

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St John's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Redfield Road,
Midsomer Norton,
Radstock,
BA3 2JN

Diocese: Bath and Wells

Local authority: Bath and North East Somerset

Dates of inspection: 25th January 2008

Date of last inspection: 13th – 15th January 2003

School's unique reference number: 109271

Headteacher: Carolyn Banfield

Inspector's name and number: Wendy Simmons – 127

School context

St John's Church of England Primary School, within the small town of Midsomer Norton, has 406 pupils on role arranged in fourteen classes. The buildings are an aesthetic mix of the original Victorian structure, with more recent improvements and additions to accommodate a large pupil role and to meet the needs of education in the twenty first century. The school buildings are beautifully decorated which gives the school an overall unity. There are many clubs and activities for the children. The school has gained a number of awards including the International Schools' Award, Artsmark Gold, Sportsmark and it was the first school in the Authority to gain a BECTA ICT mark. Most of the pupils live in the town with some coming from the surrounding area. The majority of the pupils are white British. Few pupils are in receipt of free school meals.

The Distinctiveness and effectiveness of St John's as a Church of England School are outstanding.

The Christian nature of the school permeates all aspects of its daily life. Care for the children has a very high priority. All aspects of learning, development and well-being are addressed. Learners are happy and readily share their opinions about the school and all those who help them. Collective worship and prayer are central to the life of the school. Older children support the younger ones and some are appointed 'guardian angels' who identify those who need someone to play and help them integrate with others. There is an active School Council and strong Church and community links where children raise money for a range of charities.

Established strengths

- The Christian ethos of the school shines through and is epitomised by the range of opportunities available for learners.
- The leadership of the head teacher is outstanding. She interacts with all learners, with staff and everyone connected with the school. Children are at ease in her company. Her leadership of Collective Worship is a particular strength.
- The excellent range of displays and cultural artefacts throughout all areas of the school provide learners with examples of the crafts, ways of life and faiths of the wider world.

Focus for development

- Maintain and develop the excellent provision for Collective Worship and continue to provide opportunities for regular monitoring by adults and children.
- Continue to provide Religious Education through the existing creative and challenging scheme of work, resources and identified assessment opportunities.
- Reinforce the many opportunities for learners' Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development with a written SMSC policy as outlined in the Action Plan.

The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is outstanding in the way it meets the needs of all learners.

Christian character is reflected in classrooms, the school entrance and corridors with a very high standard of signs, symbols and displays. Standards of attainment are good and learners make very good year on progress from their entry at Reception. The emphasis on 'Every Child Matters' and the five outcomes to successful learning and development are central to the organisation of the school. This is practiced through the care, guidance and support given to all learners. Policies and procedures are identified and well documented to contribute to the well-being of all. Relationships between pupils and adults are excellent and pupils are able to develop as individuals through a range of activities and responsibilities such as the School Council, the 'Guardian Angels' at break times and the 'Happy Lunchtime Helpers' who support both lunch sittings. The children's dining experience makes a positive contribution to their social development. The standard of catering is excellent with a high percentage take up and an emphasis on healthy eating. Lunchtime, which begins with Grace, is a pleasant social occasion. Hot lunches are provided and children sit at cloth covered tables where conversation is relaxed as well as stimulating. The contribution to learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is identified through the very strong links with the local Church particularly through a Mass held in St John's Church every term for Key Stage two children. A number of the older pupils receive the sacrament alongside staff, parents, governors and parishioners. There are very good links with a local secondary school through use of their music, food technology and science facilities. There is a strong emphasis on the expressive arts using professional musicians and artists. Learners are able to work with a potter and their impressive work is displayed around the school. At present children are producing a pottery map of the world which is being gradually assembled. The children have good social skills and are supportive of each other.

The impact of Collective Worship on the school community is outstanding.

