

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Matthias Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Bacon Street,
Bethnal Green,
London,
E2 6DY

Diocese of London

Local authority: Tower Hamlets

Date of inspection: 15th November 2007

Date of last inspection: November 2003

Type of school: Voluntary Aided Primary

School's unique reference number: 100956

Headteacher: Ms Clare Sealy

SIAS Inspector: Miss Gladys Vendy (NS 299)

Context

St Matthias is a one form entry school, with Nursery provision, situated close to Brick Lane in an area of significant socio-economic disadvantage and in the parish of St Matthew's, Bethnal Green. The school is in the top 2% nationally on the school deprivation index. The majority of pupils live within the immediate vicinity and are of Bangladeshi heritage. The school has a high mobility rate. A very high percentage of children have Special Educational Needs. Reduced numbers of children means that there are two split age classes. Since the last inspection the area has been subject to a rapid demographic change and the majority of pupils are not of the Christian faith.

Summary Judgement

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Matthias as a Church of England School are good

Inclusion is at the heart of its practice and the school achieves its aim to serve and value all members of the community. The carefully considered response of the Head Teacher and Governing Body to the challenges and tensions presented by changes in the area and beyond is both positive and sensitive.

Established strengths

- Strong leadership of the Head Teacher together with active support of the Governing Body and the close involvement of the parish is an exemplar to Christian witness
- Inclusion in which spiritual, moral, social and cultural development leads to consideration and respect for all the school community.
- The links between RE and Worship which enables the Christian faith to be promoted effectively.

Focus for development

- Review the scheme of work to take account of split age classes in Key Stage 2 and develop a broader study of Christianity.
- Assessment in RE needs to be embedded using national level descriptors so that accurate comparisons can be made with literacy and other subjects

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

The school makes very good provision to meet the needs of all its learners based on Christian values which permeate every aspect of school life. The Trust Deed and Instrument of Governance clearly state the aim of the school to serve the community and there is much emphasis on nurturing the spiritual life of all children whatever their faith background. There are many visible signs that this is a church school and very high quality RE displays are prominent in the shared areas. All key policies are driven by the aim 'to understand that God loves us, that we are special and that we all matter' and this includes all learners, staff and parents. Positive relationships are successfully achieved through a variety of strategies based on Christian values. Respect for each other's views and beliefs is high. Children with special educational needs are warmly embraced and well supported. Emotional development is nurtured through teaching Second Step anti violence and parenting classes. There is a commitment to lifelong learning and the adoption of the International Primary Curriculum fits in well with the Christian ethos. Standards of attainment are satisfactory overall given the very low starting point of most pupils and the high mobility rate. The facilities of a newly opened on-site sports hall are shared with the community for evening classes, daytime fitness courses, the junior youth service, a holiday club, the breakfast club and allows the school to promote sports and art as specialisms. The transparency around the Christian ethos and values enables the school to meet the real challenges of the rapidly changing demographics of the community. The employment of a learning mentor to support pupils with diverse needs effectively supports the Christian ethos of the school and provides "talk time" for the children. The Key Stage 2 school council spoke about the opportunities to make decisions and the importance of religious freedom. The extra curricular activities encourage the pupils to further their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Children clearly understand and recognise the need to work together to help others and to care for those in the community through regular charitable giving.

