



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St John's CE Primary School

Portland Road
Kingston upon Thames
Surrey
KT1 2SG

Diocese: Southwark

Local authority: Royal Kingston upon Thames

Dates of inspection: 1 April 2014

Date of last inspection: April 2009

School's unique reference number: 102589

Headteacher: Lynn Halliday (*Acting*)

Inspector's name and number: Shaun Burns (Jo Fageant (*Assessor*))

School context

St John's Church of England School is an over-subscribed one-form entry voluntary-aided school in Kingston with pupils aged 3 – 11. The school serves a suburban area, generally favourable in its socio-economic character. The majority of pupils are White British with approximately 23% from other ethnic groups. About half the learners are from practising Christian families whilst some other faith groups are represented. The number of pupils with special educational needs is below the national average, as is the number entitled to free school meals. There is currently an acting headteacher and deputy headteacher, a new headteacher has been appointed from September 2014.

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

- Religious Education (RE) is a key contributor to the effectiveness and distinctiveness of St John's through which a deep understanding of Christianity is developed alongside growing an integral awareness of and respect for other faiths.
- Collective worship and personal spirituality are at the centre of the school, with their positive impact being clearly articulated by members of the school community.
- The consistently rich and distinctively Christian ethos of the school shapes the community's approach to all that it does in its daily life.

Areas to improve

- Review the school's understanding of itself as a church school to ensure that all members of the community have a shared understanding of its Christian vision.
- The Governors should develop an explicit cycle of regular evaluation of the impact of Christian distinctiveness against the current National Society criteria so it can be used with understanding to support the school's continuing outstanding effectiveness.

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

'We just do it! . . . To live out the Christian faith, it's second nature', expressed different members of St John's community. This Christian character is evident everywhere in the school. A deeply engrained Christian ethos creates a very positive and caring atmosphere which supports excellent attendance, well-being and achievement amongst all groups, together with outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school uses its Christian character to shape relationships and its high expectations of all: a pupil with behavioural and emotional difficulties commented, 'The school wants me to do well in life'. Staff take time to value each individual and support them: 'Each child is precious to God', spoke one stakeholder. All stakeholders highlight the caring community of St John's; many attribute this to the strong connection between the school and St John's Church. One parent having faced difficulties outside school appreciated how the school had supported her and her child, 'All are looked after and I've been looked after. . . They stuck by me.' The school has strong bonds across age groups with the Buddy System, Friendship Bench and Peer Mediators. A Year 6 pupil said, "We don't want people to feel lonely, Jesus Christ said 'Love one another as you love yourself.'" Creative cross-curricular experiences enable pupils to grow as spiritual learners. Work about crosses around the world shows how learners are fully aware Christianity is a multi-cultural world faith. Through the school's inclusive approach learners develop an open mind, a deep respect, appreciation and understanding towards diversity within the wider world. Whilst the living out of a Christian character is accurately expressed as just being a natural way for the school community, a lack of clarity by many indicates the school has not developed a shared understanding of what defines its distinctiveness or an analysis of the impact this has on the school's effectiveness. Some members of the school community succinctly express and attribute the school's success to doing it 'all through gospel values'. However the deeply-embedded Christian spirit informing the school's rich provision is not consistently explicitly promoted. Consequently other members of the school community are not yet able to articulate clearly the difference that the school's strong Christian nature makes on its learners.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is understood by the school to be a time of making a difference. Christian teaching underpinned by biblical material and with a regular focus on Jesus Christ and the Trinity is a strong feature of the clear programme planned by the collective worship co-ordinator, acting headteacher and the team vicar. Learners can identify clearly Anglican traditions from those included in worship whilst it remains inclusive, enabling all participants to grow from it. As a result learners build up a powerful understanding of Anglican faith. This is enhanced by displays of bible verses which link Christian values and participants' own lives. Weekly merit collective worships celebrate all achievement including examples where distinctly Christian values have been lived out. Personal and shared prayer is central to the school's life, noticeable in the reflective areas around the school. Pupils are currently working with Kingston University to design and construct a Swedish woodland chapel in the grounds, to be used for prayer. A Year 6 pupil commented, 'I like it when we have a minute of silence, to think and pray to God'. The use of music, visual images and space leads to the development of spirituality in those present, seen in the collective worship observed when Year 6 pupils sang, inviting the listeners to 'Cast Your Cares on The Lord'. Classes regularly plan and lead collective worship in the school, developing engagement with and understanding of worship. The impact of worship is regularly tracked and evaluated by the faith group, to inform developments. The team vicar writes annually to parents of leavers inviting their children to be confirmed, showing a commitment to sustain the Christian faith experienced in school. A member of staff said, 'Some of the topics for our collective worship give me time to pause and reflect on issues in my own life. It is sometimes, surprisingly, helpful to hear a child's view on moral and spiritual issues. I do learn a lot from them'.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

