

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Nicholas Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School Church Green, Harpenden, St Albans AL5 2TP

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority:	Hertfordshire
Dates of inspection:	23 October 2012
Date of last inspection:	9 November 2007
School's unique reference number:	117434
Headteacher:	Ms Sara Lawrence
Inspector's name and number:	Mrs Lindsay Fraser 107

School context

St Nicholas Church of England School is a smaller than average primary school situated alongside St Nicholas Church in Harpenden. The majority of pupils are admitted under the school's admissions policy church criterion which includes St Nicholas and other churches in Harpenden. Pupils are taught in five classes of mixed year groups. Standards are well above national averages. Almost all pupils are from white British backgrounds and have English as a first language. Since the last inspection there have been considerable changes in staffing.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Nicholas Church of England Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding.

As a result of excellent leadership at all levels the impact of the school's distinctive Christian character upon pupils' attitudes and values is outstanding.

Established strengths

- The outstanding Christian leadership has continued to further develop the ethos of the school through an era of considerable staff change.
- The standards achieved in Religious Education are high.
- The pupils' attitudes, behaviour and motivation reflect strong Christian values.
- The richness of the school environment, internally and externally, contributes significantly to the spiritual development of pupils.

Focus for development

- To further develop, in accordance with the school development plan, the strong partnership between the church and school by increasing within the church the visual representation of the life of the school through pupil contributions.
- To maximise opportunities for increased pupils' involvement and leadership in the delivery of Collective Worship.

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

Pupils' behaviour, attitudes and relationships are outstanding because of the excellent 'values education' which pervades the whole school. Pupils' understanding of what each value means is underpinned by their knowledge of biblical stories, the role models of adults in the school, the rich curriculum and the environment. Displays around the school encourage pupils to engage in reflection such as the promise tree, the values board, the learning to learn wall and the religious education displays in each classroom. The high quality of the spiritual garden, created recently, enables pupils to reflect and find moments of peace. Speaking on behalf of fellow pupils, one pupil remarked that, 'It's when you are five-nil down in a football game or have played a wrong note on the piano that you get the courage, hope, perseverance and resilience to carry on'. Pupils also appreciate that when problems are encountered adults refer to Christian values to resolve these problems. The impact of Christian values on the school community is also witnessed by parents whose appreciation of the support given by staff and pupils in times of need and times of change is heartfelt. Although the majority of pupils in the school have a strong Christian identity they are able to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and respect for those of other faiths and cultures because of excellent teaching and the opportunities to visit other places of worship; a visit to a mosque had considerable impact upon pupils. Pupils' eagerness to further develop their knowledge of other faiths is also apparent. Compassion and respect for those in difficult and challenging circumstances are also demonstrated by the pupils, pupils making reference to the biblical story of Zacchaeus and of the sinful woman who anoints the feet of Jesus. Caring for the wider community is well supported by fund-raising activities and the involvement with the Harpenden Spotlight on Africa, the evidence of which can be seen through the many letters of thanks displayed on the school notice board. It is reported that pupils continue to demonstrate this same responsibility and service as they move on to their secondary education. Many opportunities exist for times of reflection throughout the school day and this is valued by pupils as a time for thinking. Planning for the development of spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) education ensures these are strong features of the curriculum. The school has in place strategies for monitoring the impact of spiritual development of pupils. Pupils are also given many opportunities to contribute their ideas and opinions. The development of a new school prayer is an excellent example of pupils' influence in improving the school.

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

Pupils respect and value the centrality of Collective Worship which is outstanding. 'Worship supports you to have friendships, to be calm and to reflect on how to turn over a new leaf and to have time to think,' are typical comments made by the pupils as affirmations of the impact of Collective Worship. Collective Worship is well planned and is led by the headteacher and class teachers, all of whom are committed to providing a high quality experience. The weekly use of the church and the involvement of the ministry team enable pupils to develop a greater knowledge and understanding of their Anglican heritage. The presence of governors and parents give added importance to Worship in the life of the community. Since the previous inspection a strong monitoring programme has evolved, involving governors, staff and pupils which informs future planning. Pupils are beginning to take more responsibility for the planning and delivery of Collective Worship. On the day of the inspection a group of Year 6 pupils led Collective Worship which had been carefully planned based on the 'Respect for the Environment'. Other pupils listened attentively, discussed the questions posed and responded appropriately. In later discussions it was obvious that pupils had been particularly attentive and engaged as a result of the worship being led by other pupils. The school has quite rightly identified that this is an area to further develop.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding.

This is because the leader for religious education has high expectations and aspirations for effective learning and teaching throughout the school. Since the last inspection the subject leader has built upon her excellent subject knowledge and commitment to maintain high standards despite staff changes; this has been achieved through attention to staff development. Long term and medium term planning in line with the local authority agreed syllabus and diocesan guidance ensures that pupils have a full and broad understanding of Christianity and other major faiths. As a result of rigorous monitoring, scrutiny of planning and pupils' work the subject leader has been able to share and develop good practice in order that standards are at least in line with the high standards being achieved in core subjects. Establishing a baseline with pupils in the Reception class, with further monitoring in Year 2, has shown the extent to which pupils have learned about, and from, religious beliefs and traditions together with their spiritual development. With plans to extend this to older pupils, further understanding of how pupils progress will further enhance this subject. Effective strategies are used to engage and enthuse pupils; for example on the day of the inspection Year 5 and 6 pupils were involved in the 'commitment game', used to enable pupils to discuss and explore the similarities in Christian values and those of Judaism. A group of pupils had introduced this activity as a result of a Gifted and Talented Day in St Albans Abbey. Pupils' work reflects considerable empathy and understanding of the impact of people's beliefs on the way they live and behave. A remarkable depth of thinking from many pupils results from the use of effective questions and discussions.

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

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is outstanding because the headteacher and the governing body have an extremely strong commitment to the promotion of Christian values in all aspects of life. The strong vision of the headteacher and her energetic commitment to put this into action has further strengthened the status of this school as a church school. The Governing Body demonstrates a firm commitment to ensure that the staff are well supported and this has been reflected in their personal appreciation for the hard work of all staff to achieve high standards. Members of the Governing Body are an effective presence within the school through the rigour of their monitoring programme and through their practical support around the school. Amongst the members of the Governing Body exists a wide range of skills, thus enabling them to carry out their responsibilities and duties effectively. The support of the previous Incumbent was instrumental to the maintenance of the strong Christian ethos through times of change. The Ministry team plays a significant role in the school and there is regular contact between the school and the church. Not only is there a weekly service in St Nicholas' Church, but the team also assists with Religious Education lessons. Importance is given to rigorous monitoring which contributes to the self-evaluation process, resulting in a reflective culture identifying and acting upon areas for improvement. One result has been that the Governing Body have shown their commitment to the provision of teaching other faiths through their financing of coaches for visits to other places of worship. Links with the diocesan education team have led to the development of further excellent practice throughout the school.

Parents are very supportive of the school's ethos and provision, stating that their decision to send their children to St Nicholas' has been fully justified by the experience they have received.