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

Worship is of central importance to the life of the school and underpins its Christian character. Pupils learn that religion is important to everyone and respect and reverence for each other is pivotal to the spiritual and moral development of all. The weekly pattern of worship has been carefully planned to make it meaningful and to involve pupils as active participants. The Rector is a frequent visitor to the school where he leads weekly worship, plans the worship themes in discussion with the Head Teacher and supports the pastoral and spiritual needs of the school. The weekly class led act of worship is based on the work done in RE and includes learning from religion as well as learning about it. The subsequent act of worship will develop the theme and illustrate it from a Christian perspective. For example, the worship observed followed a presentation about Diwali and the focus was on Christ as the light of the world. On another occasion the Sikh story of the two chappatis was followed by the story of the Good Samaritan. Powerpoint presentations are used imaginatively and professionally and records of these are kept centrally. Acts of worship take place in the hall which has a prominent crucifix and an altar with lighted candles. The interactive whiteboard is used to provide meditative images and music is played on both entry and exit. The Lord's Prayer is always sung (and signed) and the school prayer said. Pupils' consultation shows that most children enjoy worship and understand its purpose although they might not actively join in. The school attends church twice yearly for the Eucharist and in Holy Week a whole school day is given to reflecting and exploring The Passion through art and drama. Anglicanism is conveyed to the children and impacts upon them through the service to the community as played out in school. The school takes part in Prom Praise and visits St Paul's Cathedral. A weekly early morning mass held in church is specifically but not exclusively for the school staff. In spite of the challenges it faces, the school is highly sensitive in endeavouring to ensure that provision is made for the spiritual and moral development of its entire community. There are no withdrawals from worship.

The effectiveness of Religious Education is good

Religious Education is given a high profile. The Hackney Agreed Syllabus is used because of the support it gives to non specialists, the way it meets the needs of all pupils and the sensitivity it promotes to each other's faith. Some amendments have been made to increase the amount of Christianity studied. All six major world faiths are included to provide the opportunity for the subject to be linked with worship and to widen pupils' knowledge to include religions other than Christianity and Islam. Emphasis is placed on achieving a balance between the two attainment targets although this is not always consistent across the school. The quality of learning and teaching observed was good with the pupils showing very good knowledge and understanding. The Foundation Stage children had been looking at wedding celebrations and excellent use was made of photographs, books, artefacts and wedding outfits from all faiths. The children had been to church to re-enact a Christian wedding and they were clearly enjoying this focus for their learning. Key Stage 1 children were learning about the destruction of the temple and Hannukah and their knowledge of places of worship and sacred writings was impressive. This lesson clearly impacted upon the spiritual development of the children as, through role play, they empathised with the feelings of the Jewish people. In a Key Stage 2 split-age class pupils related the story of Zaccheus to their everyday life. Pupils were encouraged to reflect on the rights and wrongs of the situation. However more use could have been made of differentiation. The older pupils were studying the Haj pilgrimage. Very good use was made of a variety of resources: ICT (videos and the internet), information books and a game to support their learning and to challenge the children to ask questions. There is a regular pattern of visits to other faiths' places of worship which enhances and excites the children's understanding. The work scrutiny revealed that pupils find it difficult to record and present work to a high standard but all classes keep an evidence book of work. The Foundation Stage had made a large book to illustrate the story of their fish that died. Children audit what they have learned each half term and their assessments are kept in their RE files which gives them access to what they have achieved and what the next steps are. National level descriptors are being introduced but they are not yet embedded and it is not possible to make accurate comparisons with literacy and other subjects. The Head Teacher, who is the RE co-ordinator, has been used in an advisory capacity for RE by the local authority - training Newly Qualified Teachers and speaking at the launch of the Tower Hamlets revised Agreed Syllabus which contains work by some pupils. Children enjoy RE lessons and feel that teachers make them interesting. Parents comment that children come home and talk about RE.

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

The quality of leadership by the Head Teacher and Rector, who work in close partnership, contributes significantly to the strength of the school as a church school. The committed and dedicated Head Teacher, who is confident in communicating her vision of a Christian school to the whole school community, provides a very good model of Christianity in action. A significant number of staff are new to the teaching profession this term and staff morale is good. All spoke positively about the support they have been given and how they feel their contributions are valued. A number of staff are from ethnic minority groups and are not of the Christian faith but support the ethos of the school. Their appointments are a reflection of the children's backgrounds and they provide good role models for the pupils. The church sees the school as forming part of its ministry and the Foundation Governors are particularly active in school having a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Governors also take the initiative in a pupil consultation working party, talking to pupils and gaining their views on a range of issues including RE and Worship. Views of parents are regularly sought and a weekly drop in coffee morning affords the opportunities to explore issues of concern with parents. All aspects for development since the last denominational inspection have been achieved. The school is well supported by the diocese and the local authority.