

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Stephen's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Albyn Road
Deptford
London
SE8 4ED

Diocese: Southwark

Local authority: Lewisham

School's Unique reference number: 209 3597

Dates of inspection: 16 January 2008

Date of last inspection: July 2003

Headteacher: Ann Bull

Chair of Governors: Revd Geoffrey Kirk

Inspector's name with National Society inspector's No: Christine Smyth (NSI 459)

School context

St Stephen's is an oversubscribed, one form entry voluntary aided school in Lewisham, serving children from three to eleven years. The vast majority of learners are from practising Christian families. Other faith groups are also represented. Children come from a diverse range of social, economic and cultural backgrounds. The proportions of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and those whose first language is not English are far higher than in most schools.

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

St Stephen's is an outstanding school with a unique, distinctive and overt Christian ethos which pervades all areas of its life and work. Day by day both staff and governors demonstrate their strong commitment to its Christian foundation. They live out the Christian Gospel by ensuring that every member of the school community is made to feel special, and valued. A real sense of spirituality permeates the whole school community.

Established strengths

- The Christian vision and inspirational leadership of the Headteacher, staff and governors.
- The central role that worship plays in the life of the school community which spiritually enriches the lives of children and adults alike.
- A strong and highly motivated Christian community which is welcoming, inclusive and harmonious, where children are nurtured and supported.

Focus for development

- Raise further the above average standards in Religious Education (RE) through the development of learners' self assessment and the tracking of individual pupil's progress.

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

Through its unique and distinctive Christian character, the school as a whole community makes outstanding provision in meeting the needs of all learners. Children enjoy school; they feel special and valued and speak of being treated with respect and genuine concern for their well-being. They were eager to say that all the adults in the school were friendly and cared about them. "Everyone gets on really well, there's a friendly atmosphere – so we can get on well, be safe, be happy and be ourselves!". Learners enjoy their work and co-operate and collaborate fully with each other and with adults in the school. Their self-esteem is high and they demonstrate self-confidence and considerable independence which enables them to optimise learning opportunities. Children at St

Stephen's achieve well; they support each other with older pupils engaging in a really positive manner with their younger peers. All this is a powerful reflection of the school's Christian commitment to each individual in its aims. The Christian values of the school enrich the spiritual, social, moral and cultural development of all pupils. Children are outward looking. They find ways of actively supporting those less fortunate than themselves. They have an understanding of and empathy with those of different cultures and belief systems. For example learners in Years 5 cited lessons on Judaism as being particularly enjoyable, saying they were "new to them" and they were able to compare the differences with Christianity. Parents clearly enjoyed their children being known and loved as individuals by staff. Everything that goes on in school is seen as part of the school's Christian Mission. They enjoyed joining the children in acts of worship. As one parent said, "St Stephen's is pastorally and spiritually amazing". Another stated that the school "meets all the children's needs – it's not just Christian in name, it is Christian in reality!" There are spiritually uplifting periods of worship in school and in church. One parent reflected that within the school, "There is a relaxed but ordered atmosphere ...God is here".

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

The collective worship of the school is at the heart of its life, rich and varied in style. The active, joyful participation of all adults and children present is almost tangible. A Year 6 girl stated emphatically, "Assembly has such a big impact – if there were no assemblies the school wouldn't be able to call itself a Christian school. It's important to pray and worship as a (school) family". During the pupil led act of worship observed, pupils entered quietly to music, and were interested, attentive and engaged throughout. Year 6 pupils, through their drama, provided a strong visual focus which helped the whole school, together with governors and parents, to consider how to deal with dilemmas. Pupils and staff sang and played enthusiastically, pupils were keen to answer questions, contribute ideas and generally participate, demonstrating mature, thoughtful positive attitudes. Strong leadership by the Headteacher and co-ordinator ensure that worship has a powerful impact on the school community. Planning is effective and provides a wide range of relevant experiences for staff and learners alike. The vicar is actively involved in worship in the school, enriching pupils' experiences and effectively developing their understanding of faith and practice. Links with the parishes are good. Worship related to festivals or special occasions in one of the churches deepens learners' appreciation of worship in a broader context. This enables learners to experience different forms and styles of worship including an understanding of elements of the Anglican tradition. Pupils and staff value the time for prayer and reflection as well as the opportunity to participate actively in school worship. One young pupil reflected learners' very positive attitude to worship when he said, "It's really encouraging to think about God!". Others agreed and spoke of how "praising God 'in a good way' has had a really positive impact on our lives".

