



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St John's Church Of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Clay Lane Grove
Colchester
Essex
CO4 0HH

Diocese: Chelmsford

Local authority: Essex
Dates of inspection: 6th June 2013
Date of last inspection: 22nd September 2008
School's unique reference number: 115065
Headteacher: Nicholas Hutchings
Inspector's name and number: Philip Knowles (795)

School context

St John's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School is a smaller than average sized primary school. It has 212 pupils on role, most of whom are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is well below average. The current Headteacher took up post in January 2011 and there have been a number of staff changes of late.

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

The Headteacher and other key people provide clear and effective leadership for this church school. The school's vision and values are clearly and proudly stated and promoted. It is through this approach that the values have become embedded and are seen to permeate strongly through the very positive relationships that exist throughout the school. The school has involved a range of stakeholders in agreeing them and it is these values that strongly underpin the work of the school in ensuring the needs of all of its learners are met.

Established strengths

- A clearly defined set of Christian values that are understood by all and are very effectively used to permeate the work of the school
- Collective worship which is effectively scheduled and regularly planned and very effectively led by the pupils themselves
- RE which is well led, taught creatively and given a high status within the school

Focus for development

- Develop the Monitoring activities involving the new Ethos Committee of key personnel to ensure a focus on impact and recommendations for future developments

- Learners understand the place of prayer within the context of collective worship, they are ready now to be encouraged to understand the importance of prayer in their own lives
- Develop the quiet spaces that already exist within the school to encourage quiet reflection and prayer

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

The school's ethos is built upon a clearly stated set of values which are drawn from 'Values for Life' as well as the school's own agreed set of values. These values include Trust, Respect, Humility, Compassion, Perseverance, Hope and Forgiveness. All stakeholders have a clear understanding of these values and they apply them so that over time they have become deeply embedded into the life of the school and are clearly evident through all discussions with stakeholders. This is a Church of England school that is proud to uphold and develop its Christian distinctiveness and this clearly underpins the school's work in ensuring that the academic and pastoral needs of all its learners are met.

Positive relationships, good behaviour and mutual respect have been taught, strongly encouraged and are evident throughout the school. One pupil said, "We used the 'Friendship Stop' a year ago but now we don't need to because we all have a friend." Parents say that they also feel well supported by the school. Data shows that the pupils achieve well when compared to schools nationally. The very recent OFSTED inspection of May 2013 judged the quality of teaching to be good and the children say they enjoy their lessons and feel challenged by them. Pupils celebrate each others' achievements and genuinely value each other. Fixed term exclusion rates are minimal and there have been no permanent exclusions for a significant period of time. Attendance rates are amongst the top 20% of all schools and have improved by almost 2% over the past two years. This clearly supports the views of all stakeholders that the children enjoy coming to school and they find their lessons exciting. The school encourages the children to see themselves as good citizens in a global context through its involvement in 'International Schools' and 'eTwinning,' where children have the opportunity to explore issues that are important to them, anonymously, with other children around the world via email in an innovative way. RE is well led and taught through a variety of approaches, which ensure that the children are inspired and engaged by it. Their experiences in RE are recorded in a variety of ways in RE 'Big Books.' For example, the children were photographed imagining how the disciples must have felt when they experienced the Holy Spirit by being outside and feeling the breeze on a windy day. The RE 'Big Books' are also well used and, as meaningful working documents, they become frequently used by the children in subsequent lessons to help reinforce their learning.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship is firmly rooted in Christian teaching and a worship team of children are regularly involved in planning and leading acts of collective worship that are truly exceptional. All pupils are engaged and actively involved, for example when they all discussed the 10 Commandments with their 'Talk Partners.' Pupils particularly enjoy worship when it is led by their peers because, as one child put it, "They say it in a way we can understand."

The children recognise and respond to elements of the Anglican tradition. 'Flippin Praise' is used effectively to plan collective worship that reflects the 'Gathering, Engaging, Responding and Sending' elements of the Anglican tradition and which the children respond to naturally as an expected part of collective worship. Symbols such as the cross and candles are used to great effect as an intrinsic part of the worship and the children understand the significance of these.

The Priest-in-Charge has recently been involved in leading worship which has sought to tackle the challenging concept of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in a way the children can

understand. When asked, pupils can express this concept and there is some innovative pupil work on The Trinity on display.

Collective worship is systematically planned and scheduled so that children and adults are always aware of the current value, which is then further developed in class. Teachers ensure that the values are taught and further embedded by “knitting them into lessons.” The key Christian festivals are all celebrated in St. John’s church and this involvement has recently been extended so that the Priest-in-Charge leads a half-termly whole-school act of collective worship in St. John’s church. This has served to support the children’s understanding of these festivals in the context of the Christian calendar.

All pupils participate and respond to prayer in the context of collective worship, which contributes to their spiritual development. As yet, they do not fully understand the value of prayer in their own lives. The school is considering ways that it might develop its ‘Prayer Wall’ to encourage this and it also has plans to develop its ‘Secret Garden’ quiet area into a place set aside for quiet reflection and prayer. A worship record is kept which the school intends to develop further as a tool to evaluate and plan for future improvements in collective worship.

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

The Headteacher and key leaders communicate their Christian vision clearly to all stakeholders and are implementing it with great energy, enthusiasm and vigour. This is approached through clear and systematic planning so that all stakeholders have a clear understanding of the rationale and timescales involved. The arrival of the new incumbent has further enhanced this. All classes have their own ‘Class Cross’ on display. These are particularly effective and meaningful because the children have been made responsible for creating them and they are a result of their own thought and work.

Parents and governors recognise the strengthening relationship between the school and St. John’s church and see it as positive in further establishing the school’s Christian ethos, which they also value highly.

There is a sense of pride in the school that is shared by all stakeholders. The environment is tidy yet exciting and inspiring. There are a significant number of displays throughout the hall and in the classrooms that focus on elements of Christianity, which indicate that the children regularly explore challenging aspects of faith and spirituality. This work is then displayed in a fun, colourful and original way that is relevant to the children.

Governors are both informed and involved. They understand the school’s performance and are able to attribute it to the school’s Christian values, for example, by citing how the increased emphasis on the Christian character of the school has directly impacted in a positive way upon pupil attendance. They make high level decisions always being mindful of the potential impact of these on the Christian character of the school. Recently, a complex staffing issue was resolved by governors in an attitude of sensitivity and prayer. They pray at the start of each meeting of the full governing body and end meetings by discussing how their decisions have impacted upon the children and upon the Christian Character of the school. Through discussion, they also show that they are mindful of the importance of planning for succession.

An Ethos Committee has recently been formed, which is concerned with developing St. John’s and is beginning to monitor the impact of its work as a church school.

The recommendations from the previous SIAS inspection have been addressed: A planned cycle of collective worship is now in place. There are also several examples of how the school has worked hard to address the issues of community cohesion, for example by being regularly involved in several charitable activities and achieving ‘International School’ status. There are close links with the Diocese, who have provided advice and training to the school. This has been particularly effective in enhancing the place of RE in the school and developing the role of the RE Co-ordinator, whose work is showing real impact.

SIAMS report June 2013 St. John’s CEVC Primary School, Colchester CO4 0HH