



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St John the Baptist Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School
Hillside Lane, Great Amwell, Ware, Hertfordshire SG12 9SE

Diocese of St Albans

LA:	Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection:	10 April 2008
Previous S23 Inspection:	21 - 22 April 2004
URN:	117432
Headteacher:	Mrs Sue Robinson
SIAS Inspector Name:	Mr Bob Hopcraft
SIAS Inspector No:	484

School Context

St John the Baptist Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School is a smaller than average primary school set in pleasant rural grounds, close to the town of Ware. It is popular and is over subscribed. The numbers of pupils of ethnic minority heritage is low and the numbers of pupils with learning difficulties is below the national average. There has been a recent change in leadership and large building programme has been completed, which has enhanced facilities considerably, including the provision of a new hall and classroom.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St John the Baptist Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School as a Church of England school are good.

St John the Baptist is a good Church school, which promotes its Christian character well. Staff and school leaders have worked hard during the recent change in leadership to ensure that the school's Christian ethos remains strong. There are well established and effective links with the parish and the school has good links with the local community. The school has recently begun to work more closely with a neighbouring Church school in the parish, which promises to provide good opportunities for the future. It enjoys the confidence and support of the parent body and communications with parents are enhanced by regular and informative newsletters. Pupils are provided with many opportunities to develop an understanding of the Christian faith and other major world religions and are encouraged to take an active role in worship.

Established strengths

- The good relationships at all levels and the strong team ethos within the school;
- The opportunities provided for pupils to be actively involved in planning and leading acts of worship;
- The effective pastoral links between the school and the parish;
- The improved opportunities for pupils to develop an understanding of other cultures and belief systems;

Focus for development

- Develop consistent systems for assessment and monitoring in RE to ensure that all pupils make the best possible progress;
- Develop systems to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of acts of collective worship;
- Ensure that governors' evaluation of the school's effectiveness as a Church school is consistent and becomes embedded in practice.

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

This is because pupils are valued and enjoy their work, encouraging one child to comment *"I like my school, because it makes me feel special"*. Pupils enjoy coming to school and as a result, attendance levels are well above the national average. Christian values are central to the life of the school and are modelled well by both staff and pupils: as a result, pupils are confident and demonstrate high levels of self esteem. There are many opportunities for learners to develop independence and the school council is an effective vehicle for this, providing genuine opportunities for pupils to influence the development of the school – for example their discussions relating to ensuring that the new hall is a conducive environment for worship. Social, moral, spiritual and cultural development are good and there are many opportunities for quiet reflection during the busy school day. There are now many more opportunities to develop an understanding of other cultures than was the case at the time of the last inspection and visits, such as the one to the Hindu Mandir at Neasden, and a range of displays around the school encourage pupils to think about other cultures and belief systems. Pupils are encouraged to explore their own feelings and those of others, supported by the high quality Personal, Social and Health Education programme. Relationships are good at all levels and there is a positive team ethic throughout the school: as a result, pupils work well together and behaviour is consistently good. The recently completed new building has enhanced facilities considerably and the signs and symbols of the Christian religion are clearly displayed in all parts of the school, supported by good quality displays in each classroom and public areas designed to promote the school's Christian character.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship plays a key part in the life of the school and acts of worship are stimulating and engaging. The school has recently begun to work together with a neighbouring school within the parish on the planning of acts of worship and this promises to be an effective tool for future development. However, the school does not currently evaluate acts of worship in order to assess their quality and the impact they have on pupils. Pupils enjoy worship and particularly appreciate the opportunities for active involvement: a good example of this are the regular assemblies led by pupils, such as the one observed during the inspection on the theme of *"Being a Good Friend"*, in which pupils demonstrated great confidence and a mature understanding of the issues involved. Good use is made of prayer to enhance worship and pupils know and use a range of traditional and other prayers at key points during the school day. A range of traditional and modern hymns are used and singing is of the highest quality, enhanced by live music and accompaniment. There are very good links with the local parish and clergy lead weekly acts of worship in school. Good use is also made of the local Church for worship, where pupils attend services at key points in the Church year.

The effectiveness of the religious education is satisfactory

This is because pupils achieve the levels expected for their age and ability. Lessons are well planned and teaching is good, encouraging pupils to experience and develop an understanding of Christianity and other major world religions and to relate their understanding to their own every day lives. However, while assessment procedures in religious education (RE) are good in some year groups, they are not consistently applied in all classes and as a result, not all pupils make the progress they could. The school is aware of the need to monitor the development of RE in order to ensure a clear view of standards and progress. Pupils enjoy RE, as reflected in their response to questionnaires and the use of a range of teaching techniques, including drama and discussion, help to support this. Some good examples of the use of drama were observed during the inspection, for example in a lesson exploring the events on the *Road to Emmaus*, which enhanced pupils' involvement and understanding of the topic. Pupils are articulate, talk confidently about a range of Christian festivals and can identify the main beliefs, symbols and festivals of other major world religions. RE is well resourced and use has been made of professional development courses to ensure staff have a sound working knowledge of the subject.

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

The school has recently undergone a significant change in senior management and the new headteacher has worked hard with staff to ensure as smooth a transition as possible. As a result, the school's focus on its Christian ethos has been maintained and its Christian vision remains clear in documentation and the quality of relationships within the working environment. Foundation governors support the school well and have been involved in the school's evaluation of its effectiveness as a Church school: as a result, school leaders and staff share a common vision for the school as a Church school. However, this is not yet fully embedded in practice and the school is aware of this. This is an inclusive school and regards all pupils and staff as individual and special. Parents are very supportive of the school and its ethos, moving one parent to write: *"The Christian message is a strong thread that runs through school life"*. They say their views are valued and that the school has a significant influence on the lives of their children. The strong and productive links with the local parish provide very good pastoral and spiritual support for the school. Links with the local community are strong and pupils are actively involved in a range of charitable fundraising and giving.