Religious Education is outstanding.

RE has a high profile in the curriculum; it is recognised by staff, children, governors and parents as being of tremendous importance. Planning is innovative, creative and well organised with many opportunities for learners to participate through first hand experience. Learners display great enthusiasm and extremely positive attitudes to the subject. This subject, through its content and creative presentation contributes very well to learners' spiritual, moral social and cultural development. Pupils are actively engaged in their learning and their knowledge and understanding is good. The distinctive character of this Christian school is demonstrated through the very confident way in which learners speak, role play and write in RE lessons and through the passion, commitment and confidence of the teachers and support staff. The quality of teaching and learning is mostly outstanding enabling learners to develop a very good understanding of Christianity, and of Judaism and Islam. Children in the foundation stage were able to understand and reflect accurately the emotions of the characters in a bible story. They could also relate these to their own feelings and articulate clearly how to show friendship. Learners acknowledged that RE lessons were challenging and made them question and think. A Year 4 pupil expressed her particular enjoyment of an activity in which she had to decide whether various words or phrases related to Christianity, to Islam or to both religions, "It wasn't easy, it really made me think – but I realised how much I'd learned.". The involvement of the clergy and the use of the local churches enrich learners understanding, particularly of Anglican worship. Very good quality displays to illustrate Christianity and other world faiths are evident throughout the school. Children referred to them during discussion - they served as reminders of prayers they had written as well as reinforcing the learning.

Children make good progress and standards achieved in RE are in line with those achieved in Maths, which are above average. Assessment procedures are established and learners are able to evaluate their success against their learning objectives, and know how well they have achieved. However, the Headteacher and RE subject leader have rightly identified the assessment of RE as an area for further development in order to achieve even higher standards, for example in line with the very good levels English and Science.

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

The Headteacher's strong and overt Christian leadership, ably supported by the staff and governors, provides a powerful Christian vision which pervades the whole of school life. The vision is shared by the whole school community and is explicit in every aspect of school life. The governors are all involved in actively promoting the school's Christian status. Links between the school, the parish and neighbouring churches and the community are very strong and effective with pupils visiting the churches and taking part in services. The vicar provides an active and supportive presence, giving a clear Anglican lead. He takes part in and contributes to collective worship, RE and pastoral care. A real sense of spirituality and harmony permeates St Stephen's school.

The Co-ordinator for collective worship and RE is enthusiastic, committed and reflective. With the encouragement and support of the Headteacher she has undertaken appropriate professional development and has been extremely effective giving staff clear guidance and support. All members of the school community are involved in the evaluation of the school and in development planning. Self evaluation, using the diocesan toolkit, indicates judgments which are honest and accurate. Governors see RE and worship as central to the school. The vicar and other governors who are able to visit the school monitor the collective worship programme and observe RE lessons. Governors receive an annual report on RE and join in a shared 'development day' with staff. Governors also review the surveys completed by the children in the class with which they have a link. Children's views and those of staff are fully represented in the development of the environment. Staff recruitment, induction and development processes ensure that the school's Christian character and mission are clearly understood.

The school ethos, the pastoral care and the prayerful support provided for children and for their families is very much appreciated by parents. They believe that their children are happy and safe; and that they are being provided with the educational and spiritual foundations upon which they will continue to build their lives. They clearly consider that St Stephen's as a church school plays a central and valued role in the community.