

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Alban's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Baldwin Gardens

Holborn

London

EC1N 7SD

Diocese of London

LEA: London Borough of Camden

Dates of inspection: 6th October 2006

Date of last inspection: October 1999

School's Unique reference number: 100036

Acting Headteacher: Ms Lea Hannam

SIAS Inspector NS: Miriam Rinsler

Context

St. Alban's is a small school in the heart of Holborn, a disadvantaged and ethnically very diverse community. A very high proportion of the pupils belong to ethnic minority groups, with Bangladeshi and Black African children predominating. A very high proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language, and a large proportion of these are at the first stages of acquisition. Over 50% of the school population is Muslim. Since the retirement of the previous head 10 months ago, the school has been led by an acting head. The governors have been able to appoint a substantive head this month, who is yet to join the school.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Albans as a Church of England school are satisfactory

St. Alban's effectiveness as a Church of England School is satisfactory. It is reviewing and redeveloping its distinctiveness as a faith school. It has many strengths as a school, and good capacity to improve. The acting headteacher and governors have worked together well to enhance the school's Christian ethos and the outward signs of its Christian foundation.

Established strengths

- The school has a clear Christian vision, with a strong culture of reward and praise which is appreciated by the learners.
- There is very good support for learners' personal development: they show independence, courtesy and very good attitudes to school.
- Christian principles are, both explicitly and implicitly, at the heart of the school's mission and all key policies.
- There is a commitment to shared development, and learners play a key role in collective worship and its development

Focus for development

- Develop further the prayer life of the school
- Develop assessment for learning methods in RE so that progress of children can be tracked, and knowledge used to develop teaching and learning further
- Review scheme of work and related materials to ensure they meet the needs of current intake whilst retaining a distinctive Christian character
- Develop "learning from religions", by offering greater challenge in lessons and extending comparative thinking about Christianity and other world faiths

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

The school meets the needs of all learners satisfactorily. The Christian ethos, while not always explicit, underpins the very good support children receive for personal development, and the high expectations for behaviour. Learners from all cultures feel safe and happy, and say that their beliefs are respected and their knowledge of other faiths is valued. They speak confidently about the rôle the school council has played in developing the school, and the way individual concerns are effectively handled - for instance in circle time. Parents value the school and feel comfortable approaching staff when they need to. The school has a strong commitment to inclusion, with good support for bilingual learners. There is a good effort to bring in support from the community, with many volunteers from local businesses working one-to-one with learners on their reading and numeracy. Staff and learners maintain an orderly atmosphere and all value working independently. Staff offer good rôle models, resulting in courteous, well-motivated and articulate children. Displays, especially at the entrance, give a clear Christian message, and learners as young as six years old can explain the Egyptian cross on the school badge.

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

Collective worship in assemblies has a good impact on spiritual development overall, and there is scope to develop it further. Assemblies are well-organised and peaceful, with a range of themes throughout a two-year cycle. A candle and music set this time apart from ordinary school time. Worship is consistently and recognisably Christian, whilst remaining sensitive to the beliefs and traditions of other faiths represented in the school community. Children of other faiths feel included, except where their parents have opted to keep them from the weekly visit to church. Learners show very good attitudes: they all keep a respectful silence and join in singing. They are articulate about prayer and what they understand it is for. The practice of encouraging them to write a "prayer of the week" is good and learners are proud to have theirs chosen. However, the use of the same prayer in classes is sometimes perfunctory. The acting headteacher has introduced a very good practice of learners evaluating assemblies. Their comments are perceptive and direct. The major festivals of the other main faiths represented in the school are celebrated. One class at a time uses a weekly assembly to celebrate recent learning, including in RE. In the assembly observed, learners presented poems about the greatness of God, showing a good sense of wonder at his creation. The children had also rewritten the Lord's Prayer, showing good understanding of its meaning, and of its relevance to them.

How effective is the religious education?

RE is satisfactory overall. By the end of Year 6 expectations and standards are good. They show increasing consistency across age groups; this continues to be a point for development for the school. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall with good coverage of main world faiths. Learners of other faiths say that teachers welcome their contributions in order to extend subject knowledge. Learners recall stories and activities from RE lessons and develop good levels of interest in the subject by Year 6. In order to raise the quality of teaching and learning further, teachers need to plan for deeper thinking to take place. Lessons concentrate more on learning about, than from, religion. Hence RE can only make a limited contribution to learners' spiritual development. Informally, and more explicitly through assemblies, RE and PSHE are well linked to support learners' moral development. RE should follow other subjects in the school in using assessment for learning principles. This would engage learners more fully, and provide reliable evidence to improve teaching and learning further.

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

Leadership and management of the school are good. The acting head and governors have a strong and developing vision for the Christian nature of the school. This has helped to establish an atmosphere of self-evaluation and improvement in all areas of the school, which should withstand the further changes in leadership to come. The leadership of the headteacher and senior staff has a very good impact on behaviour. The headteacher is also the subject leader for RE and has set up satisfactory systems to monitor learning in RE and good practice in evaluation of collective worship. As with other areas of the school's life, the information gained from such evaluations needs to be fed back into the planning process more securely. There are very good links with the church of St. Alban the Martyr. Parish staff offer a weekly service in church, prepare children for confirmation and make themselves available for pastoral support to the whole school community. For the most part, the self-evaluation of the school matched the findings of the inspection, and the school has a good sense of its strengths and weaknesses. There has been good progress on the key issues of the previous inspection report, and leaders throughout the school show great commitment and good capacity to improve further.

SIAS report October 2006 St Alban's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School Baldwin Gardens Holborn London EC1N 7SD