



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St John the Baptist Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Hillside Lane, Great Amwell, Ware, SG12 9SE

Previous SIAMS grade: Good

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority: Hertfordshire

Dates of inspection: 15 March 2016

Date of last inspection: 11 March 2011

School's unique reference number: 117432

Headteacher: Lydia Hunt

Inspector's name and number: Lindsay Fraser 107

School context

This is smaller than an average-sized primary school. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Few pupils are eligible for additional government funding known as pupil premium. The number of those with special educational needs and disabilities is below average. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2015 and there have been a number of staff changes in recent times.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St John the Baptist C of E VA Primary School as a Church of England school are good

- Based on a very strong Christian vision for the school the recently appointed headteacher has quickly established an effective programme of Christian values which has already impacted upon the behaviour and attitudes of pupils.
- Parents and carers are very well informed of the Christian ethos and values and are therefore able to support their children further in their understanding of values.
- The broad creative curriculum, often based on themes from religious education (RE) and links to worship enhance the quality of spiritual moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development.
- The high quality of relationships, attributed by the school community to the school's Christian character, ensures that morale in the school is high because each child and each adult is valued and cared for.

Areas to improve

- Build on pupil evaluation of collective worship by involving adults, especially governors, to further improve the quality and impact of collective worship.
- Ensure the governing body understands and evaluates the impact of Christian distinctiveness on teaching and learning and responds to the findings.
- Raise standards in RE by providing more opportunities for teachers to extend their subject knowledge.
- Include within collective worship a stronger focus on God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit so that pupils gain a clearer understanding of the Trinity.

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

On taking up her post in September 2015 the headteacher introduced a values programme which is thorough, rigorous and firmly rooted in Christian theology and Biblical stories. Staff and parents have welcomed this and can already identify positive impact upon pupils' well-being, their academic achievement and relationships. Each half term a new value is introduced which is developed through collective worship and Christian teaching, personal, social and health education (PSHE) and RE. Parents can further develop the values because they are well informed by the school. Home school value sheets detail Biblical stories to read such as the story of Zacchaeus for forgiveness, ideas to talk about and interesting facts, activities and quizzes. Parents know how the Christian character is developing because they are well informed in newsletters. For example they knew that the pupil collective worship team had performed a drama giving a modern view on a Biblical story of forgiveness. Parents report that their children are using the language of values at home and, in many cases, teaching other family members. As yet, only a limited number of values have been introduced. However, teachers also report that pupils are applying values such as perseverance or reflection to how they learn. This is already making a positive impact on pupils' progress which is already good for all pupils regardless of ability. Both staff and parents speak highly of the strong and supportive relationships at all levels within the school which they attribute to the distinctive Christian ethos which the headteacher has brought to the school. Parents report that where families and children have faced challenging circumstances they have been very well supported. They are pleased that the school is very inclusive of all aspects of diversity. Behaviour and attendance are good and improving throughout the school as a result of the constant reinforcement of Christian values. Parents praise the school for the way in which the school manages a very small minority of pupils who are challenged by the behavioural expectations of a school environment. As a result this does not impact on the learning of other pupils, who themselves are learning how to deal with the needs of others. Pupils are also very keen to support charitable organisations. The school is linked to a primary school in Gambia and pupils recently wrapped 200 presents to send to children in the school. They were deeply moved to learn that for many of the children this would be their first present. The Christian character of the school underpins the whole curriculum because RE, taught as a separate subject, is also the inspiration for many subjects including English, art, history and PSHE. As a result RE and the Christian values lead to a high standard of SMSC development. This means pupils show a high respect for other beliefs and cultures. For example, having learned about the character of Jesus in RE, Year 6 pupils then created art work based on the statements used to describe Himself. The symbolism used by many pupils was deeply thoughtful. School leaders have identified that further training, monitoring and evaluation regarding the Christian distinctiveness are required in order to further embed the knowledge and application of Christian values.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

