

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St. Nicholas Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

London Road,
Strood,
Rochester,
Kent
ME2 3HU

Diocese: Rochester

Local authority: Medway LA

Dates of inspection: 15th & 16th May 2008

School's unique reference number: 118643

Headteacher: Mrs. Anne-Marie Hutton

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

School context

St. Nicholas Church of England Infant School is a Voluntary Controlled school in Strood, near Rochester. The original Victorian school building has been transformed recently, resulting in a very pleasant learning environment. Its 108 pupils are mostly White British from the local area, which has considerable deprivation. The school has an above average percentage of pupils with special educational needs. Less than ten percent of pupils come from active Church families. The recent Ofsted inspection found it to be a good school with some outstanding features, including excellent personal development.

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

St. Nicholas Church of England Infant School in Strood is an outstanding Church school, with the capacity to improve even further.

Established strengths

- The progress made by pupils in Christian spiritual and moral development.
- The Christian leadership of the headteacher, supported by governors and staff.
- The support given by the local church, especially the Vicar.
- The quality of Religious Education (RE).

Focus for development

Continue the process of developments identified by the school's own self-evaluation, such as to:

- enhance Religious Education (RE) through visits and visitors; and
- develop the school website with links to the local church and diocese.

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

St. Nicholas is a very caring Christian school, where everyone is valued and individual needs are met. Consequently, pupils feel secure and happy, and they make good progress. This is demonstrated in RE, where pupils start with hardly any knowledge and understanding of religions and leave, at the end of Year 2, with standards above the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus. The school claims that 'As a Church of England school, our children grow in knowledge and understanding of what it means to be a Christian.' RE and Collective Worship play an important part in this. They also enhance pupils' own spiritual and moral development by encouraging them to explore their own feelings and to consider the feelings of others. A typical parent's comment was "The strong Christian faith of the school helps to keep the children morally grounded ...". Relationships in school are built on respect for all, so that pupils behave very well and there is a feeling of belonging to an extended family. Staff are valued, well supported and very supportive of each other. They act as good role-models to

the pupils of caring behaviour. Pupils also enjoy supporting charities to help people in need beyond the school. They understand that this is what God wants them to do. The school environment is now very well used to support pupils' spiritual development. Pupils say that the crosses around the school tell them that God is always with them and remind them of Jesus. They also use and enjoy the worship areas in their classrooms and the prayer-board in the corridor.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Daily Collective Worship is central to the life of this school, for both pupils and teachers. It is of a high standard, being very well planned, monitored and developed by the headteacher and the Vicar, who lead most of the worship. It is appropriately planned around the major Christian festivals of the Church's year and core Christian values, such as forgiveness, mostly using stories from the Bible. Pupils respond very positively to worship. They behave reverently, particularly at the beginning when two pupils light the candle, welcome everyone to their 'Worship Time' and use a religious greeting. Pupils like looking at the candle and said that "It's like God and Jesus shining on us" and that it makes them feel happy and proud. Pupils participate fully in worship and particularly enjoy the singing, which is very good. They know over fifty religious songs by heart and often accompany them with percussion instruments. They understand worship as a time "to learn about God and Jesus", "to learn how to pray to God" and "to learn to do the right thing." Many parents reported that their children talk about school worship at home and sing the songs. Pupils are developing an understanding of the Church of England through their worship, particularly through their regular contact with the Vicar. They also appreciate the special services when they worship in the local church building; and they love the annual festival in Rochester Cathedral, where they always make a meaningful contribution to the worship theme.

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

The school's self-evaluation as a Church school is accurate and gives scope for further development. The school makes clear in its documentation its status as a Church of England school and its Christian aims. It is therefore known in the local community as a Church school and many parents choose it for this reason, even though they may not be church-goers themselves. The headteacher has played a crucial role in developing the distinctive Christian character of the school. She has been fully supported in this by the governing body and her staff, many of whom are church members. The Vicar has fulfilled his role well as a link-governor, helping to monitor RE and Collective Worship and to see through developments, with the result that both are of a high standard. An indication of the good support for RE is the Creative RE fortnight for pupils last Summer, with a day run by Barnabas (Bible Reading Fellowship), preceded by staff training. This resulted in some exceptionally perceptive work. The headteacher has made good use of Diocesan training, such as their Early Headship course, which has brought a mutual benefit of linking with another excellent Church infant school. All stakeholders have been involved in evaluating the Christian aspects of school life, including questionnaires to parents and questions to pupils with their answers scribed by a school governor. Responses have been very positive and informative, and have led to some developments. There is a strong and developing two-way relationship with St. Nicholas Church. The Vicar commits regular time to visit the school each week and his spiritual and pastoral role is valued by the whole school community.