



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report



**St Helen's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead AL4 8AN**

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection: 24 January 2007
Previous S23 Inspection: 30 June - 3 July 2003
URN: 117462
Headteacher: Mr Andrew Emeny
SIAS Inspector Name: Mrs Mel Adams
SIAS Inspector No:

School Context

St Helen's Church of England school which is an average size primary school serves a large village community. Forty pupils start school each year, therefore half the classes are of mixed age. Most pupils are from white British backgrounds. Below average numbers of pupils have learning difficulties or disabilities and few are entitled to free school meals. Most pupils start school with better skills than those expected nationally for their age. There have been recent changes of leadership, staff and job shares.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Helen's Primary school as a Church of England school are outstanding.

The Christian values are evident in all aspects of the life of the school community. There is clear cohesion between the daily assembly, Religious Education, and the way staff and children work together, driven by the clear belief in the importance of each individual to God.

Established strengths

- The Christian leadership of the Head teacher
- The Christian ethos of the school which creates an environment for learning in which children grow and flourish
- Collective worship which is the backbone of the work of the school, and which impacts on the lives of all those taking part.

Focus for development

- To establish Church school self evaluation to provide a clear view of Church school priorities.
- To consistently provide greater challenge in Religious Education to ensure that all children have greater opportunities to learn from religion.

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

Children speak very positively about the school, recognising that the values they learn in Collective Worship and Religious Education affect how they behave and conduct themselves. They enjoy school and learning and say that they are treated fairly and with respect, and staff show great patience in helping them to make the right moral choices. The promotion of self-esteem is paramount, and children speak of how they are supported whether in resolving difficulties, taking decisions or in their learning. Children speak eloquently about how learning related to other faiths and cultures is giving them understanding and respect, and that everyone is special, which are important values for them in the present and a good preparation for them for their lives as citizens in the future. Social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is therefore excellent and clearly evident. Teamwork is an expressed aim of the school, motivated by the 'mosaic prayer'. It is encouraged through a display in the hall to which every child has contributed, showing their importance as each is a key member of the school community. This was skilfully linked in an assembly to the story of those who worked together to bring their sick friend to Jesus. Children describe how this assembly and others, leads them to talk about the issues raised and motivates them to adopt the values and actions for themselves. The culture of second chance, based in the Christian understanding of forgiveness, tolerance and respect, ensures that children have the opportunity to rectify mistakes and be given a fresh start. The school is well cared for and all members of the school community take great pride in maintaining a comfortable climate for learning. Through RE displays, posters and crosses in all areas of the building the presence of God is communicated. This was evident in an interactive display where children write down their ideas of what God is like.

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

Organised around a range of themes and linked to the church calendar, collective worship is led by all staff at different times. The rector and clergy team regularly lead assembly in school and in church at least twice a term. Communion services in which children either receive communion or a blessing are well prepared by the Rector's teaching. Assembly themes are linked to the children's own experiences and take into account circumstances at the time, for example giving children time to reflect on the awe and wonder and beauty of the snow which had fallen overnight. Worship is described by the Headteacher as the backbone of the school, giving all members of the school community the opportunity to reflect on matters which directly relate to their own lives. Children talk of 'being spoken to' and a staff member said that assemblies enhance the sense of belonging and working together. Prayer and silence are well used, and children respond to this, saying it helps them to think about the importance of what they have heard. Visitors to assemblies from a range of other Christian traditions enhance the worship further, and children describe how a visit from a local congregation featuring clowns not only entertained them but gave them a clearer understanding of God. Children clearly enjoy worship times and are eager to participate, either through readings and prayers, or through interaction and dialogue with leaders during the assembly. Regular Church Sunday services are held in school.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Children achieve well and this is reflected in their achievement in RE. Children enjoy learning in RE and recognise that what they learn is relevant to their own lives. They have a good understanding of the Christian faith, and through learning about other faiths are able to speak with real confidence about their own attitudes and moral stance on racism. All staff and children understand the importance of RE, and participation in lessons is very good. Teachers are very committed to good teaching and learning, and plan for variety of learning experiences. In Key Stage 1 through role play and the use of empathy in a lesson on

Moses, children were able to talk about how they have felt scared and angry and about who helped them. In Key Stage 2 by integrating art, excellent ICT and role play, children began to understand the importance of prayer in the Muslim faith. The classroom culture is usually such that children are able to take risks through making contributions and giving opinions. Occasionally, where children are more reluctant to participate, this puts limitations on the learning experiences. Where challenging questions and statements are used to provoke thinking the children are helped to process religious thinking, as in the Foundation stage where children gave a range of pertinent and relevant responses to a question about why the disciples didn't want children to meet Jesus. Where this is less well used, children are not so easily able to grapple with learning from religion. The newly appointed RE leader has had a considerable impact on developments, has introduced very effective planning for lessons, and has rightly identified the need to revise the scheme of work and assessment against the new Agreed Syllabus.

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

Leadership and management of the school as a Church school is outstanding because the commitment of the Head teacher, shared by the Governing body, to lead with Christian purpose, permeates the work of the school. The foundation governors, provide support and challenge, and share the vision for care for each other based in shared Christian values of respect, tolerance, understanding and forgiveness. The vision is fully supported by staff who work with enthusiasm to realise this in their day by day work with the children. It is also greatly appreciated by parents, one of whom said, 'The children all have a caring nature and understand the importance of looking after each other right across the year groups. They practise the Christian values they are taught'. Monitoring and evaluation is very effective in many aspects of the Church school dimension, but where this is less clear, priorities for Church school improvement, taking into account the views of all members of the community, are not so clearly identified. The staff team works well together, are highly valued, and are provided with professional development opportunities such as assessment in RE to support and enhance their work and enrich learning for the children. There are outstanding links with the local community and opportunities are taken to share the Christian vision of the school, by visiting local organisations, charity fund raising, and more recently through participating in an open air service.