



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Norton St Nicholas Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
Norton Road, Letchworth SG6 1AG

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection: 22nd May 2008
Previous S23 Inspection: February 2003
URN: 117442
Headteacher: Gareth Linwood
SIAS Inspector Name: Lyn Field
SIAS Inspector No: NS 151

School Context

The majority of pupils attending this popular primary school are White British. When they start school their attainment is broadly average. The proportion with learning difficulties and disabilities has risen significantly in the last two years and is now well above that in similar schools.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Norton St Nicholas as a Church of England school are satisfactory

Pupils are friendly and welcoming. They work well together and value each others' opinions. Collective worship and religious education play a key role in the positive attitudes pupils form towards other groups in society. The school is placing greater emphasis on setting priorities for its development. The enthusiasm of the headteacher, staff and governors mean it has the capacity to rapidly achieve its objectives.

Established strengths

- Pupils' good behaviour and their positive attitudes to living in a diverse society
- The active role the parish clergy play in collective worship
- The headteacher's clear understanding of the school as a church school

Focus for development

- To gather a cross-section of views in setting priorities for development as a church school
- To develop pupils' use of language in describing religious and spiritual ideas.
- To introduce a manageable way of assessing pupils' progress in RE

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

Pupils feel happy and secure in school. They are confident to put forward different opinions and listen carefully to what others say in response. They feel their views are valued and so they take responsibility seriously. This is because the school asks their opinion in making major decisions such as the development of the playground and the appointment of new staff. The school feels that pupils do not express their ideas as clearly as they might because in some situations they lack the exact vocabulary they need. In a discussion about behaviour, for example, there is little said about the values that underpin the school's expectations. In spite of this, behaviour in the school is good. Pupils work well together and different ages mix easily. Parents feel this is the result of the daily act of worship for the whole school where children gain a strong sense of being part of one family. They say this transfers to the playground and encourages parents to become more involved in the school. The distinctively Christian features of the curriculum, such as religious education and collective worship, clearly shape the good progress pupils make in spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They have positive attitudes to living in a multi-faith society and are aware of what minority groups can offer to their own understanding. In a Year 6 RE lesson, pupils engage in a lively discussion about how what people eat can reflect their personal faith. Residential visits and community events leave a lasting impression on pupils. They describe their feelings when watching dolphins and standing silently for Remembrance day. The school has yet to take the importance of these moments into account when evaluating the spiritual development of pupils.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Pupils play an active part in worship. They appreciate the different atmosphere that being in church creates and describe their feelings about using both the modern and traditional church buildings in the parish. Parents and grandparents regularly support these occasions so pupils gain a strong sense of the larger community. Worship takes a variety of forms and often incorporates drama and computer presentations. This keeps pupils interested so they are attentive and understand the Christian teaching that underpins the stories and themes. The vicar and curate of the parish lead worship each week and make a significant contribution to the way it is planned and delivered overall. Their regular dialogue with the staff means there is ongoing evaluation of the quality of worship. Changes are made to improve the spiritual impact on children. For example, the clergy have devised new sets of words that are appropriate for use in school and which introduce pupils to simple styles of Anglican worship. At the moment, this aspect of planning and evaluating worship does not take account of what parents and pupils feel, so there is a gap in what the school knows about the impact of its work. There is complete agreement among pupils that they find prayer a valuable source of help no matter what their religious background might be. This is because it extends into the classroom where prayer boards are used to address their individual concerns.

The effectiveness of the religious education is satisfactory

Pupils feel RE has an important place in their learning. Older pupils explain it helps them make personal choices as they grow up and contributes to the racial harmony in the school. This is because teachers plan lessons that make links between faith and issues in contemporary society. Even the youngest pupils understand the purpose of RE. A typical comment in a Year 1 lesson on sacred texts was 'we do this so that when we meet people from other faiths, we know what they are talking about.' The organisation of RE varies across the school. This affects the quality of teaching and the way pupils are able to build on their previous knowledge. Where teaching is of a high standard, lessons make good use of paired and group work so that pupils stay actively engaged and clearly focused on what they need to learn. They are interested in what they do so they often ask further questions and start debates among themselves. The leadership of the subject is at an early stage but is clearly focused on raising standards. A rigorous programme of monitoring how well pupils make progress is being implemented. The headteacher has worked jointly with the new co-ordinator to scrutinise pupils' work and they have accurately identified specific areas to improve. For example, they recognise that although pupils talk confidently, they do not always use religious terminology to explain their ideas. The school knows that assessment is not fully in place and that this limits the information they have about standards across the school. The current evidence suggests these are satisfactory but some pupils may be capable of more than this. Posters and displays around the school reflect the importance of RE and the range of faiths that pupils study. Some provide only factual information but the most effective include pupils' own ideas. These show that they have been challenged with more reflective questions such as 'What does God look like?'

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

The clergy and foundation governors clearly contribute to the Christian ethos of the school. They bring their Christian faith to bear on the decisions they make and provide pastoral support where it is needed. All members of staff are valued for the different personal and professional skills they offer. This is reflected in the management structure where colleagues work in teams representing the cross-section of their roles in the school. There are good partnerships with the church and the local community in charity fundraising and activities such as the development of an allotment.

The headteacher has embarked on an effective evaluation of the school's progress as a church school. He has a clear and accurate view of its strengths and knows exactly where improvement is needed. The governors have always recognised the importance of RE and collective worship but the school's monitoring has not been sufficiently focused on standards or on the benefit to pupils. The current evaluation recognises the need to gather the views of different groups and use these to feed priorities into the school development plan.