



St John's CofE Primary School

Sallowbush Road
Huntingdon
Cambridgeshire
PE29 7LA

Diocese: Ely

Local authority: Cambridgeshire
Dates of inspection: 20th & 27th March 2007
Date of last inspection: October 2001
School's unique reference number: 110818
Headteacher: Miss Helen Curtis
Inspector's name and number: Mr Stephen Cutts 495

School context

The school serves the Oxmoor Estate, a large community in Huntingdon. There are 160 on roll and all live locally. The majority of pupils are of white British heritage where the first language at home is English. The number of pupils receiving free school meals is above average. A large proportion of pupils are on the special needs register and the number of those with statements is also well above average. The head teacher is new in post but was previously deputy head in the school.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St John's as a Church of England school are Good

A strong team is now in place to lead this school forward and raise its profile as a centre of Christian learning. There is a warm welcoming atmosphere and children buzz with enthusiasm. The school has to deal with many needy children and each is valued and treated as an individual. Praise and rewards encourage the children to work hard and care for each other. Visitors can be in no doubt that this is a church school.

Established strengths

- **There is good support for children and their families. Each individual is valued and treated as special.**
- **The pro-active and enthusiastic leadership of the new head teacher who has strong support from the incumbent and staff team.**
- **Communal areas have excellent displays of children's RE work with thought-provoking Bible references.**

Focus for development

- To develop church/school links in exciting and imaginative ways.
- Foundation governors to become more involved in the evaluation of collective worship and to monitor how the Christian values underpin the work of the school.
- Raise the profile of St John's as a church school by further developing links with the local community and fostering mutual support.

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

The school prospectus says, "God created us in His image and all people have a unique value." St John's School is clearly based on this understanding, demonstrating care and respect for individuals. Ofsted also recognised this and praised "an ethos based securely on Christian tradition." Aims and values are prominently displayed in the Hall and linked by text to St Matthew Chapter 22. Verse 40, "Love your neighbour as yourself."

Children are elected by their peers to positions of responsibility and trust. The playground buddy system is valued by children, primarily to help those who are lonely, and the school council believes that its role is important and influential. They were recently involved in Head teacher interviews and several of their suggestions are currently being discussed by school leaders. Further opinions of children, parents and staff are collected through suggestion boxes, surveys and suggestion books.

There is a welcoming atmosphere and the children were generally well behaved. The reward system includes stickers and certificates, and lots of praise is given to those who try hard. An "attendance cup" is helping to reduce absence. After school clubs are presently limited to sport and there is a popular breakfast club. A weekly "excellence and enjoyment" afternoon is popular with children. School trips are seen as important for extending children's experience and developing teamwork. Children know the school's processes for dealing with poor behaviour and described it as "fair". A family support officer is employed to help vulnerable pupils and support families. She speaks highly of the school and the steps being taken to help in cases where home circumstances are affecting achievement or attendance.

Good support for English as a Second Language and for children with special educational needs enables them to improve and reach their potential despite a low starting point.

Progress of individuals is tracked and provision mapping is already in place whereby the individual needs of each child are audited to inform teachers' planning and provision of work. There is a new Spiritual, Cultural and Social Policy but this has not been monitored sufficiently to determine its effectiveness. The school celebrates its diversity. Children make bi-lingual books and school leavers are presented with their own scriptures at a special service

There has been a strong drive to support staff well-being. Collaborative working is firmly established in Key Stage One and this is now being extended to the upper school. The new head gives good guidance, support and care.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Importance is given to Collective Worship as a special time of the day when staff and children gather together as a school family. It provides a calm and reflective start to the school day. A clear programme based on Diocesan guidelines is evident in the co-ordinator's file and a brief, one-sentence comment is added afterwards by the head teacher. This is the only form of Collective Worship evaluation that takes place at the moment and the School Management Team are looking to develop this further. The acts of Collective Worship during the inspection period were imaginative and children were fully involved. A candle was lit at the beginning of the worship, though this was not referred to again and children said that they were unsure as to why it was there. Pupils were keen to participate in role-play and to answer questions.

They joined enthusiastically in singing hymns to a CD accompaniment. Gentle music helped to create a reverent atmosphere as classes entered the hall and during the assembly there were many references to the life and teachings of Jesus. A time for quiet reflection was well-guided and used effectively. Children are encouraged to write prayers at anytime and these may be placed in an envelope at the front of the hall. Two of these prayers are read out each day at the end of worship and children saw this as a special privilege and an opportunity to pray for their own personal needs; family members who are ill, new births and the death of a family pet were all mentioned. Staff and clergy lead Worship each week, but there are no class-led assemblies although children said they would like these to be introduced. School worship is often linked to work taking place in the classrooms. Children found it difficult to recall any collective worship themes from more than a week ago, and although they agreed that school services are held in church, there was disagreement about when these took place and how often. However, the children clearly enjoyed their visits to church and recognised these were special occasions that they could share with parents and friends. The incumbent

clarified that the pupils visit the church about three times a year to celebrate major Christian festivals.

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

The new head teacher is a pro-active and energetic leader who, in a very short time, has taken positive and considerable steps to develop the Christian ethos of the school. Colleagues praised her collaborative and consultative style that gives all stakeholders a voice in any decisions taken and nurtures each child. She has a clear vision for the school speaking of inclusion, aspirations, and a safe environment in which all children can achieve and develop individual skills and talents. There is no doubt that everyone in St John's is "special" and "valued" and the head teacher believes that Christian values should underpin everything they do in school. This is clearly stated in the school prospectus and in recent job advertisements. All communal display boards have excellent art work depicting Biblical passages and labelled with text references. Other visible signs of Christianity include the school notepaper, school signs and photographs in the entrance hall. However, there is no cross in the school and budget has limited the purchase of Bibles.

The local minister is eager to work closely with the new school management team to build on the limited links that already exist between the church and the school. Children visit the church to support several areas of the curriculum, but many other links are under discussion in order to raise the profile of St John's as a church school. Governors and staff see this as their main priority. The incumbent sees the school as having a main role in the church's mission work and is keen to pursue this. Governors are not yet involved in the monitoring of Religious Education and Collective Worship, and the school's Christian ethos, as yet, rarely features on governors' meetings agendas.

There have been some links with the Diocese including Cathedral days, Heads Conference and the use of a Bishop's Visitor, but the school recognises that Diocesan Staff could be used more now for training and advice, especially in respect of "mission schools". With the new partnership keen to move forward, there is great potential to improve rapidly in these areas.

SIAS report March 2007 St John's CofE Primary School, Sallowbush Road, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire. PE29 7LA