



## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

### **Toddington St George's Church of England Academy**

Manor Road  
Toddington  
Dunstable  
LU5 6AJ

#### **Diocese: St Albans**

Local Authority: Central Bedfordshire  
Dates of inspection: 20<sup>th</sup> June 2013  
Date of last inspection: not applicable as a new Academy  
School's unique reference number: 139372  
Headteacher: Jane Spencer  
Inspector's name and number: Lyn Field 151

#### **School context**

St George's is a lower school for pupils aged 3-9 in a semi-rural area of Bedfordshire. It converted to Academy status on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2013 with the staff and governing body remaining the same. There is a Hearing Impaired Provision and the school co-manages the contract for this with the Harlington Area School Trust of which it is an associate member. The school also caters for a higher proportion than usual of children with complex special needs including Dyspraxia and Downs Syndrome. The Chair of Governors is a National Lead Governor.

#### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St George's as a Church of England Academy are outstanding.**

Strong leadership and a series of new initiatives in RE and worship have revitalised the spiritual life of this successful school. All members of staff provide exceptional pastoral care and a curriculum that utilises the school's Christian foundation to meet the needs of all children in their care. Pupils are enriched by this experience and are constantly inspired to learn and to show compassion and respect for others as children of God.

#### **Established strengths**

- The strong spiritual leadership of the headteacher
- The part played by collective worship in creating an inclusive Christian community
- The impact of the partnership with St Albans Diocese, in particular the training opportunities for senior leaders
- Effective strategic planning as a church school

#### **Focus for development**

- To review school policies to ensure they reflect the quality of the school's distinctive Christian character
- To refine the current systems for evaluating Christian values to gain a detailed picture of their impact over time

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

The school fully embraces its pupils with hearing impairments and special needs. This inclusivity is based on a 'profound commitment to every child as a child of God who is to be valued for who they are'. It informs all the decisions that are made about children's wellbeing whether these are about the appointment of specialist staff or changes to the spiritual curriculum. Every possible effort is made to help pupils access the rich diet of activities on offer and as a result of exceptional pastoral care, attendance is high. The achievement of all pupils has been consistently well above national averages and, for some groups, continues to rise. Although the starting points for those with special needs is lower, the majority of these pupils make rapid and often outstanding progress.

When children join the Nursery they are taught a Christian understanding of values. By the time they reach Y4, they are confidently drawing on Bible stories to explain the part that values, such as justice and perseverance, play in their learning and the way they behave. In spite of this, the school feels the time is right to review Christian values to check that they are deeply embedded in all areas of school life. Relationships are excellent because the staff consistently model Christian values. This benefits pupils of all abilities who follow their example and gain confidence in serving others through simple actions or supporting charities. It is quite usual and, often moving, to see pupils take the initiative to draw children with very special needs into their play. Spaces for reflection in classrooms are well used because pupils are helped to gain a sense of their own spiritual lives. The spiritual, moral and social development of pupils are therefore outstanding, confirming the school's own evaluation. However, its assessment of cultural development is unduly cautious and does not fully recognise the major contribution that RE makes to pupils' appreciation of religious diversity in society. 'Faith tours' of places of worship for different religions have captured the interest of older pupils and many parents feel their own knowledge now lags behind that of their children. However, 'home tasks' have gone a long way to addressing this as parents and pupils have jointly researched and produced models of mosques and gurdwaras.

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

Distinctively Christian worship is at the heart of school life because it models exactly what the school stands for as an inclusive community. Anglican prayers and responses are always signed as well as being spoken or sung. This is for the benefit of hearing impaired pupils but has become a means of communication between all pupils because so many have volunteered to learn sign language. The staff are all actively involved so the messages of worship, particularly Christian values, are followed up through the school day. This inspires pupils to look after each other and independently make use of spiritual areas in classrooms. A Year 1 pupil, for example, created a cardboard hand and invited other children to write their names on it to show that God holds them in his hand. They have grown to understand the difference between public and private prayer because the school wisely offers opportunities for both. 'Hooked on Worship', an initiative for pupils to plan and lead worship in mixed age groups, is proving extremely popular and is never short of volunteers. It has enabled pupils to show how well they appreciate the different components of worship and their relevance to school life. Worship in classrooms maintains the same high standards as in the church or in the school hall. This is where pupils develop skills in quiet reflection such as in the Reception class where the sense of reverence was palpable. Teaching about Christian beliefs is a regular part of worship. Pupils develop an excellent knowledge of Bible stories, not just in recounting the events but also in grasping what these stories say about the nature of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Worship builds on what happens in lessons where pupils learn the basics of philosophical thinking. The time they are given in worship to reflect and respond to what they have heard, deepens their understanding of what Christian values mean in their daily lives. Christian festivals are celebrated in imaginative forms of worship with many visual prompts to aid pupils' understanding. These are sometimes in the church or the school grounds and leave a lasting impression on adults and children.

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

The school's progress as a church school has accelerated over the last two years. Everyone involved with the school understands how Biblical teaching shapes the approach to teaching and pastoral care. This is because the headteacher gives excellent spiritual leadership. Her determination to protect and reach out to those who find learning difficult is rooted in the teaching of Jesus. This vision is shared by her staff and implemented by leaders at all levels. The appointment of a deputy headteacher with specific responsibility for worship, RE and spirituality has secured the Christian leadership of the school for the future. In the first two years of her appointment, she has made maximum use of Diocesan training, especially a research project into outstanding church schools. Innovative ideas, such as RE focus days on Prayer and The Cross and a half-termly newsletter for parents reporting on the spiritual life of the school, have been quickly implemented and are now firmly established. Foundation governors have first-hand evidence of these improvements and the rector undertakes monitoring activities alongside the deputy headteacher. Feedback gathered from all groups in the school community is regular and informative. This ensures that the school's self-evaluation is accurate. It shows insight into exactly where the next steps are needed and informs the governors' priorities in development planning. In a few cases, practice has moved faster than written policies. Some documents, for example, the Behaviour Policy, do not reflect the full impact of the school's distinctive Christian character on pupils. The change to academy status has been extremely well managed and has benefited from expert Diocesan advice and guidance. This has enabled governors to steer a firm course through a rapidly changing education landscape locally. Throughout, they have shown an unwavering determination to retain the distinctive Christian character of the school and this is valued by both the local church and the village community.

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