



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St Nicholas Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Station Road
Child Okeford
Blandford, Dorset
DT11 8EL

Diocese: Salisbury

Local authority: Dorset

Date of inspection: 2 May 2014

Date of last inspection: 3 June 2009

School's unique reference number: 113796

Headteacher: Tracy Maley

Inspector's name and number: Andrew Rickett 201

School context

St Nicholas is a smaller than average rural primary school with 148 children arranged into 6 classes. The large majority of children are of a white British heritage. More than half the children come from outside the school catchment area. The number of children with learning needs is above the national average. The proportion eligible for the pupil premium is below the national average. Children enter the school with levels of attainment generally in line with national expectations. Attendance is broadly in line with the national average. The current headteacher was appointed to the substantive post in September 2013 following a year as acting headteacher.

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

- The quality of opportunities for children to develop their personal spirituality makes a significant impact on their wellbeing and learning.
- Explicit Christian values are central to the high quality of relationships that permeate the whole school community.
- The commitment of the school's leaders and managers to the ongoing development of the school as a church school ensures that the impact of the Christian ethos is continually growing.

Areas to improve

- Refine the recent developments in the assessment of religious education (RE) so that there is a greater understanding among teachers of children's progress in their knowledge and understanding of the subject.
- Develop the role of the recently formed ethos group to lead the monitoring and evaluation of the school as a church school and ensure that children are included in this process.
- Strengthen partnerships between the school and the local community.

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

The school has made good progress since the previous inspection in taking forward the impact of its Christian character. Since the appointment of the current headteacher, this progress has accelerated even further. For example, a review of the school's values in April 2013 resulted in the identification of a core set of three core values that are now firmly embedded throughout the life of the school. These values are explicitly underpinned by a Christian understanding that is developed and explored through collective worship. Children have a good grasp of the Biblical roots of the core values of love, hope and trust. The development of a shared interpretation of spirituality among the staff, and an understanding of how this can be promoted throughout the whole curriculum, has been a significant development in recent years. Placing spirituality as a priority for development as a church school, so that it drives the whole curriculum, has resulted in some different approaches to the way that subjects are taught. For example, teachers explain how a greater emphasis on exploring the nature of self and beauty has enabled them to look at the curriculum in a new way and opened up opportunities to plan their lessons in different ways. This is making an impact on the quality of learning and contributes to the good progress that children make academically. Opportunities for spiritual development are further enhanced through reflection areas in each classroom. Relationships throughout the school are excellent and are based on the core values. Parents agree that staff in school model these values and that they are used to deal with any problems that might occur. Children have a good grasp of right from wrong and can articulate in a very mature way that values such as truthfulness and trust are not always straightforward and easy to deal with. Behaviour throughout the school is based on the core values and children say that they feel that school is a safe place and that they are comfortable to talk to their teachers with the confidence that they will be listened to with respect.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Children have a strong understanding that acts of worship are at the heart of what makes the school a distinctively Christian school. They articulate clearly the difference between assembly and worship. They explain that worship is a time to celebrate God and to talk to Him through prayer. Collective worship is outstanding because children explain that what they learn through Bible stories, and the opportunities to be still and reflect, are important to them because the messages they hear help them to learn how to live their lives. Parents say that their children talk about Bible stories and values at home and that they help their children to distinguish right from wrong. Acts of worship therefore make an impact on children both in school and beyond. The programme of themes for collective worship is explicitly based on Christian teaching and thoroughly planned to reflect the school's ethos and values as well as following events in the Anglican church year. The development of class based worship each week gives teachers the opportunity to explore worship themes in greater depth at a level appropriate to the age range. They are carefully planned and give teachers the necessary support to deliver them with confidence. Children take part in collective worship in family groups which very effectively creates a greater sense of the school as a single community in which older children help and support the younger ones. In this way, children have a greater sense of ownership of the actual worship itself. Children have good opportunities to be involved in planning acts of worship and regularly participate in them. There is scope for this to be improved further. Time for prayer and reflection are important aspects of worship and children have an excellent appreciation of the value of being still and having time to think about important issues. They talk very maturely about prayer and how it can help those in trouble. For example, older children explain how God helps people who are ill by giving them the strength to get through their illness. Children regard the local church as an integral part of worship through the regular visits each term to celebrate major Christian festivals and to mark the beginning and ending of each term. Whilst there is some monitoring of collective worship by governors, as well as feedback from interviews with children, it is an area that should be further developed by the recently formed ethos group.

The effectiveness of religious education is good

Leadership of RE is excellent. The RE coordinator is passionate about her subject and ensures that it has a high profile within the overall curriculum. She has a very secure understanding of the latest developments in RE and has accurately identified priorities for future development of the subject. Standards in religious education (RE) are broadly in line with national expectations for the vast majority of children by the time they leave the school at the end of Key Stage 2. They compare favourably with other core subjects in the school and children of all abilities make at least expected progress in RE. This represents good progress for children across their time in the school. The school has been developing its systems to accurately assess children's attainment in RE and this has been particularly successful through the use of Big Books which very effectively record children's progress in the various RE units covered. These books are now at the heart of the way that RE is assessed and mean that children's achievement is more closely matched to their ongoing learning in the classroom. They provide clear evidence of the way that children are developing their knowledge and understanding of concepts and skills in RE. These Big Books are used as an integral part of the lesson as a tool for learning and capture the immediacy of the children's thoughts and ideas. The school is aware that there is still some work to be done to ensure that teachers confidently assess all areas of RE particularly regarding the progress that children make as they move through the different levels. The overall quality of teaching in RE is good. The best teaching is characterised by the way that teachers plan innovative approaches to learning that enthuse and engage children in the subject. For example, a Key Stage 1 class were very keen to discuss in groups their understanding of Bible stories and the messages that they contain and then link them to the school's core values and finally to their own lives. A Key Stage 2 class challenged the children's understanding of heaven through the use of metaphors to explore life as a journey along a 'River of Dreams'. Religious education makes an important contribution to the promotion of the school's Christian ethos. Lessons make reference to the school's core values where appropriate and contribute significantly to the development of the children's spirituality. Units in the RE syllabus give older children the opportunity to explore their understanding of the nature of the Trinity.

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

The school's leaders and managers share a strong commitment to the Christian ethos. They have a passionate regard for the impact that the promotion of the core values and spirituality makes to the lives of the children. The headteacher is fervent in her belief that children are at the centre of the school's mission and clearly articulates its underpinning by the Christian ethos. This is shared and understood by governors and staff. Parents too have a very clear grasp of the way that the school's Christian character makes a distinctive contribution to the development of their children's wellbeing and creates a positive attitude towards learning. The headteacher is very well supported by the RE coordinator. Together they ensure that there is an accurate system that monitors the effectiveness of the school's RE, collective worship and ethos and evaluates next steps for improvement. Governors are informed of these but, with the recent formation of the ethos group, now have mechanism to become more involved in the actual evaluation process. The school is keen to involve children in this process as well. The school has made good progress since the last inspection in addressing the areas for development and in taking the school forward significantly by placing spiritual development more firmly at the heart of the curriculum. Relationships with the local church are strong and children regard the church as an integral part of being a church school. They talk about the parish church as being 'theirs'. The school has a good relationship with the diocese and value their advice and the training that they offer. Leadership of RE and collective worship is a strength of the school and both are managed with great passion which is reflected in the importance with which it is spoken about by children, parents and other members of staff.