Collective Worship is a major strength of the school. Co-ordinated by the head teacher, there is an impressive range of resources and a detailed record of collective worship dating from 2002 including evidence of regular staff training and evaluations of individual acts of worship by staff and children. Copies of the rolling programme of weekly themes and festival services provide secure evidence that worship is an important part of each day and of the school's life. The worship observed was outstanding, 'Busy, Busy, Busy, that is what life is like' this was supported by a power-point display of drawings relating to the story of Martha and Mary. The Headteacher filled a large jar full of round white balls representing our family and friends. Small pebbles were added to allow for the good things in life and finally sand to fill in further spaces demonstrating to children the busy aspect of life. The comparison to Martha and Mary helped children understand why Jesus did not admonish Mary for not helping her sister. Some excellent singing was accompanied by both a very good teacher pianist and children's recorder group. There was an appropriate time for prayer and reflection. The majority of children's behaviour throughout was very good. Pupils and staff can recall particular examples of collective worship and how Bible stories and Christian beliefs support examples of life in the twenty first century. For example one child particularly remembers the worship led by the head teacher about Noah's Ark. 'It was just amazing, saving two of each kind and everything happens for a reason'. The Vicar who attends worship most Fridays regularly leads worship as well as the termly celebration of Mass. The weekly theme is followed by other worship leaders and by class teachers during class worship. The signal for the start and end of worship is by the lighting and extinguishing of a candle. An older pupil does this and when the candle is lit, the child uses the Anglican response, 'The Lord is here' and everyone responds with 'His spirit is with us'. Collective worship is celebrated in a variety of groupings, whole school, key stage and class. Worship is planned from a four year cycle with supplementary material for special occasions and is reviewed bi-annually. Collective Worship contributes very significantly to the school's distinctive Christian character.

The impact of Religious Education is outstanding

The standards in Religious Education are very high. Two lessons were observed, in Year two and Year six. Both lessons were judged to be very good with some outstanding features. The

pace of the lessons was matched by the rigour and range of activities for learners' responses. The unit of work being studied in Year 2 is 'The Life of Jesus'. The lesson focussed on what it means to have a special friend. All pupils were actively involved in discussion and were able to recall the names of the Disciples. The use of excellent resources including a fishing net and models of fish and sea creatures all supported the ethos of the lesson. There were twelve candles representing the Disciples. Children then drew picture of their special friend to form the class display of 'Special Friends'. In Year six learners have studied a number of different world leaders and have considered the question 'What makes spiritual leaders different'? The lesson was the first of two about Guru Nanak. The ethos was sensitively created through music and the burning of incense. The teacher introduced a fabric bag which concealed some 'Mala Beads', featured in the story about Guru Nanak. Learners were asked to consider Guru Nanak's qualities and to think about the people they know who guide them in their lives. Learners identified a number of qualities and placed these words around a cameo silhouette to demonstrate what they look for when seeking guidance. Learners in both lessons were presented with challenge appropriate to their age and experience. Both teachers used very good questioning techniques and pupils were calm, controlled and responsive to questions. The RE scheme, based upon 'A Gift to the Child', follows units from the Agreed Syllabus. Lessons follow the four stages of, 'Engagement, Discovery, Contextualisation and Reflection'. There is a particular emphasis on the senses and the use of artefacts. Assessment opportunities are planned to meet the learning objectives and the subject profile contains examples of learners' work which has been moderated across the classes. It is a particularly imaginative scheme of work which contributes significantly to learners' attainment and progress by being engaging and helping to develop learners' understanding of themselves. In this way it very much supports the holistic approach offered by the school. A review of assessment is planned for term four. Monitoring of RE also takes place through 'learning walks' undertaken by the Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team. Learners understand the nature of religion, that there are different faiths in different cultures and relate this understanding to their own lives. During a discussion with learners across the school, a year two pupil was able to explain the significance of the sacraments following a class visit to the church. Religious Education contributes considerably to the school's distinctive Christian character and to learners' spiritual and cultural development.

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

The Head Teacher is an outstanding and committed leader who fully promotes the Christian vision of the school. She leads a committed, enthusiastic and skilful staff, who work very well together as a team for the benefit of the children. The school ethos statement is prominently displayed in the foyer and corridors of the school. St John's Church of England school, 'A foundation for learning and caring' owes its existence to the 'Ann Harris' foundation. Learners are aware that her legacy from the eighteenth century founded their school. The School Development Plan itemises, in Goal 2, aspects for improvement relating to the church school foundation. The Senior Leadership Team monitors attainment and progress and evaluates provision and practice. Staff, parents, learners and governors are aware of the distinctive nature of the school. Subject and aspect leaders carry out their tasks effectively. Parents and children have responded through questionnaires. The parents' association supports the school through a variety of activities. The Vicar and the foundation governors are fully supportive and work very hard for the school. Foundation and other governors support the school voluntarily by leading swimming lessons, participating in the Y6 residential week, in science and with general classroom help. They praise the benefits of festival services, such as the Carol Service and say that children know what it is to worship together. St John's school uses innovative and discovery based learning strategies where children can explore belief through discussion and the use of appropriate artefacts and resources. Collectively all those involved in the leadership and management of St John's Church of England Primary school provide outstanding leadership.