

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St. Lawrence Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Church Road,
Stone Street,
Sevenoaks,
Kent
TN15 0LN

Diocese: Rochester

Local authority: Kent

Dates of inspection: 1st – 2nd October 2007

Date of previous inspection:

School's unique reference number: 118704

Headteacher: Mrs. Alison Saunders

Inspector's name and number: Ms Jan Thompson (NS 92)

School context

St. Lawrence is a Voluntary Controlled (VC) Church of England Primary School situated in the small Kent hamlet of Stone Street, outside Sevenoaks. The school was built in 1868 along with St. Lawrence Church and now benefits from a new school hall. It is a very small school of 64 pupils (with a capacity of 70). About 12 pupils live within walking distance of the school, but most travel in from surrounding areas as far away as Tonbridge, with parents choosing a small Church school that can give individual attention to their children. It has a higher than average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities. Pupils are from predominantly middle class families and there is one Muslim and one Hindu pupil. The school has high standards, with pupils making good progress overall. Ofsted judged the school to be good with outstanding features.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St. Lawrence as a Church of England school are outstanding

St. Lawrence Church of England Primary School is an outstanding Church school.

Established strengths

- The very strong, caring Christian ethos.
- The high quality of Christian worship.
- The Christian leadership of the Head Teacher.
- The close partnership between school and church.

Focus for development

- The Governing Body should have a clearer understanding of curriculum Religious Education (RE) and should either implement the Kent agreed syllabus for RE, as required of VC schools, or give parents the option of continuing a denominational syllabus, which they have a right to do.

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

St. Lawrence Church of England Primary School is a small, friendly 'family' school where every child is welcomed, cared for and treated as an individual. The small size of the school means that pupils of all ages mix together, with the older pupils helping the younger ones. Again, because of the size of the school, everyone has the chance to take responsibilities and grow in confidence. Parents spoke of the caring attitudes that their children learn at this school and take on through their lives. This was illustrated during the inspection by pupils' enthusiasm to earn money to buy chickens for people in Africa (through World Vision) for

their Harvest Festival. They explained that God has made the world for people to enjoy and understood their responsibility in this. All this relates to the fundamental aims of the school to give pupils a rounded education based on Christian principles and practice. Relationships in school are very good at all levels and pupils behave well, especially as they move around the old school building. Pupils' spirituality is particularly enhanced through worship; and their knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith is developed well through RE lessons and religious displays around the school.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Christian worship is central to the life of this school and underpins its Christian character. It is very well planned by the Head Teacher in consultation with the Vicar and covers the Church's year and important Christian and biblical themes. It is well organized and prepared, with much pupil participation. Pupils are extremely positive and enthusiastic about worship, which they enjoy and find valuable. They like contributing to the prayers and they also enjoy singing, which they do very well despite their small numbers. They really liked having their daily collective worship in the church building next door while their new hall was being built, and teachers also spoke of how moving an experience it was. The setting enhanced their experience of Anglican worship, as it did when the older pupils provided an orchestra for the Church Schools Festival in the cathedral and took part in the Holy Communion service. Pupils understand the meaning and purpose of worship. They can also explain what they get out of worship, for example: "It helps me think about how I could be a better person", "It helps me believe in God" and "It makes me feel peaceful." A pupil worship committee has begun to help evaluate their worship, and there is a good idea of holding the regular Friday afternoon worship in the church and to invite parents to attend.

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

The school is successful in promoting its Christian vision, with all stakeholders being aware of the school's Church status and most being able to explain the difference that this makes. The Head Teacher is a committed Christian leader of this school and she is well supported in this by her staff. The Governing Body is also very supportive of the Church character of the school, with a number of regular church-goers among them. The Vicar, who is vice-chair of governors, is very active in the school and there is a strong partnership between school and church. The Governing Body has overseen the school's self-evaluation as a Church School and, as a result, has put a number of areas for development into the school improvement plan. However, the Governing Body did not know that the school was following the wrong RE syllabus. Both parents and pupils have recently been given questionnaires about the Christian aspects of school life, and these have elicited very positive responses. Although only a minority of parents are active church members, many chose St. Lawrence because it is a Church school and they are appreciative and supportive of the Christian education their children receive.