

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

### **St John and St James Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School**

Isabella Road,  
Hackney  
E9 6DX

#### **Diocese of London**

LA: London Borough of Hackney  
Executive Principal: Miss Sian Davies  
Head of School: Ms Nicola Massey  
Date of last inspection: November 2002  
Date of inspection: 4<sup>th</sup> March 2008  
School's Unique reference number: 100262  
SIAS Inspector: Miss Gladys Vendy (NS 299)

### **Context**

St John and St James School is a popular heavily oversubscribed one form entry school, with a nursery class, situated in the ancient parish of St John's, Hackney. It was founded nearly five hundred years ago to provide a free education for the children of Hackney. The school, which is in the Borough's most deprived ward, provides a safe, bright and secure haven in a troubled and fragile community. The school features among those with the highest deprivation indicators nationally. It has above average numbers eligible for free school meals, children with learning difficulties and statements and those who speak English as an additional language. About 83% of children are from minority ethnic groups the largest being from Black African and Black Caribbean backgrounds. The majority of pupils, 82%, are from a Christian background the others being predominantly of the Muslim faith. The school formed a federation with another primary school in the borough three years ago and in addition to the Head of School shares the same Executive Principal, senior leaders and governing body.

### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St John and St James School as a Church of England school are good.**

The school has many outstanding features and the strong Christian ethos of inclusiveness is secured through the close links between the school and the church. Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent. Pupils feel highly valued as individuals within a safe and caring environment.

### **Established strengths**

- The Christian vision for an inclusive school in which all learners are valued and in which spiritual, moral, social and cultural development leads to consideration and respect for all.
- The strong and committed leadership and a united team of staff, together with the active support of the governors and the close involvement of the parish, is an example of Christian witness in action.
- Strong relationships between pupils, staff, parents and governors support the school's vision.

### **Focus for development**

- Recording creative and non written work in Religious Education
- Involving pupils more actively and consistently in acts of worship
- Governors' evaluation of worship

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

The school makes excellent provision to meet the needs of all its learners based on clear Christian values. The school puts great emphasis on being an inclusive school that serves the local community, celebrates the diversity of pupils' backgrounds and develops positive relationships in a supportive environment underpinned by Christian values. The school has a commitment to children with SEN, EAL and complex needs. These pupils are supported very effectively enabling them to make good progress - for example, those whose spiritual and psychological needs are met through the work of an art therapist. The school has adopted the Success for All programme and the International Primary Curriculum as a central strand of curriculum provision that allows all children to fulfil their potential and creates a sense of unity amongst staff and pupils. Many opportunities are provided for Gifted and Talented pupils to develop interests and extend their learning. Co-operative learning principles are fully embedded in all areas of school life and support effective learning as well as promoting social and emotional development. In addition to the breakfast club there is a wide range of after school and lunchtime clubs. The reception area with its dedicated space for reflection, church community board and a banner rich in the symbols of St John and St James overarched by a rainbow, firmly proclaims the school as a Christian school. Colourful cards with the saying 'to expect the best from ourselves and each other' are found everywhere in the school. Golden Rules reflect Christian values with love and respect at their core. Relationships between staff and children are excellent. Positive behaviour and attitudes are also promoted and modelled through peer mediators, playground buddies, circle time and the Pastoral Manager. Children understand and can discuss notions of right and wrong from a Christian viewpoint. Members of the school council take their responsibility seriously and are influential in representing the pupil voice and initiating change, for example in asking for a PE uniform. They also play a significant role in the school annual review day. They are proud of their school and understand that 'God made us to be ourselves'. Global awareness is promoted and developed through the curriculum and there is a charity club which suggests projects as well as organising fund raising for schools in Africa. Parents spoken to are happy with the education their children are receiving and described the school as being one happy family. The school enjoys good links with St John's Church and the local community including The National Trust, the Hackney Empire and the local church secondary school. This is a school where every child really does matter.

