

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Norton St Nicholas Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Norton Road
Letchworth
Hertfordshire
SG6 1AG

Diocese:	St Albans
Local authority:	Hertfordshire
Date of inspection:	26 November 2012
Date of last inspection:	22 May 2008
School's unique reference number:	117442
Headteacher:	Mr Steve Cowdery
Inspector's name and number:	Mrs Lizzie McWhirter MA 244

School context

Norton St Nicholas Primary serves the community of Norton and the surrounding area on the outskirts of Letchworth. Currently there are 236 pupils who are mainly from a White British background. The school enjoys close links with the parish of Norton. The headteacher has been in post for two years and the vicar for eighteen months. The headteacher has built up a strong team around him.

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

Norton St Nicholas Primary School has a very strong sense of being a worshipping and welcoming Christian community, with prayer an important part of school life. Everyone feels they belong and are encouraged to achieve highly.

Established strengths

- The strong sense of Christian community, modelled by the headteacher and embraced by everyone.
- The opportunities and experiences given to pupils in collective worship and religious education [RE], supporting their spiritual development.
- The close links with the church.

Focus for development

- Enhance the evaluation of collective worship, involving pupils and governors.
- Establish a forum for clergy to dialogue with pupils on the deep questions of faith.

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

Norton St Nicholas Primary provides an excellent learning environment where pupils are proud to belong. This inclusive, cohesive community demonstrates Christian love and service and is much loved by its pupils and much appreciated by its parent body. Pupils say they value their teachers and their friends. Parents acknowledge their children are well supported and their needs and abilities are well met. Parents also value that 'all the staff are unified' and they 'know the children as individuals'. The school is seen to value the widest range of achievement and pupils feel able to make a positive contribution, showing great care for younger children. Relationships and behaviour are exemplary. Some pupils aspire to work in the caring professions. They enjoy giving to charitable projects, through which they experience the Christian values of service and gratitude. Their sense of global awareness is greatly enhanced through work with The Samaritan's Purse and other fundraising activities as well as links with the Caribbean and Guyana. Bright, prominent displays and interactive prayer corners nurture pupils' spiritual development. The school grounds with the outdoor chapel, recently blessed by The Bishop of Hertford which pupils describe as 'amazing', greatly contributes to pupils' engagement with the natural world.

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

High quality prayerful and meaningful worship is at the heart of this worshipping community, inspiring the school day and permeating all school life and practice. Pupils especially value 'asking God for what we need and praising God for what he's given us'. They appreciate the rich variety in the pattern of worship and enjoy worshipping together in a setting which enables them to encounter Jesus Christ. They say they like going to church 'as it is peaceful and it is God's place where he likes to talk to us'. There is great support from the vicar of St Nicholas who meets with the head to plan and review worship. Key festivals in the church year, such as Easter, take place in church. Pupils say The Lord's Prayer regularly, acknowledging 'it is really important to find it in your heart to really forgive someone and be friends with them.' They also recognise the importance of values in worship and to 'live, learn, love and respect faith and trust'. Currently Year 6 enjoy researching for, and leading school worship. Pupils welcome the opportunity to record their reflections regularly on worship for governors to read. 'more worship in the church as we need it to count when we do'. It is planned to hold school Eucharists in the willow chapel, appreciating the space for reflection. Pupils say 'we are the only school who has an actual chapel in our school grounds'. In all these ways, worship is continually improving in integrity and quality.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good.

Pupils clearly enjoy their RE lessons which greatly help them to understand their own spiritual journey. RE has a high profile in this school where teaching and learning is good and standards are often higher than in other core subjects. Year 5 pupils had the opportunity to engage with a gifted and talented RE day at St Alban's Abbey. In lessons pupils are given opportunities to ask puzzling questions about God and life. They enjoy learning about other faiths and are clear about what mosque life means for Muslims and church life for Christians. There is a systematic method of assessment and tracking which informs planning and demonstrates achievement. Marking is purposeful, with pupils recognising what they need to do in order to improve their work. Next steps include using child speak levels in assessment in RE. Many pupils show a good level of theological literacy and a number of pupils demonstrate very high levels of achievement, explaining Christian concepts such as sacrifice and salvation. To this end, the school welcomes the plan to establish a forum for clergy to engage with pupils on the deep questions of faith. Learning outside the classroom features highly. Very good examples across the school include using enquiry approaches to religion when learning about Christmas around the world.

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

Norton St Nicholas Primary's distinctive Christian vision is clearly evident and very effectively promoted by the headteacher and his staff. This is embraced by the clergy and governors so that the school's Church of England foundation is articulated and celebrated by all. An excellent partnership exists with the church, school and diocese working closely together. Pupils' work has been displayed in church and the school features in the parish magazine. Parents speak highly of the headteacher and his staff and their approachability. They say they feel valued and welcomed as parents. Foundation governors are active in their support for the school. They ensure areas from the previous inspection have been addressed, They have identified clear areas for future development, especially in their monitoring and evaluative role. They appoint effective teachers and give them opportunities for leadership experience. In all these ways, Norton St Nicholas Primary maintains excellence in everything.

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