

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Francis Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Aitken Road

Taw Hill

Swindon

SN25 1UH

Diocese of Bristol

Wiltshire LEA

SIAS inspection: 15 November 2005

Previous S23 inspection: Unknown

URN: 134151

Headteacher: Mr Clive Westall

SIAS Inspector NS 181: Mrs Jo Curd

Context

St Francis, a one form entry primary school, is less than two years old. It caters for children from three to eleven years old. It is set in the new area of Taw Hill. The oldest houses here, most of which are privately owned, are less than ten years old.

Summary Judgement

This school is very distinctive and effective as a Church of England School.

Established strengths

Inclusive Christian values and attitudes pervade all aspects of this high quality school. Spirituality and worship positively and successfully underlie all that is done in the school. Pupils behave very well and have very good attitudes to learning.

Focus for development

Continue to develop Religious Education by fully implementing the new Locally Agreed Syllabus and new approaches to assessment.
Provide more opportunities, including visual images, for pupils to learn about and see aspects of our culturally diverse society.

How well does the school, through its distinctive Christian character, meet the needs of all learners?

The School meets the needs of all its learners very well. All the pupils are well cared for, enjoy school and know they are valued and special. All pupils make good progress in their learning and very good progress in their personal and social skills. Pupils with Special Educational Needs are supported well and those who have English as an additional language are included, gaining confidence and making friends. The school's one key rule of being courteous and considerate at all times successfully pervades throughout. Pupils are very well behaved and have very good attitudes to learning. The few pupils with slightly more challenging behaviour are supported well. Relationships throughout the school are positive, caring and warm. Older pupils proudly and eagerly take up positions of responsibility such as being a School Councillor, Playground Leader or Mini Teaching Assistant in the Nursery or Reception class. Pupils care about and are eager to help each other. The playground is a safe and happy place to be and pupils of different ages play well together. Pupils are successfully involved in the wider community through participating in the Christmas 'Shoe Box' appeal, donating harvest goods to a women's refuge and raising money to sponsor two children in the Philippines. Although Religious Education and Worship are clearly based on Christian principles the approach is open and values pupils of any faith and none. Planning for acts of collective worship include coverage of different religions such as Judaism at Yom Kippur and Islam at Eid. Hindu pupils spoke about Diwali at an assembly last year and to younger pupils this year. Although these examples help expand pupil's experiences and help prepare them for a culturally diverse society, they need to become more extensive, with an increased range of images around the school celebrating such differences.

What is the impact of Collective Worship on the school community?

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding. Spirituality and worship go beyond allotted sessions on the time table and pervade all aspects of this high quality new school. Careful consideration and deliberation have gone into formulating a clear school definition of spirituality and cohesive policy for collective worship. These successfully uphold Christianity, the Anglican Church and respect for people of all faiths and none. Parents report that children eagerly relay what they have learned in Religious Education and acts of worship. Parents are pleased with the way pupils are encouraged to develop their own beliefs, questions about life and respect for others. Acts of worship are very well planned, broad and balanced. They include explicitly Christian themes, stories, morality and a range of national and religious festivals. There has been a strong partnership between the local vicar and Head Teacher. Initially their weekly meetings provided strong spiritual input to the school. Unfortunately this vicar resigned due to ill health and is sadly missed by parents, governors and staff. The Head Teacher has used this situation for the good of the school however and now ten representatives of different churches in Swindon, including an interim local vicar; visit the school to lead acts of worship. The school's helpful guide for such volunteers ensures that they take an appropriate approach and include pupils of different faith traditions and none. Pupils are very involved in acts of worship and prayer in the school. They enjoy writing prayers and participating. All classes from Nursery to Year Six took part in a 'Spiritual Assembly' during the inspection. Older pupils presented their own interesting and creative reflections and responses to the school's theme of peace. Younger pupils were successfully encouraged and supported to do the same. This eager active involvement of all the pupils in such acts of worship is presenting its own challenges as the school grows. Their length and standards of presentation need to be balanced with the opportunity for all to share.

How effective is the Religious Education in the school?

Religious Education is a central and very effective part of the school and of all pupils' learning. Lessons, discussions with pupils, staff, governors and parents, display and key documents such as the School Improvement Plan demonstrate how important Religious Education is in the school. All pupils, including those who have Special Educational Needs, who find learning difficult and who have English as an additional language are making good progress. They are supported well by Teaching Assistants, some imaginative methods and use of resources such as video and interactive white boards. Standards are as high as in other subjects and in line with national expectations by the end of Year Six. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons such as one on the parables of Jesus in which Key Stage 1 pupils searched for ten silver coins around the classroom are imaginative and fun. In a Key Stage Two lesson pupils were clearly inspired by the courage, faith and running of Eric Liddell. Later in this lesson however pupils found the work more challenging because some of the concepts were abstract and did not build on pupil's own experiences and beliefs. The subject is successfully being established and developed in this new school by an experienced, committed, able subject manager. It is linked well with other subjects. Pupils and staff have made spectacular large scale woven pictures on the various 'I am' sayings of Jesus and wonderful metal sculptures of birds and animals on the theme of St Francis within special art projects. These are now displayed prominently and aptly in and on St Francis school's stunning new building. The scheme of work, which is currently incomplete, is being developed in relation to the new Locally Agreed Syllabus. This will ensure that Christianity retains its central position whilst giving due consideration to other religious and secular traditions. The subject manager has attended training and is eager to implement some new ideas on how assessment can become more creative, more dynamic and more relevant to pupil's learning.

How effective are the leadership and management of the school as a church school?

Leadership and Management are very good with some extremely strong features. The Head Teacher was appointed at a key time of planning and development of this new school and community. He is an able and experienced Head Teacher with a clear Christian vision and robust commitment to the spiritual and overall development of all pupils. He has worked strenuously, wisely and creatively with others to set up this vibrant learning community. The whole atmosphere of the school including buildings, fixtures and fittings, staff, and school lunches are of high quality. Respect, worship and spirituality pervade the whole school. Community spirit and team work are strong at St Francis and all the staff are ably led and managed by the Head and Deputy Head Teachers. Other parts of this school community such as breakfast and after school club and toddler group are integrated well. Christianity, and key features of the Anglican tradition, are successfully upheld throughout. Individuals of various faiths and none are respected, welcomed and valued. The partnership with the Anglican Church, even at this time of interregnum, other Churches in Swindon, Governors and Parents is positive, dynamic and fruitful. For example, pupils in the school are to take part in a Swindon Churches Together Carol Service which will be broadcast on the radio on Christmas Day. Skills and talents of various members of the staff are recognised, encouraged and utilised. For example, the talented Nursery Nurse is responsible for coordinating the displays. These are superb, neat and vibrant and integral to the overall ethos of the school. The management team are monitoring practices, such as teaching and acts of worship, within the school well. Whilst this monitoring and evaluation is successfully leading to improved practice, some features such as preparation for a multicultural society are at early stages.

SIAS NOVEMBER 2005 St Francis CE VA Primary School, Swindon, SN25 1UH