

Rusthall St Paul's Church of England Primary School

High Street
Rusthall
Tunbridge Wells
Kent
TN4 8RZ

Diocese: Rochester

Local authority: Kent

Date of inspection: 11 September 2012

Date of last inspection: 5 December 2008

School's unique reference number: 135164

Headteacher: Carolyn Cohen

Chair of Governors: Graeme Anderson

Inspector's name and number: John Ross (NS 476)

School context

Rusthall St Paul's is a Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School for pupils aged 4 to 11. There are 239 pupils on roll. Almost all pupils are of white British heritage. The proportion of pupils joining the school with an existing church connection is around 6%. The school operates in two fit for purpose buildings set in pleasant grounds. In June 2012, Ofsted judged the school as satisfactory and improving. The school has the Healthy School Award and Eco-School status and has recently gained a Bishop's Commendation Award from the diocese.

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

Rusthall St Paul's is a happy, open and inclusive community where Christian values underpin everything. Respect, care and especially Christian love are in evidence everywhere. Pupils, staff, parents and governors are proud of their Church school, and justifiably so.

Established strengths

- The Christian ethos, based on love, patience and kindness, exemplified through excellent relationships at every level
- The strong and visionary Christian leadership of the headteacher, well supported by senior staff and foundation governors
- 'Deep Learning Days' which enable the whole school to come together to celebrate major Christian festivals

Focus for development

- Create a spiritual garden in the school grounds as a place of reflection and retreat for everyone.
- Develop the use of teacher assessment in Religious Education (RE) in order to set pupils clear targets for improvement.

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

This school is wholly inclusive. All are welcome here, whatever their beliefs and background. Christian values, especially love, patience and kindness, permeate the life of this school. This is reflected in the excellent relationships and very good behaviour observed consistently across the school and throughout the day. There is a calm, orderly and happy atmosphere in which pupils are co-operative and polite. The vulnerable and disadvantaged are especially well cared for. Forgiveness and fresh chances characterise behaviour management. A buddy scheme gives leadership responsibility to all older pupils while helping younger ones feel safe. The Mission Statement, 'Be the best you can be,' provides a focus so that no groups are disadvantaged but all are nurtured to achieve their full potential, especially spiritually and socially. The school environment is outstanding in promoting pupils' spiritual development. Christian symbols and artefacts feature in attractive displays to be found in every classroom and many areas of the school. There are well used prayer stations in every classroom. The main hall features crosses made by pupils and a 'Fruits of the Spirit' display. Outside one building is an attractive mosaic featuring a cross. There are well developed plans to create an outdoor spiritual garden, a project which will involve both the school and the wider community. Support for local and national charities is strong and plans exist to extend this to support a school in Africa. A wide range of clubs and activities contribute to pupils' social and cultural development. The recent Bishop's Commendation Award is a clear endorsement of the school's distinctiveness as a Church school.

The impact of Collective Worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective Worship occupies a key place in the life of the school. This takes many forms, including whole school worship, house assembly, prayers said in the classroom and services in the parish church. Pupils take a significant and regular part in leading worship and enjoy it. On the day of the inspection, Year 6 pupils led the prayers and the enthusiastic singing (with actions), gave a Bible reading and commenced the assembly by bringing in a small cross. A rota ensures that all classes regularly take their turn at leading these aspects of Collective Worship. Worship is well planned, delivered and evaluated by all stakeholders, including pupils. It therefore has a strong impact on the spiritual development of all within the school. All staff, both teachers and support staff, regularly attend. Pupils are familiar with Anglican tradition and practice. For example, all joined in the responses used during assembly. Pupils in Year 6 experience Eucharistic worship at Rochester Cathedral. The incumbent is a familiar figure within the school and all classes attend the parish church regularly. 'Deep Learning Activity' days are a particular strength. These celebrate key Christian festivals and involve the whole school, always beginning with an act of worship. These days are led by the pupils themselves. Pupils are familiar with and knowledgeable about Christian festivals, including Christmas, Easter and Pentecost. Collective Worship is well resourced and state of the art audio-visual equipment, operated by pupils, has been installed in the main hall.

The effectiveness of Religious Education is good

Standards in RE are in line with national expectations and consistent with other core subjects in the school. Teaching is always at least good and sometimes outstanding. The best lessons are exemplified by high levels of subject knowledge, conveyed with enthusiasm and confidence through a wide range of learning activities. In one lesson observed, Year 6 pupils were fully engaged in a rapid sequence of activities relating to the Bible story of Adam and Eve. This included 'freeze-frame,' where photographs are taken, instantly displayed and discussed, 'performance poem,' where the whole class chants words related to the topic being discussed and individual written work. Excellent links were made between learning from the Bible story and problems in the modern world. Pupils showed imaginative and creative ideas. RE makes a strong contribution to the spiritual and moral development of pupils because it enables them to apply ideas learnt about religion to their own lives. One pupil spoke movingly about attending the funeral in church of a relative and feelings about the occasion. The diocesan syllabus for RE has been fully embedded since the last inspection and is used successfully for all classes. The focus is on Christianity but over time pupils learn about Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism. Year 5 pupils visit a local mosque. Pupils and staff regard RE as a popular and enjoyable subject and it makes a strong

contribution to the Christian character of the school. RE is ably and passionately led by its subject leader and is fully supported by the school's leadership and governors. Assessment for learning is not yet fully developed and this is being addressed through the improvement plan for RE. Capacity exists for further improvement in RE.

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

The Christian leadership of the headteacher is visionary and inspiring. She is well supported by senior staff and foundation governors. Their Christian vision is made into an everyday reality in the life of the school. The prospectus is very clear about what makes the school distinctive as a Church school. All stakeholders – pupils, parents, governors and staff - are involved in the school's self-evaluation as a Church school. This self-evaluation is honest and accurate. Foundation governors play a strong role in shaping the school's Christian ethos and meet regularly with senior staff to evaluate, discuss and plan for the future. Most parents are positive about the school. The school is working to increase parental involvement in developing its Church school identity. Teaching staff and support staff feel valued and included in the life of the school. Although not all have a Christian background, all are committed to the Christian values and ethos. Support for the professional development of staff is strong, with opportunities provided to create leaders for the future. The headteacher supports other Church schools by mentoring newly-appointed headteachers and meeting governors. Links with the diocese are strong and supportive. There are strong links with the parish church and incumbent and also with other local churches including those of other denominations as well as with the Muslim community in Tunbridge Wells. In the summer of 2012, local churches ran a holiday club on school premises, which was attended by 80 children. The school is fully involved with the local community. Its premises are used by community groups and pupils go out to sing for local residents. There were no key issues identified in the last inspection but the school continues to make progress as a Church school. Capacity remains for further improvement.