

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St Ippolyts Church of England Aided Primary School

Address Ashbrook Lane, St Ippolyts, Hitchin, SG4 7PB

Previous SIAMS grade: Outstanding

This inspection grade: Outstanding

Local authority: Hertfordshire

Dates of inspection: 24 February 2015

Date of last inspection: 11 September 2009

School's unique reference number: 117440

Headteacher: Rachel Peddie

Inspector's name and number: Lilian Weatherley 42

School context

St Ippolyts is a smaller than average primary school on the edge of Hitchin, with 145 pupils on roll. Although the school serves the local villages there are now a greater proportion of non-village children attending from the towns of Hitchin and Stevenage. The majority of pupils are of white British origin but there has been a steady increase in other ethnic groups, which reflects the changing make-up of the local communities. Pupils are taught in four mixed age classes and one for Year 6 pupils. The proportion of pupils with disabilities and special educational needs is above average but those supported by pupil premium is less than half the national average. The school is currently amending its admissions policy to place the school closer to the geographical centre of the parish.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Ippolyts C of E Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The school's distinctively Christian family atmosphere has a significant impact on pupils' high achievement and progress.
- There is a strong link between the newly introduced Christian Values Education Programme and pupils' attendance and exemplary behaviour.
- The inclusive, holistic and high quality teaching, which is supported by Christian values, enables all pupils to achieve to the best of their abilities
- The high quality displays reflect the value put on the pupils and create an inspirational learning environment in which pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development can flourish.
- The Young Worship Group initiative has engaged the pupils and is having a significant impact on their understanding of Christian prayer and worship

Areas to improve

- Ensure that all work sheets used for religious education (RE) allow pupils to demonstrate what they really know, understand and can do in preparation for assessment without levels
- Foster closer links with the church congregation to help the pupils' understanding of Eucharistic worship

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

From the moment visitors walk through the doors they are met with an exciting and vibrant school. Displays reflect the highest quality of pupils' work and young pupils are engaged and excited by their learning. Achievement and progress are high and above the national average. Pupils all speak with pride about their school and how the teachers work hard to make their learning fun. This is reflected in good attendance and exemplary behaviour. When asked, many pupils could not find anything that they would want to change or improve about their school. Relationships are excellent and parents are eager to praise the school's Christian family atmosphere, explaining how it is not only the pupils who feel safe and supported. Parents quoted times when they were in need and were greatly supported by the headteacher and the staff. Pupils' personal development is a priority. Each pupil is valued as being unique and those with special educational needs or vulnerable pupils have clear interventions in place, are well cared for and their needs met. The chair of governors commented, 'Children have come into this school with significant needs. The school puts interventions in place which are in the best interest of each individual child. Within a short time these children settle and participate fully in the life of the school.' The recent Christian values education programme has had a significant impact on the whole community. Muslim and Christian parents are impressed by how the programme underpins the whole curriculum and has had a significant impact on their children. The school's values are distinctively Christian. Each value is linked into the curriculum, worship, a biblical text and where possible to a worldwide issue. The current value of 'justice' linked to British values is known and understood by parents, governors and all pupils. One younger pupil commented, 'The values teach us life lessons'. The school places a high emphasis on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through creativity and the creative arts. As a consequence, pupils show a high respect for other beliefs and cultures. They speak passionately about the themed art days when they have studied Africa, India, Australia and China. At the time of the inspection the school was alive and vibrant with dragons, fans, lanterns and Chinese costumes following the recent art day on China for Chinese New Year. The clay terracotta warriors and other artefacts made by the pupils were exceptional. RE makes a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development. For example, the introduction of the 'Big Question' in RE has led to pupils thinking more deeply, reflecting and questioning. It has improved their confidence and enabled them to articulate their thoughts with other pupils and adults. The current question 'Peace is....' has created much debate and the pupils have designed a Peace Garden for the school grounds. Pupils enjoy a wide breadth of experiences, cross-curricular activities and opportunities ranging from art to sport and music. Pupils in the choir spoke of how they sang at the Albert Hall and the O2 Arena for the anniversary of the First World War. Pupils understand the value of service and caring for others. They raise a considerable amount of money each year for charities, including Comic Relief, Children in Need, the Hitchin food bank. The pupils were also keen to talk about the three guide dogs for the blind that they have been sponsoring and watching grow.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Prayer and worship have a high profile in the school, with a strong focus on the life and teachings of Jesus and the Trinity. Statutory requirements are met and a carefully planned programme supports pupils' knowledge and understanding of Christian values and the liturgical year. Worship is inclusive; it is enjoyed and appreciated by all and has a range of approaches which inspire and motivate pupils. Excellent use is made of technology to create an atmosphere for prayer and reflection in which pupils' spiritual development is paramount. Following the last SIAS report the school has created a 'Young Worship Group' that takes a key role in planning and leading the worship, sometimes with staff but also alone. This development has had a significant impact on the pupils. One pupil said, 'I like the school because we have a young worship group so we can learn more about values. Doing our own assembly has helped me with my confidence'. The worship observed on the theme of justice was a clear example of how this group works with the headteacher to plan and deliver high quality worship. One member of the group said, 'I like my school because it is a church school and we can enjoy and learn about religious things and have clubs where we reflect and plan collective worship. I also enjoy singing hymns and saying prayers to God.' Pupils show respect as they enter worship and from Year R to Year 6 they sing with gusto and enthusiasm. Pupils of all ages contribute and eagerly volunteer to take a role or answer questions. The systematic evaluation of worship by pupils has led to the introduction of an altar with a cloth and candle as a focus for prayer and worship. All pupils know the Lord's Prayer, key Christian greetings and understand the Trinity at an age-appropriate level. The school day is punctuated by opportunities for prayer and reflection and RE lessons begin with a spiritual moment of reflection. Pupils demonstrate a clear understanding of prayer and worship and what prayer means to them. One pupil commented, 'I like our class prayer basket'. The incumbent is a regular visitor to the school and works with the Young Worship Group. This helps with their planning and theological understanding. Pupils go to the church on a regular basis and celebrate the key festivals of the church year. These visits are very popular with the pupils and parents but with only 120 seats space is limited. In the words of the pupils, 'I would change the services in church by having more of them.' 'We could improve the school by going to the church more.'

