



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report



St Ippolyts Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
Ashbrook Lane, St Ippolyts, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG4 7PB

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection: Friday 11 September 2009
Previous S23 Inspection: 14 and 16 March 2006
URN: 117440
Headteacher: Rachel Peddie
SIAS Inspector Name: Bob Hopcraft
SIAS Inspector No: 484

School Context

St Ippolyts is a smaller than average primary school, set in pleasant rural surroundings in the heart of the village, close to the local Church. It has recently undergone a change in headteacher, following the retirement of the long-serving head, which has been managed seamlessly by the governing body. Attainment on entry is mixed, with pupils coming from a wide range of backgrounds. A large majority of pupils come from the immediate area, although some travel from further afield. Most pupils are of *White British* heritage, with about 15% being from ethnic minority backgrounds. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is broadly average.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Ippolyts CofE VA Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding.

This is because the strong Christian values, which underpin the school's daily life, are clearly understood by all and are modelled consistently. In the words of the headteacher: "*All staff walk the talk*". This provides pupils with an outstanding environment in which to live and grow. All stakeholders are clear that St Ippolyts is a Church school and the importance of this in the everyday life of the school.

Established strengths

- The vision of the headteacher, staff and governors for the development of the school as a Church school and the continuity provided during the recent change in leadership;
- The commitment to Christian values which are promoted and modelled by all;
- The exemplary attitudes and behaviour of all pupils;
- The commitment and drive to improve, which have resulted in much improved provision for collective worship and religious education since the last SIAS inspection.

Focus for development

- Develop ways to evaluate the impact and quality of collective worship formally and systematically;
- Build on the existing good practice in assessment in religious education, to ensure that all staff are confident in levelling pupils' work.

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

This is because the strong Christian values which underpin the school's work are known and understood by all who work and learn there. As a result, relationships are outstanding at all levels and both staff and pupils treat each other with mutual respect, supporting one another at every turn: as one pupil put it "*Teachers always respect us*". This, in turn, helps to provide a learning environment in which every child really does matter, ensuring that all members of the school community have a chance to shine and to develop in the best way they can. Values are modelled consistently by staff, resulting in outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development for pupils. There are numerous opportunities for pupils to discuss and to reflect during the school day, enabling many of them to develop a spiritual awareness well beyond their years. Pupils' involvement in developing the school's Code of Conduct, the School Council and the Buddying Scheme are powerful tools in ensuring that they have the opportunity to develop a strong sense of citizenship for the future. The school environment is bright and welcoming and is used very effectively to support learning. Signs and symbols of the Christian religion are visible throughout the school and no one can be in any doubt that the St Ippolyts is a church school and that this aspect of its character is important to everyone.

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

Collective worship has developed significantly since the last SIAS inspection and daily acts of worship now provide pupils with an outstanding experience on a regular basis. Pupils respond very positively to worship: they say that it is an important part of the day and that they enjoy the many opportunities to take part and to reflect quietly on what they have heard and learned. The regular use of the cross, the candle and projected images as a focus for worship ensures that it is marked as a special time and in the act of worship observed during the inspection there was a tangibly spiritual atmosphere. The range of resources used has improved since the last inspection and excellent use has been made of training courses and opportunities for professional development by staff, who all participate in and lead worship. Worship is well planned and detailed records are kept. While the impact and effectiveness of worship is evaluated informally, the school does not at present undertake this in any formal or systematic way. The vicar contributes regularly to worship and a number of services are held in the Church, including an annual leavers' service, which is entirely planned and delivered by the pupils, ensuring that pupils now have more opportunity to feature in the life of the Church. Good use is also made of visitors to widen pupils' experience of worship and to help develop an understanding of other faiths and cultures. There are many opportunities for pupils to engage in prayer and quiet contemplation and these opportunities are extended beyond worship, through such means as *prayer boards*, which are in all classes. Pupils' singing of a range of hymns and religious songs is outstanding and the singing of the Lord's Prayer on the day of the inspection provided a genuinely moving experience.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding.

This is because improvements in RE have been a focus for school development since the last inspection. School leaders and staff have been rigorous in ensuring that all aspects of the subject have been reviewed and that excellent opportunities for staff training and development, notably through the diocese, have been taken. Attainment and progress of pupils is well above average and pupils develop an excellent understanding of Christianity and a good knowledge of key aspects of other faiths and belief systems as they progress through the school. This is the result of outstanding teaching, reflected in well-planned lessons which are challenging and exciting. Close links are drawn between RE and other subject areas, enabling pupils to develop a breadth of understanding on a range of issues. One example of this was seen during the inspection when a year 5/6 class were asked to view images of poverty and to reflect their own responses and feelings. Through such opportunities, RE contributes significantly to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Assessment in RE has developed well since the last inspection and a range of tools are used, including a portfolio of work and pupil tracking sheets, to ensure that pupils are challenged to make the best possible progress. The school has identified this as an area of ongoing development, particularly in the effective levelling of pupils' work. RE is very well led by an enthusiastic and knowledgeable subject leader.

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

This is because staff, school leaders and governors share a common goal in promoting and modelling the Christian values which underpin the school's day to day life. This results in a strong team ethos and family feeling, which is shared by all. There is a strong sense of continuity, but also a desire to develop and improve for the benefit of all. Parents, too, are aware of this; as one parent put it: *"St Ippolyts is a school that is not a follower, but a leader in educating children to a high level, with a conscience and knowledge of all faiths"*. Of particular note has been the smooth transition in headship, which has been handled and planned outstandingly well by the governing body, ensuring that the change has been as seamless as possible. As a result, the new headteacher continues to provide outstanding direction to the school, well supported by staff and governors. Governors provide excellent support and challenge to the school and have been closely involved, along with staff, in developing the school's excellent and accurate self-evaluation documents: they have a clear strategic view for the future development of the school as a Church school. The vicar plays a key part in the life of the school. She is well known to all pupils and provides effective pastoral support within the school. There are strong links with the local community and through arrange of special days, for example Africa Week, pupils are encouraged to think about life beyond their immediate experience. They have many opportunities to engage in charitable giving and to consider those less fortunate than themselves.