

**St John's Voluntary Controlled Primary School**

High Road  
Buckhurst Hill  
Essex  
1G9 5RX

**Diocese: Chelmsford**

Local authority: Essex

Dates of inspection: 6<sup>th</sup> December 2012  
Date of last inspection: 5<sup>th</sup> February 2008  
School's unique reference number: 115094  
Headteacher: Mr Peter Tidmarsh  
Inspector's name and number: Rosemary Privett 321

**School context**

St John's is a large primary school with 365 pupils on roll. It holds a highly respected place in its local community and is regularly oversubscribed. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. Recent extensions to the school buildings and grounds have greatly enhanced the learning environment for the pupils.

**The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St John's as a Church of England school are outstanding**

This is a distinctively Christian school. It remains outstanding because of the strong leadership that is never complacent and ensures that it continues to develop. Through very strong links with the parish it provides a very rich Christian environment for all its pupils. As a result, pupils develop into articulate, confident and compassionate individuals, equipped to play a leading role in society.

**Established strengths**

- The Christian values which permeate all aspects of school life and have a profound impact on the behaviour and attitudes of pupils.
- The very strong links between the school, Church and wider community which support pupils on their spiritual journey and allow the vision of the school to be shared by all.
- The strong and mutually supportive relationships at all levels.

**Focus for development**

- Develop opportunities for pupils to both plan and lead significant aspects of daily collective worship in school.

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

Upon entering St John's School there is an immediate sense of the school's Christian distinctiveness whether it be from the warm welcoming attitudes of staff and pupils or the rich displays and Christian symbols that adorn the school walls. The school buildings provide a tangible expression of the school's history and connect pupils with its heritage in a very explicit way. This strong visual environment also enables the school's core values to be shared and understood by all. An example of this is the way classes regularly produce posters focusing on one of the values covered in collective worship or religious education [RE] lessons. These posters demonstrate how well pupils make meaningful connections between the values and their biblical origins. Pupils say that the posters provide them with a constant visual reminder of what is important to their school. Parents say that the school's values are, 'its core' and see them as making a 'massive difference' to their children. Values education is also very well supported by the school's system of 'values cards.' These are awarded to pupils when they display one of the core values. They are prominently displayed on all classroom walls and taken home by pupils at the end of each term. This system has a profound impact on the attitudes and behaviour of pupils which are exemplary. Pupils are justly proud when they receive one. One child said, 'They don't just give them out willy-nilly you know!' Another said, 'People have to see you really showing the value! They aren't easy to get!' Parents say that they feel the cards help their children to develop a sense of care and empathy for others. Staff also make use of learning across the curriculum to enrich children's understanding of the values, and links are particularly strong in history and RE. The RE in the

school is well planned. Creative initiatives such as a recent RE week, enable pupils to learn about Christianity and other faiths through a variety of engaging and interactive teaching approaches. As a result of this thoughtful and creative planning, RE makes a very strong contribution to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils. Parents spoke positively about the close working relationship between the church and school valuing the opportunities that this close partnership provides for children and their families. The regular 'Energise' Christian club for pupils and regular prayer group for adults, run by the Associate Minister and church members, are tangible expressions of the church's mission to the community. The use of some rooms in the school for church services and fellowship groups, also enable pupils to meet regularly with members of the congregation. All these opportunities strongly support the schools distinctive character and enable pupils to feel part of a wider church community.

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

Worship is a rich and inspiring element for all members of the community and stands at the very centre of school life . Since the last inspection, the headteacher and Associate Minister have worked together to ensure that explicit Christian values now form a major part of the worship programme. A colourful wooden 'values' board , created by pupils, is displayed on the wall above the worship table in the hall. Pupils say it helps them to remember the value in worship each week. The worship table also serves as a focal point for the display of objects and symbols , like the Advent ring and a lighted candle, which reflect the Anglican tradition of their school. Pupils have a very good understanding of the meaning of these symbols. Local clergy as well as visiting Christian groups such as Christian Story Tellers and Epping Youth for Christ, enable pupils to experience a variety of styles of worship. Prayer and reflection are elements of worship that spill out into school life. Pupils are eager to describe the time set aside each day for classroom prayer. They appreciate the fact that teachers let them prepare and lead these prayers and see it as a time to talk to God and pray on behalf of others in the school community. One child said, 'It's like a telephone call to God.' They also enjoy contributing to their class prayer books. Good monitoring and evaluation of worship is helping staff and governors to continually improve provision. A good example of this is the recent survey involving pupils. This survey demonstrates that pupils' attitudes to worship are generally very positive. They value the opportunities they had to act out stories sing and read prayers .They would ,however, like to be more involved in the planning and leading of the daily acts of worship in school on a regular basis .

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

This is still an outstanding school which has continued to move forward since the last inspection. The inspiring leadership of the headteacher and his senior staff is key to the school's success. All leaders demonstrate a determination that the school will continue to grow and develop as a Church school. A strong example of the continued drive for improvement is the way in which the school's core values were introduced and are now embedded both in worship and across the curriculum. The strong leadership in the school has enabled an effective and mutually supportive partnership to be maintained between the school, the church and the local church community. This stands at the core of the school's effectiveness. Regular meetings and discussions between clergy, headteacher and school administrators ensure that lines of communication are clear, enabling information about their respective activities and events to be shared effectively. This excellent communication means that events such as school services in church and events such as holiday clubs are well attended. The governors give good support to the school and are committed to monitoring and evaluating its effectiveness. This is seen in the way they regularly monitor worship and in the way they engage with the annual governors 'monitoring day' .The work of all these partners, greatly enhance the school's Christian character and enables their vision to be shared and understood widely. A particularly strong example of this is the way in which the church community and the school have sought to capitalise on the close proximity of the school and church buildings. It is seen by all as 'one site.' The worshipping needs of the school have been a central consideration for the church in its recent plans for the refurbishment of the church building. All parties have worked closely to ensure that the refurbished building will provide a flexible space not only for the congregation, but for the school's daily acts of worship. The school has a very clear vision of its responsibility for aspects of succession planning. To this end it has recently submitted a joint bid to become a Teaching School with a local church secondary school .