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Statutory requirements are met. Standards of achievement and progress in RE are high and equal to those in other subjects, especially English. Teaching is never less than good and teachers bring excitement and vibrancy to their RE lessons, ensuring that this is a popular subject. 'I love RE because we have deep thinking and our lessons are lots of fun'. 'I like RE because we can find out a lot of things about the world that we didn't know'. 'I really like to learn about God and Jesus and how the world was created'. Teachers have high expectations, for example the Years 4 and 5 pupils exploring the creation story and discussing the 'Fall'. Artefacts, creativity, drama, art and technology are all used to engage pupils with their learning and create an inspirational and sensory environment. The philosophy of 'no failure in this class' is successful. The new initiative on 'Big Questions' is also having a significant impact. Pupils are well motivated, confident and eager to talk, debate and question. Pupils have a secure knowledge and understanding of Christianity and the other faiths studied. For example, pupils in Year 6 were eager to explain their designs of clay wall tiles depicting the Easter story and those in Years 1 and 2 were excited to explain about the festival of Shabbat and the Havdalah ceremony. The experiential learning activity of smelling and then making spice boxes ensured pupils not only know about Havdalah but also have a deep understanding of what it might be like to be Jewish and take part. 'I like everything in RE. This morning we decorated a spice box'. The new subject leader (September 2014) ensures that there are detailed and differentiated lesson plans. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is enhanced by built-in opportunities for reflection and links to the values programme. For example, the Years R/I class was exploring the story of Jonah and the whale. Pupils enjoyed the lighting of a candle and the preliminary reflection time before the main body of the lesson, focusing on 'justice' and how God wants everyone to be just and fair to each other. RE is enhanced through making links with belief and practice. The incumbent, pupils from other faith communities and their parents regularly support RE lessons and ensure that pupils have a deeper knowledge and understanding of the faiths studied. Following the last SIAS report rigorous and extensive monitoring and evaluation has taken place including the use of headteachers from other local church schools to moderate judgements. The result is highly effective assessment procedures and additional worksheets to assess levels. With the demise of this form of assessment using levels the worksheets are no longer appropriate and school is having to consider adapting its practice to ensure that the rigour remains and they can track progress in other ways.

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

The school's aim to 'provide the best possible education for each child within the context of a caring Christian community' is lived out at St Ippolyts on a daily basis. Issues from the last SIAS inspection have been addressed in full and the school has moved forward with its distinctive Christian character. The headteacher, staff and governing body have a clear vision and aims for the school. These are based on Christian values, which are not only articulated fully but modelled and promoted by all. The school has been through a difficult time during recent months and staff, governors and parents acknowledge the ways in which the school united as a Christian family to support each other. Relationships are excellent and the headteacher and staff are praised for their constant care, compassion and support given to pupils and parents alike. Governors are well informed about standards and data; they contribute fully to the SIAMS evaluation of the school's Christian character. Alongside the senior leaders they ensure that all areas of the school's distinctiveness, including RE and worship, retain a high profile. They know the school and the pupils well and fully understand the impact of Christian values on pupil achievement and well-being. Self-evaluation is robust and provides an honest view of the school's performance and areas for development. For example, a member of the governing body attends each school council meeting. Partnerships are strong, especially those with other church schools through the small schools cluster. This has enabled school leaders to observe other schools, share best practice and provide support where needed. Providing an external view of the school's performance has impacted in a positive way. Rigorous monitoring takes place and the links with other local church schools ensures that evaluations are moderated, fair and accurate. The headteacher actively encourages staff development and the school has been used by the diocese for the training of 'aspirant church school headteachers'. Links with the incumbent are excellent and provide a positive working relationship. She is a valued member of the governing body and offers pastoral care to all. She is well known and popular with the pupils, staff and parents. Members of the Parochial Church Council (PCC) are invited to school events and the chair of governors gives regular reports on the school's progress as a church school to the PCC. Unfortunately, joint services and the meeting of pupils with members of the church congregation appear to be difficult to arrange. Pupils studying the Eucharist in RE, for example, do not have an opportunity to join with the congregation to observe or join in Eucharistic worship. Links with the diocese are strong. There is good liaison with the diocesan office staff at St Albans and school staff regularly attend diocesan training. The headteacher and the RE subject leader have spoken at diocesan courses and featured in a National Society publication entitled 'Strong Schools for Strong Communities'. Recently the diocese has been working with the school to change the admissions policy to take account of the changing population.

SIAMS report February 2015 St Ippolyts Church of England Primary School