

Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Nicholas Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
Six Hills Way
Stevenage SG2 0PZ

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection: 7th March 2012
Previous S48 Inspection: 18th March 2009
URN: 117456
Headteacher: Mrs Jackie Roberts
SIAS Inspector Name: Mrs Mel Adams
SIAS Inspector No: 58

School Context

The school is a smaller than average one form entry primary school and serves the seven parishes of Stevenage. Children are from a range of different backgrounds with those from minority ethnic backgrounds above average. Children eligible for free school meals are below average as are those with special educational needs. An increasing number of children are admitted under church criteria.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Nicholas as a Church of England school are good.

St Nicholas is a good Church of England school because the Governing Body has shown a clear determination to maintain the distinctiveness and effectiveness through strategic leadership appointments since the previous inspection. This has ensured continuity in maintaining the church school ethos which enriches the day to day experiences of the children and all who work in the school.

Established strengths

- The determined vision of the Governing Body including the Vicar and Head teacher to maintain and develop the school as a church school.
- The impact of Christian values on relationships throughout the school community

Focus for development

- To ensure that systematic self evaluation of the school as a church school involves all stakeholders in order to inform ongoing development
- To raise standards in RE by ensuring children have opportunities to make consistent progress throughout the school through a variety of learning experiences which enable them to not only learn about but also learn from religion.
- To ensure that recording of learning in RE is designed to enable children to achieve at age appropriate levels in RE, particularly in writing.

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

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of the school are good. Parents, governors, staff and children speak of how the Christian values which are becoming understood and embedded have a clear impact on the day to day experiences not only of the children but across the school community. The availability of the Rector for pastoral support is greatly valued as is support offered by staff to families. Parents spoken to during the inspection described how they are aware not only of how children can care for each other and are able to relate values to their every day lives, but how they also continue to practise them when they leave the school. Behaviour of children observed in lessons during the inspection was good and this is attributed to the spiritual and moral understanding the children learn in collective worship and throughout the school day. Some children are able to describe how the values help them in relationships, such as the older children looking after the younger children. Through an ongoing programme of charity fund raising in which children have the opportunity to learn about the needs of others beyond their school, they are further able to develop their values and service. School leaders and governors are motivated in their decision making by Christian values and seek to apply these in dealing with conflict and complaints. The school environment celebrates its identity as a church school, with a crucifix in both the entrance and in the hall where worship takes place along with a display by all the children of their values. Displays around the school celebrate children's learning and include RE displays such as Buddhism posters and a display showing children's interpretation of the beatitudes both of which indicate developing religious understanding.

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

Children participate well in all aspects of collective worship, listening attentively, singing well and joining in with prayer through well understood responses to adult prayers and their own written prayers. They are able to articulate the importance of collective worship as central to the life of their school as a church school, and as one child said, 'we learn new ways to live our lives'. The programme of monthly values provides the themes for worship. Children have a clear understanding of how stories with a meaning, often from the bible, help them, as expressed by more than one child, 'to be better people'. They are able to describe how beyond daily worship they apply their values in their relationships and problem solving. Their values can also inspire learning and one child talked of how courage had helped him to work hard with learning he had found challenging. Prayer is appreciated and opportunities for worship and reflection are enjoyed by some children during the day as they access prayer areas in classrooms. One child described how, 'I just find a quiet place at playtime sometimes to pray'. There is a good understanding of Anglican tradition and practice through half termly communion services and an understanding of the church calendar and festivals which steer the planning for aspects of worship. This can be linked to learning in RE which further enhances the children's understanding. During the inspection, children were able to effectively evaluate the worship they had just seen presented by Year 1. They understood that it was cross curricular, linking RE to maths, music, drama and literacy, and also expressed how it gave them the opportunity to reflect on the character and person of Jesus through his miracles. Some informal evaluation is in place, but this is not yet organised systematically to enable feedback from stakeholders.

The effectiveness of the religious education is satisfactory.

Standards in RE are satisfactory overall. Where children achieve well and develop and apply their understanding well, it is as a result of good teacher subject knowledge and well structured learning experiences. This was evident in a class where children had demonstrated a depth of understanding about Buddhism through writing a letter and they were observed writing a diary entry enabling them to reflect on the character of Judas and his relationship with Jesus. Younger children are also given age appropriate opportunity to ask questions or make 'wow' comments which extend both RE and literacy achievement. However, school assessments and children's work indicate inconsistent achievement across the school as both attainment targets are not always adequately covered. This limits the opportunities for children to develop their understanding in learning from religion. This is often demonstrated in their recorded learning where tasks set can limit opportunity to present their understanding of religious concepts. Tasks can be insufficiently challenging to enable children to write or in some cases draw at the level of which they are capable. Children say they enjoy learning about Christianity and different faiths and cultures. One child was able to relate the importance of studying RE to values, explaining that it is important to understand how people respect their own faith to enable them to respect those who practice different faiths. Family members have contributed to learning by sharing their own faith and culture in school. The Head teacher and recently appointed RE leader are involved in monitoring standards throughout the school and are aware of the need of further development.

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

Leadership of the school as a church school is good because senior leaders and governors are able to describe how their decisions are informed by their shared Christian values, and this is evident in many aspects of the school. Parents, some of different faiths, are able to speak with confidence about how the school's values have an impact on the day to day lives of their children in school. They attribute good behaviour to the way children and adults in school apply the values to their relationships. School leaders evaluate aspects of the school as a church school informally but this does not systematically extend to governors and other stakeholders. Staffing changes since the previous inspection, including the appointment of senior staff have been guided by the vicar and governing body who have a clear vision for the ongoing development of the school as a church school. The Head teacher, Deputy Head teacher and RE leader are working together to ensure that all aspects of the school as a church school, including the standards in RE, are a priority for development. This is evident in the impact of the growing understanding of the children of the importance of Christian values in their day to day lives in school. In serving a number of parishes, the school has effective partnerships with a number of different churches and clergy and this adds further to the children's understanding of Christianity. The school have benefited from their partnership with the Diocese through training opportunities. The school has yet to establish links with the local community and world wide church.