

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St John the Baptist Church of England Primary School

Sedgefield Way
Mexborough
South Yorkshire
S64 0BE

Diocese: Sheffield

Local authority: Doncaster

Date of inspection: 10 November 2015

Date of last inspection: 4 April 2011

School's unique reference number: 106764

Headteacher: Mrs C Barnes

Inspector's name and number: Malcolm Price (627)

School context

St John the Baptist is a single-form entry primary school with 190 children on roll, the majority of whom are from white British backgrounds. It is situated in pleasant surroundings. The parish church is not close to the school but is within walking distance. The headteacher has taken up her post since the previous inspection and there have been recent changes in senior leadership.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of the school as a Church of England school are good

- The Christian character of the school is fundamental to its activities, its daily life and its future plans.
- Collective worship supports this distinctiveness and is well supported by a range of visitors.
- Religious education (RE) is a major strength and contributes significantly to children's spiritual development.
- All leaders share a common approach to promoting the school as a Christian community.

Areas to improve

- Review, with the whole school community, the school's vision and values so that they represent more closely its existing distinctively Christian ethos
- Explore ways for all members of the school community, including children, to be involved in evaluating the impact of collective worship on the spiritual life of the school

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

It is a hallmark of this school that children speak freely and readily about spiritual matters. When asked what is special about their school, children's first response is that 'we are a church school'. This is not just a statement of fact. They clearly understand and explain that this makes a difference to their relationships and their attitudes. Indeed, this is revealed in their very good behaviour, their consideration for each other and their explanation that they 'treat everyone the same'. The school's distinctive Christian character is demonstrated in many other ways – for example, through visits to the local church and prayers at key times of the day. It is expressed visually through the beautiful stained glass images created by children and by their ability to explain the meaning of these images, particularly those relating to John the Baptist. Reflective corners in every classroom reinforce the Christian ethos and are used by children to pause for thought, to pray if they wish or to 'ask God to help us'. However, as yet the school's stated vision and values do not reflect this distinctive character clearly enough, although governors do speak of their aim to treat everyone as a 'child of God'. Children and parents alike enjoy visits to the parish church for special occasions and festivals. Parents are highly supportive of the school and its ethos and speak of the school being 'like a family' and having 'a peaceful feeling'. Lessons are purposeful and learners appear to cooperate and to enjoy their learning. In particular, RE lessons contribute significantly to children's social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. Most children, especially the more vulnerable, make good progress personally and academically, and the school is working hard to raise the attainment of specific groups.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship plays an important part in the school day. It is respected by children and well supported by teachers. Children understand that it is a special time. They listen well and remember what they hear. Children sing well and know a number of common responses, such as the Peace. The local vicar frequently leads worship in school, usually in the form of a Mass, and children speak of enjoying his visits, especially when they are active participants. The children also appreciate visits from members of other local churches and Christian organisations, through which they experience different ways of worshipping. Those leading worship consistently make links to stories and passages from the Bible – for example, to what can be learnt from the story of Daniel – and they encourage children to think about the decisions they will make during the school day. A range of artefacts in the hall, including a cross and a candle, encourage children to focus on key elements of Christian worship. Children are able to explain that the candle is lit to show that 'Jesus is the light of the world'. Collective worship is well planned in themes and includes the major Christian festivals. From time to time children are involved in leading class assemblies, for which they choose the prayers and songs. In some classes, children take part in Godly Play and the school has also organised successful prayer journey events. To some extent, school leaders monitor collective worship – for instance, a record is kept with helpful comments – and after each Mass, children reflect in their classrooms. However, there is scope for all members of the school community, including children, to be involved in a more systematic evaluation of the impact of worship on school life.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Governors are right in believing that RE is 'the jewel in the crown' of this school. Outstanding subject leadership and a proactive approach to staff training have resulted in teachers being confident in the material and in their ability to enthuse and challenge children. Children are

proud of the Bibles that the school has given them and are impressively knowledgeable about scripture. They are encouraged to read their Bibles in lessons. They say that 'when we have Bibles, we read stories that help us be a better person because we see what Jesus did'. Children can relate the Last Supper, explain the significance of Jesus' baptism and quote many examples of Jesus' miracles and parables. Through the story of the Good Samaritan they show their understanding of compassion. They are thoughtful about the Biblical presentation of creation. They understand how the parable of the Prodigal Son shows that 'God will always forgive you'. Through their studies of Bernadette of Lourdes, they recognise pilgrimage as a 'time to reflect on God', which can have an impact on people's lives. Teachers question for deeper understanding and, through their marking, encourage children to engage in dialogue. There is every indication that standards in RE are at least in line with those in other core areas of learning. Children study a range of faiths though they have had limited opportunities to visit and experience other religious buildings. Leaders and class teachers evaluate the impact of RE while the subject leader observes lessons and maintains well-developed assessments of pupil progress.

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

The headteacher and school leadership team set an example through their commitment to promoting the distinctive Christian character and purpose of the school. This commitment is articulated by all those in leadership, including governors, is considered to be central to the school's mission, and features highly in the school improvement plan. Governors, particularly foundation governors, are fully involved in the strategic development of the school as a Christian community and have attended diocesan training. They value highly the recently established focus groups, such as the Christian distinctiveness committee. They support and challenge the school leadership team. The partnership between the school and local churches is strong; school and church leaders have been proactive in developing joint activities. Leaders have worked hard to give children a voice, as shown through the actions of the school council in supporting anti-bullying week. A member of the council has also been invited to speak to the governors. Leaders encourage children to participate in local events and to support charitable causes, such as the Goodwill Village in India and the Yorkshire Air Ambulance. The school is aware of its role and responsibility in growing and nurturing future leaders of church schools, as shown in recent appointments. The focus areas from the previous SIAMS report have mostly been addressed in that links with the parish church have been strengthened and governors are more involved in monitoring. Opportunities for greater pupil participation in planning and leading worship could be pursued.

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