There has been a vigorous approach during the last two terms to ensure that collective worship is engaging and meaningful for the whole school community. The well-established partnership and strong links with the local church and another church school have enabled the headteacher to plan a cohesive and meaningful programme for collective worship through the sharing of useful ideas. To improve the provision and therefore its impact a collective worship team of older pupils has been established to prepare a weekly act of worship under the leadership of the headteacher. A reflective and evaluative group, they have already acted upon feedback from younger children. They asked the group to read from the Bible rather than printed sheets to show where the story came from. Pupils can relate the school's Christian values to their own lives because their relevance is explored in worship through well-chosen Biblical material. Pupils understand the meaning of Christian worship through the regular structure of gathering, engaging and responding. They also become familiar with Anglican styles of worship as a result of the contributions to planning and leadership of worship by the church team. Pupils enjoy taking an active part in the celebration of major Christian festivals and important stepping stones in pupils' lives, such as starting and leaving the school. Parents, staff and pupils particularly appreciate and value these occasions which they describe as very meaningful. The centrality of prayer and reflection is seen in the confident and spontaneous prayer from older pupils, frequent contributions of prayers to the prayer box, involvement in prayer walks around the school and the use of reflection books. Pupils can describe how some stories from the Bible, such as the courage of Daniel and the generosity displayed in the 'Feeding of the 5000,' have inspired them to record their reflections. Staff describe how they feel well supported through the regular opportunities to meet for prayer or pastoral support with

one of the church team. A range of worship leaders, including the vicar and her team, enables the school community to enjoy a rich and broad experience of worship. As a result pupils have a knowledge of Anglican traditions and have a good understanding of how important Jesus is to Christians. However, their knowledge of the Christian idea of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is limited. The school has identified that the next step in the development of collective worship is to include members of the governing body in the pupil evaluation.

The effectiveness of religious education is good

The subject leader for RE has a very clear understanding of the quality of teaching and learning in RE throughout the school as a result of thorough monitoring and evaluation. Assessment records and lesson observation show that standards and progress are good. The subject leader, supported by all staff, is keen to improve on current attainment. Planning for RE is carefully designed to ensure continuity and progress throughout the school. RE has a high profile and is the current focus for improving teaching and learning. The standard of questioning skills is now high, having been identified as an area for development. The use of the 'big questions' at the beginning of lessons is encouraging pupils to think deeply, creatively and beyond their own experiences. Teachers are now applying the skills used in RE to other areas of the curriculum. Subject knowledge in RE has been rightly identified by the school as a barrier to raising standards and staff development is now in place. Marking in RE is improving and pupils are beginning to respond to teachers' probing questions, encouraging them to think more deeply. Christianity occupies the major part of the curriculum, but other faiths are studied in detail. Pupils enjoy RE because of the exciting way in which it is taught. They regard RE as important to the development of their own beliefs and many feel that it helps them in their own lives because of the example of Jesus and other people of faith. They also value the teaching of other faiths because they are very interested to know more so that they can understand what people believe and how it impacts upon their lives. Pupils of all faiths say that they can speak confidently about their own faith or if they have no faith. As part of a history topic a member of the Jewish faith has been invited on different occasions to speak of her own beliefs and her experience of the Holocaust. This has had a substantial impact upon pupils and adults alike. Visits to the local churches and Bhakivedanta Temple have deepened pupils' understanding of faith traditions and practice. Teachers make good use of the local church team and Baptist church enabling pupils to gain an insight into the role of the church in the community.

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

The headteacher, ably supported by her leadership team, is energetically striving to establish a school culture which is firmly rooted in Christian values. She has a very clear vision for future development based on an accurate evaluation of the current status of the school as a church school. The staff and pupils speak very highly of her impact already in providing a clear vision and caring environment in which everyone feels valued and confident to seek advice. The commitment of the governing body to succession planning both for the headteacher and for the changes in the leadership team has enabled a stable transfer of church school leadership. Visiting and working with outstanding church schools have enabled the headteacher to quickly put her vision into practice. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school, the work of the staff and the headteacher. There is a very strong partnership with the local church and the church team which enhances the whole church school experience for pupils. Governors monitor the development of the school's Christian ethos as an integral part of each governors' meeting where there is a focus on the development of the school as a church school. Linking the school's Christian distinctiveness with its effectiveness on teaching and learning is at an early stage. Governors are fully supportive of the headteacher's innovations to improve collective worship and value the part played by pupils in leading and evaluating collective worship. Foundation governors attend many acts of worship and services and recognize the need for more formal evaluation of collective worship. The focus on RE is a high priority and the subject leader is highly respected and well supported in the work she is doing to raise standards. The school is supported effectively by the diocese and the professional development of staff is a high priority. Training specifically linked to the development of RE and the school's distinctive Christian character is in place for staff. The arrangements for RE and collective worship meet statutory requirements.

SIAMS report March 2016 St John the Baptist C of E VA Primary School, Hillside Lane, Great Amwell, Ware, SG12 9SE