

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Saint John's Church of England (Aided) Primary School
Wheatly Avenue
Trent Vale
Stoke on Trent
ST4 6NS

Diocese: Lichfield

Local authority: Stoke

Dates of inspection: 11th March 2010

Date of last inspection: 25th June 2007

School's unique reference number: 124309

Headteacher: Mrs Pauline Bloor

Inspector's name and number: Marion Hillaby : 73

School context

The school was created through the amalgamation of two primary schools. The initial opposition to this amalgamation has now largely been overcome. The school serves an area of significant economic and social deprivation. The majority of learners are from a white British background although 16% of learners have English as an additional language.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St. John's Aided Primary School as a Church of England school are good.

The school's mission statement, "*Hand in hand we pray together, learn together and grow together*" underpins the life of this Church school. Its inclusive nature, at the heart of the community it serves, is based on Christian values of honesty, forgiveness, love and caring thereby confirming its distinctive Christian character.

Established strengths

- The strong leadership of the headteacher, well supported by the staff and governors, together committed to creating a place of security and acceptance for all learners.
- Relationships throughout the school which are based on a celebration of everyone being different but special.
- Collective worship is an important element of the life of the school and is well planned to involve and engage all learners.

Focus for development

- Develop specific areas inside and outside the school where learners can increase their spiritual awareness through quiet reflection and prayer.
- Ensure that classroom worship and prayer is consistent across the school and matches the best examples of collective worship.
- Develop the links between the school, the local Church and community through the use of St. John's Community Hall.

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

"*We are all different but in God's eyes we are all the same*" is the clear Christian message given by the school and understood by the vast majority of learners. The strong emphasis on celebrating difference and valuing everyone as special, impacts on the learners' self confidence and their relationships with each other and with the adults whom they trust to care for them. The strength of relationships, grounded in Christian values, is an important way in which learners' spiritual development is encouraged. The school's mission statement is on all documentation and is at the core of the school's distinctive Christian character. In the foundation stage, the learners were observed to be literally hand in hand praying and learning

together. Forgiveness is a central Christian value and learners and their parents know that each day is a new beginning. The carer of a looked after child described the school as “*the only stable thing in the child's life*”. Other parents confirmed the impact that the care and love shown to learners, especially during difficult and challenging times, has made on their children. The whole school's participation in a Faith and Understanding week strengthened learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and the community cohesion plan, although still in its early stages of implementation, will further such development. The Church school status is proclaimed through Christian signs and symbols throughout the school. Some learners take the opportunity to write their own prayers to put on the prayer tree or to use in acts of worship. Each classroom has a worship area but there is little evidence that learners use these or other areas of the school for quiet reflection and prayer. Plans have already been made to create a reflection garden which will give learners a place of quiet where they can develop their spiritual awareness through prayer.

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

Worship plays an important part in the life of the school and in the spiritual development of the learners. Responses to a recent questionnaire show that most of the learners enjoy coming together for worship and over 90% value the opportunity it gives them to think and reflect. The headteacher's description of the hall in which whole school and key stage acts of worship are held as “*enveloping*” reflects the importance given to the inclusiveness of worship for all learners regardless of their different faith traditions. The well balanced programme of themes gives learners opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding of Bible stories, important festivals of other world faiths and aspects of Anglican tradition. Currently the learners' understanding of Anglican tradition is satisfactory but the school has identified this as a focus for development. The quality of the Acts of Worship observed was good and learners were actively involved through dramatised stories, use of puppets, singing and leading prayers. The foundation stage learners showed a good level of knowledge and understanding, as exemplified by the comment of one young learner that, “*Jesus lights up our lives*” when the candle was lit. Older learners commented that they liked the guidance that the Headteacher regularly gives them in reflection time to respond to what they have heard through actions in their own lives and to hold on to a thought. This strengthens the impact of the act of worship on the learners throughout the day. The Headteacher has acted to address the points raised by the learners in the recent questionnaire, by advising staff to give a greater focus to classroom Acts of Worship. It is important to ensure that there is consistency of opportunity for all learners to develop their spiritual awareness through worship. Foundation Governors now play their part in monitoring Acts of Worship in a more formal manner as part of a focused approach to monitoring across the school. This is in line with a recommendation from the previous SIAS inspection. Although there is teaching about the Eucharist, celebration of this sacrament is still not embedded in the school's worship pattern.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good.

The school's effective and valued religious education co-ordinator has very recently retired through ill health but she and the new co-ordinator worked together to ensure that the subject continues to be well taught and supported. The profile of the subject has been raised by the move to class teachers delivering the lessons to their own classes and good quality teaching has led to improved progress and achievement which is now good. Throughout the school the lessons were leading to a celebration of the first Easter story. Lessons were age-appropriate, interesting and differentiated for the range of learners' abilities so that they were able to build on previous knowledge to deepen and extend their understanding of the events of Holy Week. Good use was made of different teaching and learning styles. Learners were particularly confident in working collaboratively in group activities, listening to each others' views with interest and sensitivity. The importance given to R.E was exemplified in the Year 1 classroom where the role play area represents Jerusalem based on the story of Holy Week. Year 4 learners were asked to consider the feelings of Jesus when he was betrayed and then denied by His “friends”. This encouraged their spiritual development through considering similar times in their own lives when they were “let down” by their friends. The Church is used as a resource for R.E and the vicar has involved learners in a mock wedding and baptism in the Church so strengthening their understanding of Anglican rituals. R.E is effectively used as a way of promoting community cohesion and a greater knowledge of other faiths through visits to different places of worship as part of the Faith and Understanding week. Learners' comments on the display relating to these visits reflect a respectful attitude towards the

practices of other faiths. There is a growing use of ICT and cross curricular links in R.E lessons. Co-ordinator monitoring of lessons and learners' books is beginning to have an impact as part of the school's drive to raise standards.

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

The Headteacher has led the school with outstanding commitment since its creation, four years ago, as a result of the amalgamation of a community and a Church of England primary school. *"School leaders have won the confidence of parents and have set the school on a firm path to improvement"*.(OFSTED February 2010). Parents spoken to during the inspection were fulsome in their praise for the headteacher's dedication and her success in sharing her vision of the school as a caring, secure community founded on Christian values, with staff and other stakeholders. Members of the school council expressed confidence that their voice was heard and cited examples of how the Headteacher had sought their views on ways to improve provision and also on which charities to support through fundraising. The vicar and other foundation governors are pro-active in their support for the school and have been involved in school self evaluation and monitoring. They believe that as a result of working closely together as a Governing body to support the Headteacher and staff *"as a school we have grown spiritually"*. The distance between the school and the Parish Church makes it difficult for the whole school to visit the Church regularly but the headteacher and vicar are keen to strengthen links between the school, the church and local community as recommended in the previous SIAS report. The planned involvement of learners in activities in the recently opened St. John's Community Hall is a good way of doing this. The vicar's belief, expressed on the school's web-site, that, *"It is very important that as a Church school we continue to reflect the love of Christ and to ensure that the relevance of the Christian faith is kept to the fore of pupils and staff"* is a strong affirmation of the partnership between the school and Church.

SIAS report March 2010 St. John's C.E. Aided Primary School, Stoke ST4 6NS.