RE is a key strength; the subject makes an exceptional contribution to the school's Christian distinctiveness. The RE subject leader is a very able, skilled and supportive leader who is passionate about the subject and the difference it makes to the learners. She leads the subject with dedication and effectiveness, ensuring the subject keeps a high profile, the relevance of it is grasped by everyone and that all pupils are mostly given the best possible learning experience. This results in standards of all groups aligning with national expectations and a significant number of pupils achieving higher. This corresponds with achievement in other core subjects which the school knows from rigorous tracking of individual pupils' progress. Along with self-assessment strategies for learners, this was the focus for development from the last inspection, which has been met. Learners speak with enthusiasm about RE and show challenging learning and deep thinking that has been internalised, developing an excellent understanding of the Christian faith which is the major area of study. The study of other faiths is enhanced by contributions from staff of those faiths and visits to different places of worship. All this ensures a broad, exciting and engaging curriculum that teaches all learners the skills and values to understand similarities and differences between faiths. RE displays are evident in every classroom and in central areas. Time is given in all RE lessons for reflection, enabling learners to develop spiritually and to relate their learning to questions of meaning. In an outstanding lesson Year 1 pupils were asked questions promoting deep thinking and encouraged to create their own Easter symbols. One child responded, 'I'm going to draw a very light cross because Jesus rose'. There is a constant quest to take the subject forward. Feedback to teachers on the quality of teaching and learning, whilst supportive and highlighting areas for development, as appropriate, does not always challenge thoroughly enough. However the extensive support, monitoring and evaluation of all aspects of the subject lead to an aspirational vision for the subject being achieved.

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

All leaders and managers of St John's unite in a commitment to a strong Christian ethos which underpins how the school operates, 'We try and live out God's love by us'. Some leaders can express clearly their understanding of this ethos and the distinctively Christian values and beliefs on which it is founded. However others, including governors, are less clear. This lack of a shared understanding means the evaluation of this aspect of school life is not as sharply effective as it should be. Many people are involved in making school life a rich experience at St John's, such as the Parents and Staff Association, strong links with the diocese and the wider community. The school is a 'giving' school, reaching out to others, for example by supporting the improvement of a local community school. St John's recognises that they themselves were given something back that helped them grow also. These links benefit learners with a broad and relevant education, building up their understanding of the faith as well as the local, national and global communities of which they are a part. The RE subject leader and collective worship co-ordinator is given good support in fulfilling her role, enabling her to ensure these elements continue to be cornerstones of the school's Christian character. The school has its own self-evaluation processes which allow leaders to have a good understanding of the school's performance. This enables the school to plan effectively for all to achieve well. However there is less clarity amongst some leaders, again particularly governors, about the impact of the distinctive Christian character on pupils' achievement. This is as a consequence of not having a regular cycle of self-evaluation against *The Evaluation Schedule for the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools*. A faith group pupil talked about all they do in faith will '... make us a more loving, friendly and caring school'. As the leadership and management undergoes changes in some key roles, the school has this good foundation upon which to take this forward and review its understanding of itself as a church school. This will be especially important to ensure that all that makes St John's outstanding is sustained.