



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

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

St Nicholas Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

St Nicholas Close, Elstree, Borehamwood WD6 3EW

Previous SIAMS grade: Good

**Current inspection grade: Good**

Local authority: Hertfordshire

Dates of inspection: 1 December 2015

Date of last inspection: 9 December 2010

School's unique reference number: 117431

Headteacher: Mrs Kate Johnston-Grant

Inspector's name and number: Lilian Weatherley 42

### School context

St Nicholas Church of England Voluntary Aided School is a smaller than average primary school with 197 pupils on roll. It sits in the parish of St Nicholas Elstree and is close to the parish church. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and those with English as an additional language is higher than the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs, statements, educational health care plans and those with SEN support is below average. The proportion of pupils supported by pupil premium is also below average. The school has a small nursery attached, which has 19 attending and is open each morning. The Ofsted report in February 2014 judged the school to be a good school.

### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Nicholas Church of England Primary School and Nursery is Good.

- The school has a distinctively Christian family atmosphere where pupils of all faiths feel valued. This has a significant impact on pupils' achievement and progress.
- There is a clear link between the Christian values programme and pupils' attitudes and behaviour.
- The initiatives of the 'calmer courtyard' and 'prayer shed' are having a significant impact on pupils' spiritual development and understanding of the importance of prayer and reflection in their lives
- The high profile given to religious education, prayer and worship is having a clear impact on pupils' knowledge and understanding of the school's distinctive character
- The governing body has an accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the school's distinctive Christian character

### Areas to improve

- Ensure that the RE curriculum is sufficiently challenging for the pupils to develop their understanding of key concepts.
- Develop the current practice of whole school worship into class, key stage and whole school worship to ensure all pupils are able to engage fully with the content on a regular basis.
- Develop the worship spaces in the classrooms to enhance pupils' spiritual development across the curriculum.
- Update the school's website to reflect fully the good and outstanding practice of the school as an aided church school.

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

St Nicholas is a multi-faith church school with a distinctive Christian character. Parents of all faiths speak highly about the school, its open door policy and family atmosphere. They praise the Christian values programme for the way it has improved standards, behaviour and attendance. 'The Christian values underpin the school and its curriculum and ensure that our pupils make good progress and achieve well'. All parents know the 'value of the month' and with their children regularly complete a weekly values page in the newsletter. Pupils are eager to talk about the school as a church school and articulate aspects of the school's distinctive character. They all know and follow the school's six core Christian values and make links to relevant Bible stories. 'I like all the values and the Bible stories linked to them'. They explain that because they all follow Christian values such as 'respect and faith' there are no incidents of bullying or racism. 'Here they accept any religion with a warming hand'. The award scheme initiative of values bands is proving to be a great success and pupils are eager to show these and explain why they were awarded the band. Each colour links to a core value. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development has a high profile. Opportunities are clearly outlined in teachers' planning and recent innovations by the staff and pupils, such as the class worry boxes, the 'calmer courtyard' and the 'prayer shed' are having a significant impact on their spiritual development and their understanding of prayer. Pastoral support is paramount and all staff see each child as being unique in the sight of God. Relationships are excellent and pupils feel safe and secure. They explain how they feel able to speak to a member of staff if they have a problem or to use the worry boxes. 'If you are worried about anything, each class has a worry box or we can speak to the teachers'. Behaviour is excellent and pupils reflect the school's Christian values by being polite, respectful and showing kindness to each other. Pupils enjoy learning and teachers make learning fun. The 'building learning power' initiative with the 'wonder owl' to encourage reflection and other characters linked to Christian values have given pupils added incentives to improve. 'I like that we have toys to represent our values and that there is a Bible story for each teddy'. Pupil voice is strong and pupils feel that they are a key part of the school. They understand the importance of charitable giving and support a variety of charities including the Borehamwood food bank and raising money for disabled children in Africa. Pupils explain how Bible stories teach them the importance of helping those in need. All pupils show respect for each other and their different beliefs. Religious education (RE) and collective worship make a significant contribution to the pupils' understanding of Christian values and the distinctive character of the school. Pupils are fully aware that Christianity is a world faith but also that the world is made up of many different belief systems. When interviewed, none of the pupils could think of anything, apart from 'more RE lessons', that they would want to change about the school. 'I wouldn't change anything because it's a friendly school to be at and fun too'. 'I wouldn't change anything about the school because it's just perfect'.

