

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St. Bartholomew's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Sydenham

The Peak
Sydenham
SE26 4LJ

Diocese: Southwark

School's Unique reference number: 100726

Date of inspection: 7 and 8 May 2008

Date of last inspection: January 2003

Headteacher: Jill Bonner

Inspector's name with National Society inspector's number : Daphne Gibbs 210

School context

St. Bartholomew's is a one and a half entry primary school of above average size. Approximately 40% of pupils are from Christian families, and drawn from a diverse range of social, economic and cultural backgrounds. The proportion of pupils for whom English is an additional language is rising. The number of pupils with learning difficulties is below average and, those with statements of educational need, small. A below average percentage of pupils are entitled to free school meals.

Summary Judgement

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St. Bartholomew's as a Church of England school is good.

There are a number of excellent features such as the way the children are placed at the heart of everything, and the Christian care and nurture they receive which prepares them for the future. The high standard of Religious Education (RE) further increases knowledge, tolerance and understanding. The school community strives hard to fulfil its mission statement of providing 'the highest quality of education within a Christian context.'

Established strengths

- the Christian care and support given to all children, particularly those at transitional stages, enabling them to face their future with confidence and tolerant understanding
- the RE co-ordinator's expertise and commitment, which has raised the status of the subject and improved teaching and learning

Focus for development

- in partnership with the church, promote the school within the immediate community celebrating its success and distinctive Christian character
- utilise opportunities to maintain and extend the outside area to match the interesting Christian environment within the school

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

Christian values permeate St. Bartholomew's. As the chair of governors says, there is a feeling of 'peace, love and understanding that is rarely found elsewhere; there is an understanding of God's love'. The children know they are valued and special. They say, 'every child is different and special'; 'everybody respects you for who you are and your own individuality'; 'they respect your confidentiality'. Pupils are given every opportunity to flourish, to take on responsibility and grow in

confidence. They are trained as young leaders and help and encourage younger children, become members of the school council, and enthusiastically enter into fund raising activities, recently raising an amazing £700 at one event to help build a school in Burma. The pupils are supported at important transitional stages in their primary school life. For example, St. Bartholomew's is one of four local church schools that run the 'Big Event' where the older children are able to express their hopes and fears for the future before going to secondary school. They are supported in doing this by the local clergy. The 'wholesome rounded Christian feel embraces difference', commented one of the foundation governors. As a result all learners, whether they are Christian, of other faiths or of none, are happy to acknowledge who they are and what they believe within the happy, caring ethos of St. Bartholomew's. This was evident during the observation of RE lessons. St. Bartholomew's is a community that looks after each other, wants to sort things out and learns from its mistakes. The children feel teachers listen to their side and problems are sorted. They see their school as special because, 'it is a brilliant place to make friends'. The internal environment of St. Bartholomew's proclaims its distinctive Christian character from the many crosses and the communion vessels on display in the entrance hall, to the altar frontal and 'loaves and fishes' mosaic. Although conditions are cramped, space is used effectively to produce interesting interactive displays, many on RE and thought-provoking subjects. There was one particularly effective two-tone display on the stations of the cross. Unfortunately some parts of the outside area do not match the quality inside the school. Attempts had been made to create areas for quiet reflection but these need to be maintained and extended.

The impact of Collective Worship on the school community is good

Collective worship is an integral part of school life affecting the overall ethos of the school as a loving and learning Christian community. The children 'feel safe and at home'; 'feel you can communicate with Jesus when you could not talk to anybody else – it is a weight off your shoulders'. A quiet reverential atmosphere is created and the children are involved in the proceedings, from carrying the processional cross, presenting the bread and wine, to being involved in dramatic presentations. The music co-ordinator plays her guitar and ably leads the singing. Messages are conveyed clearly and simply. As one child put it, the headteacher 'makes it understandable even for the little ones'. Relevant and recognisable connections are made – for example, the celebration of a child's birthday, complete with the birthday cake, to the birth of the Christian Church at Pentecost. Anglican faith and practice is embodied in the termly Eucharist held in the school and observed during the inspection, the service having been specially adapted by the clergy to make it meaningful and easily understood by the pupils. The sense of occasion was heightened by the fact that the clergy wore full robes and conducted proceedings with warmth and in such a way as to show the pupils they were valued and respected – no short cuts just because they were children. Also each child had their own order of service. The address by the incumbent was used to illustrate Anglican tradition and linked again with Pentecost – the bishop's mitre and amethyst ring. The altar frontal designed and made by the children confirmed further that this was a special time. Worship is being extended further into the life of the school by the use of the prayer tree. The RE co-ordinator has introduced 'lantern time' – a period for coming together and reflecting at the end of each day when the children are on a residential visit. More activities such as these would emphasise that collective worship need not just take place at one particular time during the day.

