



## Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

The Abbey Church of England Primary School  
Grove Road, St Albans AL1 1DQ



Diocese of St Albans

**LA:** Hertfordshire  
**SIAS Inspection:** 20<sup>th</sup> November 2008  
**Previous S23 Inspection:** February 2006  
**URN:** 117449  
**Headteacher:** Elizabeth Grundy  
**SIAS Inspector Name:** Lyn Field  
**SIAS Inspector No:** NS 151

### School Context

This is an average sized school adjacent to the grounds of St Albans Abbey. The school enjoys a good reputation locally and is oversubscribed. There are few pupils eligible for free school meals or who need help with learning although the numbers who speak English as a second language have increased.

### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of the Abbey School as a Church of England school are outstanding.

The school provides outstanding guidance for pupils in both their academic and their spiritual learning. Children experience belonging to a community rooted in Christian values and where worship is central to daily life. They grow into responsible and compassionate people with the confidence and inner strength to approach life in contemporary society.

### Established strengths

- The ability of pupils to talk about spiritual issues
- The leadership of the headteacher in partnership with the Abbey church
- The high standard of teaching in religious education
- The level of trust between children and adults in the school

**There are no significant areas for development.**

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

The Christian ethos helps to define what and how pupils are taught in all classes. Teachers are skilled in planning the balance between academic and spiritual learning. By the time pupils reach Years 5 and 6, they instinctively bring a moral and spiritual perspective to any debate. They are particularly articulate in explaining how the core values of the school are distinctively Christian. In a discussion about the huge achievements and mistakes made by mankind, pupils refer to the need for aid organisations and how faith is what motivates groups such as Christian Aid. Relationships in the school are excellent. Pupils follow the lead of adults in the school and treat each other with kindness and honesty. They trust their teachers implicitly and are confident to share with them feelings that are deeply personal. Pupils know the school takes their views seriously because it finds appropriate ways for them to express their ideas. The youngest children have the chance to draw what they understand about the school's Christian ethos whilst older pupils apply to be part of a group taking on leadership roles in worship. The opportunity to worship in the cathedral every week is something that is treasured by pupils. They regard the access they have to the building and its staff as a privilege that 'changes how they are inside'. Parents describe this as something to be cherished because of the spiritual and moral values it promotes in their children.

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

The Anglican tradition of the school is used effectively to develop pupils' spiritual awareness and their knowledge of Christianity. This is because acts of worship are skilfully led and regularly involve pupils in simple rituals and responses that make the meaning clear. An outstanding example is where the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand was used as a thread linking all the elements of worship. Five bread rolls were shared with the whole school leaving each child with a small piece to use as a focus for their own reflection and prayer. Worship clearly embraces those who have a different experience of faith and all pupils feel included and valued by the services of the Eucharist. This is because the Abbey is committed to the principle that all pupils receive communion or a blessing. Pupils understand what makes up the familiar pattern of worship and know how to respond at each stage. This confidence explains their enthusiasm to take more responsibility for leading worship. The worshipping life of the school is vibrant because there is an ongoing dialogue between staff and clergy that constantly refines what pupils experience. Hence there is currently discussion of pupil leadership and improving the hall as a space for worship. A number of parents regularly attend the weekly services in the cathedral as well as the worship for special occasions. They value this time alongside the children for the start it gives to their day.

**The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding.**

Pupils learn skills in RE lessons that enable them to express compassionate and informed ideas about living in today's society. This is central to the aims of the school. Improvements to what is taught and how it is assessed go well beyond those suggested in the previous inspection even though standards were already high. The successful introduction of an RE day involving the whole school in workshops with visitors of other faiths has broadened pupils' perception of faith in everyday life. A typical comment was 'we learned that people have different ways of knowing God'. Teaching across the school is outstanding. The pace of lessons keeps pupils fully engaged and teachers make excellent use of techniques such as 'De Bono's hats' to extend the way pupils use thinking skills. Pupils are frequently set tasks that make use of their creativity so they learn to understand symbolism and imagery as a way of expressing religious ideas. Year 6 pupils, for example, were able to offer a range of plausible interpretations for a painting by Fernando Aritzi. The quality of spiritual development and the pupils' ability to talk about it is exceptionally good. This is because every lesson is rich with activities that lead pupils to grapple with intangible ideas. Year 2 pupils, for example, offered suggestions for the message they would like the angels to bring to the world today. The strength of teaching in RE means the school has used the new diocesan materials on Christianity effectively. The co-ordinator monitors progress in all classes and has already identified the extra challenge they offer to more able pupils. Her records show that the standards achieved in RE are well above average. Some pupils do even better than in other subjects because assessment recognises their grasp of spiritual and moral issues.

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

The headteacher has a clear understanding of Christian leadership and her passion for this communicates itself to the whole community. This vision is shared by the sub-dean of the Abbey who, as vice chair of governors, has played a significant role in establishing the school's place in the life of the cathedral. There is no complacency in the leadership team and this explains why the partnership has continued to have an outstanding impact on pupils from its strong position at the time of the last inspection. For families this is tangible in the school's weekly slot in the Abbey diary and joint fundraising for a mini-bus. At a management level there are structures in place to sustain the ethos and support its clear Christian leadership in the future. This is because great care is taken in the selection of governors and the Abbey maintains a monitoring role by including discussion of school worship and admissions in its own meetings. Individual governors take time to liaise with school staff and familiarise themselves with changes to the curriculum. They therefore bring informed views to decision making. The school makes use of developments at diocesan level to improve its own practice. The subject leader for RE, for example, has been part of the working group to produce exemplar material for the teaching of Christianity.