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

Worship has a high profile in the school and the recent introduction of the calmer courtyard and the prayer shed offer additional opportunities for prayer and reflection. The prayer shed is very popular with pupils from all faith backgrounds. 'I like the prayer shed because they let you pray to your own God'. 'I like the prayer shed because it lets you pray in your own religious way'. All pupils use the shed but a regular prayer group meets once a week, supported by staff, to write prayers for daily worship. Whole school worship takes place each day and pupils encounter a range of worship leaders and experiences. The themes link to the monthly Christian values and related Bible stories. Pupils enjoy this worship. They sing well and have a deep understanding of key Bible stories and the importance of prayer. A visual focus with Christian artefacts creates an atmosphere for pupils' spiritual development and reflection but during the worship observed the quantity of artefacts on the table detracted from the key theme of Advent. Worship is carefully planned, challenging and inclusive of all faiths. However, whole school worship does not always allow for all pupils, especially the younger ones, to encounter worship at their level. The school is aware of this and together with the new vicar will be exploring different options. Each class has a worship space and time is allocated during lessons for moments of reflection. These spaces are under-used to support pupils' spiritual development. The pupil worship

group is highly active. They plan all the major festival services in church, suggest ideas for prayer and reflection and have opportunities to evaluate the worship. They were eager to explain the importance of prayer, liturgical colours and the various displays around the school, such as the prayer wall for charity on the value of 'hope'. This group is changed every few months to allow more pupils to take on this important leadership role. Pupils know key prayers; the Lord's Prayer, the prayer for St Nicholas and key Christian responses. Major Christian festivals such as Advent, St Nicholas and Christmas are celebrated in church and school. Pupils speak with enthusiasm about their knowledge and understanding of these. There are also opportunities for Eucharistic worship. Those over seven are able to attend confirmation classes and several pupils explained how they enjoy the monthly 'messy mass' held in the church. Pupils' understanding of the Trinity is less secure but planning is in place with the new vicar to support and develop this.

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is good.**

Standards of attainment and progress in RE are good. Pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of the topics and faiths studied and teaching is good or better. In the lessons observed, it was clear that pupils learn through a range of teaching techniques and artefacts, and take the lead in planning their learning. They have positive attitudes to the subject and see the relevance of the subject in their own lives. 'I like RE because I have found out about other people's religions'. The headteacher is the subject leader and ensures that RE planning is detailed, regularly monitored and evaluated in relation to the Hertfordshire Agreed Syllabus for RE. However, with bright and articulate pupils, many who already have faith backgrounds, this syllabus does not always offer sufficient challenge and allow pupils to explore the deeper concepts of Christianity and other faiths. The school focus has been on speaking and listening. This has greatly developed pupils' confidence and enabled them to plan their own learning and ask meaningful questions. Written work is, however, less secure and does not give a true reflection of pupils' ability. Assessment procedures are in place and have led to pupil progress but these alongside the curriculum are being re-evaluated with the national demise of levels. A range of visitors from different faith communities help engage pupils with RE and pupils speak with enthusiasm about these visits and what they have learnt. 'I like RE because we get visits from different people like Reverend Lucy and Rabbi Pete'. Pupils also benefit from a planned programme of visits to the Parish Church of St Nicholas, the local Synagogue, Hindu temple and to the Cathedral and Abbey Church of St Alban. The new vicar, who is also the RE governor, has become a regular visitor. She has visited each RE class, and is already having an impact on pupils' understanding of aspects of the Christian tradition.

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

The school has made significant progress since the last inspection and all areas for development in the last inspection have been addressed. The headteacher and members of the governing body work closely and have a clear vision and a shared understanding of St Nicholas as a church school. They meticulously monitor the school's performance and see the school as central to the church's role in serving the needs of the community. Clear expectations are set and all members of the school community can articulate the way in which the school's Christian values shape the day-to-day actions. The school has detailed self-evaluation and the strategic development of the school's Christian character is outlined in the whole school action plan. Governors praise the leadership of the headteacher and the direction in which the school is moving. They see the school's Christian character and the work on Christian values as having a significant impact on pupils' standards and progress and regularly join staff for learning walks. A detailed presentation given by members of the governing body showed how well they know the school and the pupils. The school's distinctive character is a standing item on the agenda of each governing body meeting and through the leadership of the headteacher worship and RE are given high priority. Training on the school's Christian character in a multi-faith community has a high priority and future leadership is built into this training. As written into the governing body presentation, 'The church and the school set the tone for the behaviour of all stakeholders'. This enhances the importance of faith in the lives of all connected with the school. Governors are aware, however, that they need to take control of the school's website to ensure it is updated on a regular basis and fully reflects the aided status of the school. Regular questionnaires to parents and stakeholders reveal over 98% satisfaction

with the school. Links with the parish church are close and the new vicar is working with the headteacher to plan school/parish links for 2016. Coffee mornings to meet the parents already take place in the church and governors are working together to develop more ways in which church and school can work together. There are three serving religious leaders on the governing body and links with the Diocese are well established. Governors benefit from regular diocesan training to support self-evaluation and the school's distinctive Christian character. The school is proud of the fact that the worship group was chosen to read prayers at the Bishop's Harvest Appeal in St Albans. Community and LA links are also strong and there are close links with the local Jewish, Hindu and Muslim communities.

SIAMS report | December 2015 St Nicholas Church of England Primary School, Elstree