



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report



Diocese of St Albans

**St John's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School,
Lemsford Village, Welwyn Garden City AL8 7TR**

LA: Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection: 12th June 2009
Previous SIAS Inspection: 4th July 2006
URN: 117435
Headteacher: Christine Hall
SIAS Inspector: Martyn Skinner

School context

St John's is a smaller than average sized primary school in the village of Lemsford. Most pupils are drawn from the village and surrounding area, although some attend from further afield. The number of pupils from minority ethnic groups is much lower than the national average. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average.

Summary Judgement

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

This is an outstanding church school where Christian values are embedded in the daily experience of pupils, staff and parents. Deeply caring relationships at every level ensure that all feel welcome, loved and respected. As one parent commented, 'We all feel very valued as human beings and that fosters a powerful sense of community.'

Established strengths

- Exceptionally strong relationships within the school community and between the school and the church.
- High quality collective worship which plays a central role in the lives of pupils, staff, parents and governors.
- Outstanding teaching leading to high and rising standards in Religious Education.
- Committed leadership which consistently develops and clearly articulates the school's vision as a Church of England school.

Focus for development

- Involve the full range of stakeholders in reviewing the church self-evaluation form.
- Provide frequent opportunities for pupils to lead significant aspects of collective worship.

The school is outstanding in meeting the needs of all learners through its distinctive Christian ethos.

All members of the school family understand and greatly appreciate the contribution made by the distinctive Christian identity of the school. Pupils speak convincingly of the impact of the school's strong emphasis on seeking and offering forgiveness, with one pupil explaining, 'Things do sometimes go wrong, but we are quick to say sorry.' Another commented, 'We are really well cared for.' This exemplary level of care results in the outstanding behaviour of the children, who show great concern and consideration for each others' needs. Christian compassion is also demonstrated in the pupils' attitudes towards others beyond the immediate vicinity of the school, including communities in less advantaged areas of the world. Excellent relationships are at the heart of the success of St. John's as a church school. Parents describe the school as being like a strong church family, 'where everyone pitches in to help without being asked.' They refer to school staff as taking a great interest in their lives and doing everything possible to help them feel valued and included. Members of staff, in turn, value the warmth they experience in their relationships with pupils, parents and governors. Teachers refer to the Christian ethos of the school as helping them in their own lives. Similarly, a number of older pupils express appreciation for the way activities at school have influenced their own spiritual development. One child described acts of worship as helping him feel 'closer to Jesus.' Another referred to the importance of the prayer corners in each classroom, explaining, 'If something bad happens outside of school, you can go to the prayer corner and quietly think or pray.'

The impact of Collective Worship on learners is outstanding.

Collective worship has an outstanding impact on all members of the school community. Parents, many of whom regularly attend both the Wednesday assembly in the church and the Friday assembly in the school, are struck by the quality of content and delivery. Parents themselves participate through singing and are often greatly moved by witnessing the response of pupils to acts of worship. Pupils consistently demonstrate extremely positive attitudes to worship, expressing great enthusiasm for the many aspects of worship at St. John's. Pupils particularly enjoy singing, celebrating achievements and discussing key themes with a 'talk partner'. They have regular opportunities to actively participate in worship, although opportunities to lead significant aspects of worship are not as frequent. Pupils are most animated when talking about their contribution to role-playing Bible stories during acts of worship in the church. The weekly visit to the church builds a powerful sense of connection with the local worshipping community and also provides pupils with a secure understanding of Anglican tradition and practice. School leaders work closely with the vicar to plan meaningful collective worship around the diocesan themes. Worship is evaluated as part of the ongoing review of the Christian mission of the school and leaders are constantly exploring ways of making the experience of worship even more relevant to the needs of the community. This depth of commitment to prioritising and continually improving upon collective worship in the life of St. John's is a key indicator of outstanding provision.

The impact of Religious Education on learners is outstanding.

Pupils make outstanding progress and reach above average standards in RE because of outstanding teaching. Under the strong leadership and informed guidance of the RE co-ordinator, teachers are confident in the delivery of exciting learning activities. The RE co-ordinator, working closely with the headteacher, has ensured that RE training for staff has been regular and of a high standard. Teachers plan carefully for variety, pace and a high level of challenge in each lesson, ensuring that pupils have a clear grasp of what each lesson is intended to achieve. Teachers and teaching assistants use questioning extremely well to extend pupils' understanding and to spur them on to respond to the content of each lesson. As a result of excellent teaching, pupils are enthusiastic about RE, with some older pupils describing it as their 'favourite' subject. Pupils enjoyment of RE extends to the respectful exploration of other faiths. For example, Year 5 and 6 pupils were fully absorbed by a lesson on symbolism in Buddhism and produced high quality work in response. By the time pupils leave Year 6, they can demonstrate a good level of understanding of several world faiths. Many reach exceptionally high standards in their understanding of Christianity. Clear progress has been made in RE since the last SIAS inspection, with a stronger emphasis on pupil's assessing and taking responsibility for their own progress. Levels of engagement are therefore higher and standards have risen. Parents are rightly confident in the high level of provision in this area. They speak enthusiastically of pupils returning home with profound questions which challenge their own faith and views. As one parent remarked, 'I'm amazed by how much they know!'

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

The commitment of leaders and governors to expressing the Christian values of the school is seen in every aspect of organisation, from ensuring close links with the church and caring profoundly for each family, to promoting the outstanding achievement of pupils. The leadership of the personal, professional and spiritual development of all staff and governors is a particular strength in this school. The headteacher and chair of governors work together very effectively in this respect. Many development opportunities are provided and the impact of such a wholehearted approach to 'training' in its widest sense can be seen in the wellbeing and outstanding performance of governors and staff. The headteacher takes a very strong lead in ensuring that Christian values are embodied in the conduct of all members of the school community. She provides challenge where needed and has successfully established a culture of openness which values humility and the grace to forgive. The vicar, as chair of governors, enjoys an active pastoral role and is also highly effective in contributing to the strategic direction of the school. While all members of the school community feel involved in pursuing the Christian vision of the school, they are not all involved in evaluating the school's effectiveness.