**The impact of collective worship on the school community is good**

There are close supportive links with St John's Parish Church and the vicar visits the school weekly to lead worship. The church youth worker is a familiar figure in school and a significant number of families attend Sunday worship. The worship co-ordinator plans the programme for the year in consultation with the Vicar and Head of School and this is shared with the staff so that themes can be reinforced in classrooms and across the school. There is a clear weekly pattern of worship that includes a merit assembly and a class led assembly that parents attend. In both acts of worship observed a lighted candle and a cross gave a visual focus and very good use was made of images projected from the computer to stimulate the children's interest. Children responded well to questions and were able to discuss their views sensibly with their neighbours. However their involvement did not extend to dramatisation or reading from the Bible or leading the prayers. Reflection was good and children were encouraged to 'be still on the outside and still on the inside'. The Vicar wore his vestments and is encouraging pupils to make responses according to the Anglican liturgy. The school has a Gospel choir and obviously they enjoy their singing. The children entered and left silently, accompanied by music. Children are able to say the Lord's Prayer and have been taught its meaning in lessons. Prayers are also said at lunchtime. Children are invited to write their own prayers in a prayer book which is displayed in the school foyer and used during worship. Pupils are currently taking part in the process of creating their own school prayer. There is a dedicated space in church for school display boards. The school attends church three times a year and these services are well attended by parents and governors but collective worship is not formally evaluated by the governors. Children are beginning to develop an understanding of the worldwide nature of the Anglican communion through the Diocesan Lent Appeal and their participation in Prom Praise at the Royal Albert Hall.

### **The effectiveness of Religious Education is good**

A new scheme of work was introduced in September by the well qualified and enthusiastic RE co-ordinator. This has served to raise the profile of the teaching of RE and training has strengthened the confidence of the staff in delivering the curriculum. The syllabus is predominantly Christian and includes the key events in the Church's year, to be taught as strands which thread through the year, whilst allowing full coverage of other faiths as children progress through the school. There are very comprehensive long, medium and short term plans. There has been good monitoring of the delivery of provision and staff are encouraged to evaluate the response of learners so that they can effectively plan the next steps. Observations showed that pupils have good prior knowledge and experiences to draw upon and teachers had a clear understanding of the subject. Questioning skills were of a high order and good use was made of paired talk. A controversial statement, 'all world religions are the same, they just have different names,' inspired older children to begin their project using resources such as books, personal experiences and the internet to compare two chosen faiths. Pupils responded well using key questions to support their findings. One of their chosen religions was Rastafarianism which was appropriate to the community in which they live and was well resourced. Another boy highlighted the festival of Epiphany which he was able to explain to the class. Assessment is fairly well embedded within the planning using 'I can' statements that match the national level descriptors thus enabling children to self evaluate their understanding. However tracking of these levels does not yet match the very good tracking system which is used in other core subjects. A book scrutiny showed that recording of creative work, discussions and drama work is underdeveloped. There was little evidence of RE work on display in the classrooms. Pupils clearly enjoy RE lessons, feel that it is fun and can make good links with other subjects. With the introduction of the new scheme of work the place of visits and visitors has not been fully developed and is considered to be work in progress. This would enhance the pupils' learning. It is clear that RE makes a distinctive contribution to spiritual and moral teaching. RE is a regular agenda point at curriculum committee meetings.

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

The quality of leadership by the Executive Principal, Head of School and Governors who work in close co-operation and trust, contributes significantly to the strength of the school as a church school. The Executive Principal is an inclusive leader who uses delegation as a key leadership strategy to create effective and efficient leadership teams that contribute to the collaborative ethos which permeates all areas of school life. The strong Christian vision for the school is clearly and confidently articulated in all public documentation and communications and displayed on small colourful posters around the school and playground. The Governing Body, Head of School and Senior Leadership Team are committed to raising the effectiveness and quality of teaching and promoting the Christian values of the school. Governors are linked to subject areas and meet regularly with the subject leaders. There is a strong clergy presence on the Governing Body and during the interregnum the school was well looked after by the local clergy. The recently appointed Vicar has strengthened relationships between church and school and in his pastoral role acts as Chaplain to both pupils and staff. The sense of a Christian community is articulated throughout the school in the quality of very good relationships and team work. Staff morale is very good because they share the school vision in many practical ways, caring and supporting each other as well as the children and contributing to the annual school review day. As one of the staff said 'there is always someone ready to listen to you'. Celebrations and achievements are shared as well as challenges and difficulties. When appointing new staff candidates are asked to discuss the differences of a faith school and to commit themselves to its ethos. The views of parents, learners and staff are regularly sought through questionnaires and the outcomes communicated through newsletters and meetings. Where appropriate they are acted upon, as for example the introduction of a buddy system. The school has good links with the local church secondary school sharing some teaching staff. The school is well supported by the diocese and the local authority. Progress from the previous inspection has been good. The school has an excellent reputation as a church school in the community.