The effectiveness of Religious Education is outstanding

St. Bartholomew's RE policy talks of hoping to sow seeds that 'will take root, germinate and grow strong', remain with the children into adulthood 'continually informing, shaping, developing and enriching the whole of their lives'. Observations of lessons and examination of documentation shows that the school is well on its way to achieving this aim. The able, knowledgeable and enthusiastic co-ordinator is raising the profile of RE, keeping it alive, modern and relevant, encouraging links with other curriculum subjects, and enabling colleagues to teach with confidence and commitment by using appropriate intervention strategies. Opportunities are created to bring RE to the attention of the wider community – for example, the RE festival where people of other faiths talked about their beliefs and traditions. The quality of lessons observed was high. There was progression, and deeper level thinking was encouraged from reception to Year 6. They 'do not shut anything out' said one of the foundation governors. This was demonstrated when listening to the older children talking about the relevance of the Ten Commandments in our world today. They were not afraid to express their opinions on issues such as adultery or reveal their thoughts and feelings. They were confident and empowered knowing that what they said would be treated with respect in a non-judgemental way. A RE bridging unit supports children as they move from

primary to secondary school. The pupils are enthusiastic about the subject. Several children actually cheered when the teacher informed the class they were about to have a RE lesson. Another child said, their teachers 'don't just teach but do it in a way that you can remember and is more fun'. All children, whatever their faith or none, are very much encouraged to be part of the process. In one lesson on the Koran, the teacher sought confirmation from one of his Muslim pupils that he was doing things correctly. The look on the child's face showed how proud he felt in being consulted in this way. High quality resources, either from school or borrowed from the local Multi-Faith Multi-Cultural Centre, again indicated to the children that RE has status. A faith symbol is placed by the side of each display to show which religion is being referred to. Assessment has been an area of focus. Assessment activities have been identified, and simple sheets prepared which enable teachers to pinpoint areas for improvement. This has resulted in more targeted teaching and high standards being achieved.

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

Teamwork is the key to the leadership and management of St. Bartholomew's as a church school. Christian 'relationships that show the children how people can work together' as the chair of governors puts it. The headteacher utilises and encourages the experience and expertise of members of the school community to promote the distinctive Christian vision of the school – for example, the RE subject leader's outreach work. Member's of the team feel they have a part to play. One of the foundation governors publishes "Sydenham Life" through which he endeavours to build community spirit and make people aware of, and celebrate, St. Bartholomew's Christian ethos. The incumbent sees his role as 'reinforcing values and conveying the spiritual dimension to life' and giving the pupils an 'unembarrassed experience of being part of a Christian community'. The chair of governors acknowledges the achievement of staff and feels her task is to encourage the team to continue working hard 'in order to achieve the best'. The children too feel they can contribute. They say the school leadership 'listens to ideas and acts upon them' and this 'makes you feel important'. The views of parents are also sought through means of questionnaires and so on. The partnership between the school, the church and the diocesan board is strong. The headteacher is a member of the Southwark Diocesan Board of Education Headteachers' Association. The church constantly seeks to support St. Bartholomew's mission statement to 'provide the highest quality of education within a Christian context'. The leadership and management of the school are 'aware there are things to improve' (chair of governors) including raising the profile of the school within the immediate church community. The clergy say that some of the parishioners are unaware of the school and the positive impact it is having on the lives of its pupils. Important decisions have to be made in the near future concerning the appointment of a new headteacher, and the conditions of the school buildings. The leadership and management are, however, confident, committed and able to support the school through this period, and oversee further improvement and development.

May 2008 SIAS report, St. Bartholomew's C of E Primary School, Sydenham, The Peak, Sydenham, SE26 4LJ