

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St John's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School.

Spring Park Road

Shirley

Croydon

CR0 5EL

Diocese: Southwark

School's Unique reference number:101788

Date of inspection: 24-25 January 2008

Date of last inspection: January 2004

Headteacher: Martina Martin

Inspector's name with National Society inspector's number : Arthur Williams 279

School context

St John's is an average sized primary school in the London Borough of Croydon. It is located in grounds adjacent to its foundation church. A large majority of learners live within a mile radius of the school. The proportions of learners entitled to free school meals and those for whom English is an additional language are below average, but rising. A higher proportion of learners than usual come from backgrounds that are favourable, economically and socially. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds has been increasing for several years. Most learners come from Christian homes with a majority regularly attending a number of churches. Staff turnover has been high in the past two years. The headteacher, who has been in post for nearly two years, has established a new leadership team this term.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St John's as a Church of England school are outstanding.

Christian values are at the heart of its daily life and drive its aspirations. The mission statement includes these words. "The school aims to serve its community by providing an education of the highest quality within the context of Christian belief and practice and by developing a school community where everyone is valued and continue to grow and learn to the best of their ability". This aspiration is evident in all that the school does.

Established strengths

- the outstanding Christian ethos of a happy and caring school that lives up to the Christian aspirations of its mission statement.
- the outstanding leadership of the headteacher who is well supported by the Religious Education (RE) co-ordinator, staff and governors in developing spiritual values in all learners.
- the mature, reflective attitudes of many of the learners as displayed in Collective Worship and R E.
- the outstanding quality of display that enhances the spiritual development of all learners.

Focus for development

- establish a manageable system that records the progress of learners in RE and informs teaching and learning
- establish a more coherent RE scheme of work that consistently states clear RE teaching and learning objectives
- establish teaching strategies that further challenge the many able and perceptive learners

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

The Christian character of the school permeates every aspect of school life. Learners are taught in a Christian atmosphere that recognises the importance of care, respect and individual worth. Christian values are shown in the learners' excellent behaviour. Examples of this are the ways that learners are given the responsibility of making their own contributions to the life of the school, raise funds for charities, older learners care for younger ones and the calm atmosphere around the school. An inclusive approach is shown in the excellent support for learners with special needs and the respect for learners of the Islamic faith. All these features positively enhance the learners' spiritual sense of community and their own worth.

The relationship between all staff and learners is one of Christian care and respect. Learners say their views are taken seriously. Parents also consider they are valued and listened to. As one said "The head will listen to you and if she thinks you are right does something about it". A parent of another faith background said that she had no problem in supporting the values of the school. Display is outstanding, giving out a strong Christian message. Work is celebrated and explained in an attractive and vibrant way. Learners are exposed to artefacts from other cultures. The learners' spiritual development is enhanced by the encouragement to engage, reflect and ponder. RE displays in the corridors celebrate the work in classes and provide opportunities for reflection and prayer. The Christian faith is celebrated by a striking display on the importance of the cross.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding.

Worship occupies a place of vital importance in the life of the school and is a fundamental aspect of its Christian character. Excellent use is made of silence, reflection, singing, prayer and formal calls to begin and end worship. All learners use these opportunities for reflection and prayer and value them. A learner said. "I like collective worship, you can be with your own thoughts and pray to God". A wide range of resources is used; drama, speech, multi-media, artefacts and music. They are used imaginatively to create a sense of worship and foster spiritual growth. Learners are enthusiastic about worship, and particularly favour acts that encourage their direct participation. The high quality of worship is sustained by a well thought out policy with all leaders being aware of the termly and weekly themes. Later conversations with younger learners showed they were able to apply acts to their own lives by giving examples of looking after animals and re-cycling. Collective Worship is further enhanced by the very strong link between St John's church and the school. The Anglican tradition is fostered through visits to the church to mark the major Christian festivals and significant events in the school year such as the leaving of the Year 6 learners when the church gives them each a Bible. The link is further strengthened by the incumbent leading weekly acts of worship in the school. These are valued. As one learner said "He makes you think of interesting things". Learners and parents appreciate these occasions and value the spiritual opportunities they provide. A feature was the strong support of parents and carers for the Year 5 act of worship. Over 60 attended and conversations revealed a respect for the strong spiritual dimension of the occasion. Recently a monitoring form has been introduced to be used by governors on school visits. Early samples show that it helps governors in evaluating the quality of Collective Worship.

Religious Education is good

The teaching and learning of every class was observed. Five classes were judged to be good and outstanding practice was seen in two. These standards were achieved through thoughtful planning, re-visiting previous work, and recognising that often the best resource were the learners themselves. A range of engaging teaching styles was used such as speaking and listening, multi-media presentations, drama, poetry, artefacts, telling stories from the Bible, script writing, writing in the role of Bible characters, discussion work, art and design. Work was also effectively matched to different abilities. This resulted in all learners being able to achieve the learning objective of the lesson.

Good use was made of teaching assistants who often focused on the needs of a particular group and were very effective because of their personal knowledge of learners.

The learners' knowledge of the Bible in all classes was very good with very young learners able to identify the underlying meanings of stories. For example Year 1 learners were able to point out that the story of Noah was about trust and in Year 2 learners saw it as God keeping his promise. Another strength was the way that learners were able to apply learning to their everyday moral choices. Year 6 learners were able to identify honesty as a characteristic of being a Christian, but also recognised that perhaps always telling the truth was a difficult path to follow.

Many learners were able to articulate very thoughtful and reflective answers. For example, Year 5 learners were able to explain how respect was shown by different faiths in the handling of their own sacred texts. They also explained that you were being disrespectful, even if you were not of the same faith, if you did not follow the same rules when using their texts. Able and perceptive learners are challenged. However these learners could achieve even higher standards. There were few examples of learners carrying out their own research or exploring issues where truth is claimed by opposite sides.

The RE co-ordinator has a good grasp of the present position of the RE curriculum. She acknowledges that a priority will be to support staff in making more demands on the able and perceptive learners. She has drawn up an appropriate action plan. This includes a review of the present scheme of work in order to guide staff with more explicit RE teaching and learning objectives. The present scheme is a mixture of three different sources and causes confusion. She has correctly identified the need for agreed standards of assessment to celebrate the achievement of learners. She understands that this knowledge can be used to raise standards through better informed teaching and learning.

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

The present headteacher has nearly been in post for two years and she has been outstanding in promoting the Christian vision of the school. Her monitoring and support is very "hands on". She has a clear analysis of what needs to change and why. She has high expectations of what a Christian school should be. She is persistent in expecting the best. She has the clear respect of learners. One commented, "She doesn't treat you like a child, she treats you as a friend". Another said, "She is always around the school and even if she is in her office, the door is open". The headteacher is ably supported by the new deputy who is also the RE co-ordinator and shares her Christian vision. Staff respect both and give them their full support. Governors are very effective, they have a good knowledge of the school, and appropriately hold the school to account. They work in close partnership with the head and share the same Christian vision. The foundation governors and incumbent give excellent support. During the recent inter-regnum a foundation governor made sure the strong partnership between church and school did not weaken and the recently appointed incumbent is thoughtful and supportive in developing his work in the school.

In turn parents fully support the Christian status of the school. Their views are actively sought through questionnaires and conversations and they are welcomed as partners.

The school is well placed to become an excellent model for all that is good in Christian education.