local rabbi. The setting up of St Nicholas' Choir who perform not just in school but are also invited to sing in the church, further links the school and the church. Children speak of values that they learn in Collective Worship which enable them to develop good relationships with each other. At present evaluation is informal; therefore the school needs to develop strategies for effective monitoring and evaluation of Collective Worship.

The effectiveness of Religious Education is good.

Religious Education is given a high priority in the school. This is reflected in the quality of RE displays throughout the school. Effective use is made of the Diocesan syllabus. Children demonstrate a positive attitude towards Religious Education and are keen to discuss their own faiths and the beliefs of others. Children are adept at articulating their own thoughts and ideas and are keen to listen to the opinions of others; they look forward to lessons and achieve good standards. Good use is made of the expertise of the local vicar, observed conducting a mock baptism for a Key Stage 1 class who were then keen to explain and demonstrate what they had learned in the lesson. Planning of lessons incorporates a range of teaching styles, but independent activities lack creativity. Assessment arrangements are currently informal and the subject leader, the headteacher, is aware that formal strategies to monitor and evaluate the quality of RE requires development. The school has undertaken some in-service training in respect of Religious Education, but there are opportunities for this aspect to be developed further

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

The headteacher, together with the governors, local vicar and staff, has a clear and distinctive Christian vision for the school. The vision is clearly articulated in displays around the school and is clearly understood by the school community. Plans are in place to involve all staff and governors in revising the values of the school in the near future. Work has already started on this through the involvement of the children in discussing their ideas with the vicar. Although many governors are new to their roles they are very supportive of the school and have put in place systems to gain sufficient knowledge to be able to appreciate the Christian vision and to be able to challenge how the Christian vision is promoted within the school. Involvement of the school in the local community is very effective, especially through the links with other local churches and the local synagogue in the promotion of arts and creativity. St Nicholas Church is part of the school website and messages from the vicar are frequently included within the school newsletter. The school has shown its support for the local community through granting free lettings to a number of group meetings. Parents are very supportive of all celebrations and services held by the school.