

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St. John's Voluntary Controlled CE Primary School, Tunbridge Wells

Cunningham Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN4 9EW

Diocese: Rochester

Local authority: Kent

Date of inspection: 4 October 2012

Dates of last inspection: 3-4 December 2007

School's unique reference number: 118611

Headteacher: Beverley Sulway

Chair of Governors: Richard Martin

Incumbent: Rev. Giles Walter

Inspector's name and number: Jan Thompson No 92

School context

St John's is a Church of England Primary School, situated just outside the parish of St John's in Tunbridge Wells. Its modern building is set in beautiful grounds. It is a very large, popular and successful school of 652 pupils. A range of backgrounds, religions and cultures is represented in the school, although most pupils are from White British and Christian families. The headteacher has been in post for just over four years.

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

St John's has made significant improvements since its last inspection five years ago. It is a good Church school with the potential to be outstanding.

Established strengths

- The use of interactive resources that help pupils to pray
- The importance of Collective Worship in the life of the school
- The very strong partnership between the school, church and local community
- The strong Christian leadership amongst staff and governors

Focus for development

- Follow through plans for an outside space for spiritual development.
- Develop pupils' leadership roles in Collective Worship.
- Use the level descriptions to plan Religious Education (RE) lessons that are appropriately challenging.
- Identify the school's distinctive Christian values and clarify these in the school's documentation and on its website.

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

Although this is a large school, it is spoken of as a 'family', where everyone is included and its members show care and concern for one another and respect differences. For example, on the long walk to the church for Harvest Festival, Year 6 pupils hold hands with the youngest and newest members of the school. Talents are recognised as God's gifts to be developed and used for the good of others. Therefore, Christian values are praised and celebrated alongside academic achievements. For example, a weekly 'Caretaker's Award' encourages pupils to take care of their environment, as they give thanks for God's creation. The school supports local, national and international charities, chosen through the School Council. When a local Christian charity for the homeless was under threat, school councillors wrote to the local council and visited the mayor. The use of the school environment makes a major contribution to pupils' spiritual development. A striking cross in the entrance hall displays a

ribbon for each member of the school, and new pupils and teachers are included when they join. Colourful Salvadorean crosses were purchased for each classroom, to support the Church in El Salvador and to act as a constant reminder of Jesus' presence. Interactive prayer displays in all classrooms and in common areas are well used by pupils. In addition, prayer labyrinths are set up in the hall for special Christian festivals such as Easter and Pentecost, for each class to visit. Adult helpers comment on the depth of pupils' response on these occasions. Pupils say it gives them time to reflect and to express their feelings. The school is now considering the development of an outside spiritual area. RE and worship contribute well to pupils' sound knowledge and understanding of Christianity. A parent commented that his children are excited by RE and come home asking lots of questions.

The impact of Collective Worship on the school community is good.

Pupils enjoy the different acts of worship that take place on each day of the week. They appreciate visitors who make the worship fun and they like to be involved. Pupils say they like hearing Bible stories, focusing on Bible verses, and learning about God. They are well behaved and attentive throughout. However, although they participate very well, there are not yet sufficient opportunities for pupils to take leadership roles in Collective Worship. The singing of modern worship songs, often accompanied by live piano or guitar music, contributes very well to pupils' spiritual development. All worship also includes some quiet reflection and prayers. A young pupil said that the singing and the prayers 'helps me to reflect a lot more and to think about other people less fortunate.' Pupils become familiar with some examples of Anglican practice through Collective Worship, since it follows the major seasons and festivals of the Church's Year. Pupils now know the Lord's Prayer, as recommended at the last inspection. St John's Church is too far away for it to be used frequently for school worship, although once a week school worship is led by the Vicar or other members of his worship team. Pupils learn about Holy Communion in RE but do not take part in the annual Church Schools' Festival at Rochester Cathedral, which includes a service of Holy Communion. Worship in school is of a high quality, being very well planned, prepared and led, based on the new Diocesan Framework. The link governor for Collective Worship has monitored different types of worship and pupils have been surveyed. This was also recommended at the last inspection. Teachers and some teaching assistants now attend worship on a daily basis with their classes.

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

The governing body has successfully addressed the issues from the last inspection, and regular self-evaluation takes place, assisted more recently by parent and pupil surveys. The current headteacher has given a strong lead in strengthening the Christian nature of the school and is well supported by the senior leadership team, other staff and governors. New teachers are made aware of the difference that a Church school makes when they apply. RE and Collective Worship have been given good support, despite being subject to change in the last year. Teachers now need to focus more on the use of the level descriptions to raise standards. The link governor for Collective Worship, who is also a link with St John's Church, has been instrumental in helping to produce a new school prayer. This includes explicit Christian values, such as 'Please help us to put others before ourselves, as Jesus did.' The governing body is aware that it needs to follow this up by identifying the explicit Christian values that underpin the whole life of the school and to make these clear in school publications. There continues to be strong mutual support between the school, St John's Church and the local community. Members of the church help with the prayer labyrinths, for example, and with the weekly after-school Bible club. They run a prayer group to pray for the school's needs. There is good attendance by school families at the church's Family Service each month. The school has good relationships with the Diocese. It was awarded a Bishop's Commendation as a Church school in 2011 and was also chosen to take pupils to represent the Diocese at the National Society's bicentenary celebration in Westminster Abbey. Parents are very supportive of the school as a Church School, and the Christian nature of the school has influenced many in their choice of school.