



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St Nicolas' Voluntary Aided Church of England Combined School

Rectory Road
Taplow
Buckinghamshire
SL6 0ET

Diocese: Oxford

Local authority: Buckinghamshire

Date of inspection: 23 January 2014

Date of last inspection: 9 February 2009

School's unique reference number: 110470

Executive Headteacher: Mr Rob Harris

Deputy Headteacher: Miss Nicola Green

Inspector's name and number: Mrs Lizzie McWhirter MA 244

School context

St Nicolas' is a recently formed new Academy on the Buckinghamshire and Berkshire border close to Maidenhead. It has a close link with Eton Wick Voluntary Controlled First School, whose headteacher is currently the Executive headteacher here. A substantive headteacher has just been appointed. St Nicolas' enjoys a rural location situated within view of its parish church. Currently, there are 208 pupils on roll, who are mainly from a White British background. A significant number of families come from Christian homes.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Nicolas' as a Church of England school are good

- The strong sense of a welcoming family Christian community, enhanced by close links with the church.
- The importance of prayer in the life of this school, nurturing both pupils and adults in their spiritual development.
- The positive attitude of the pupils who become confident learners and achieve highly within a supportive Christian environment.

Areas to improve

- Embed a systematic method for the governors to evaluate church school effectiveness in order to better understand the impact of Christian values on the pupils' learning and progress.
- Involve pupils and governors in the evaluation of worship to ensure best quality worship at all times.
- Put in place monitoring and evaluation procedures in religious education[RE], ensuring pupils have the opportunity to evaluate their work in order to inform the analysis of progress and standards.

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

St Nicolas' provides a very positive learning environment where pupils are proud to belong, feel valued and respected and achieve well. Data shows this is a high achieving school, with some pupils attaining Level 5 and 6 by the end of Year 6. Tracking and target setting arises from an aspiration for all children to do their best and succeed, helping all pupils to make good progress. St Nicolas' places the whole child at its centre, enabling each child to 'flourish in the eyes of God'. This school's overriding vision of 'Living and Learning Together with God' is clearly evident. Pupils explain this vision of learning together as 'God is like your friends'. Every action and development is referenced to the school's aims to ensure a consistent and rigorous approach, with strategies in place to inform progress. High expectations and standards are seen in ambitious targets which are set for all children at the beginning of the academic year. This takes place within an environment in which the school is looking out for all individual needs. Attendance is very positive and there have been no exclusions. Children and parents alike feel supported at school in prayer. Parents know their children's emotional well being is supported at St Nicolas', with the existing staff knowing the families well. As a result, the children too look out for each other and reflect on their actions in a safe, calm environment. Parents praise the fact that St Nicolas' is 'like a big family' and feel reassured in the ongoing support for their children. Pupils' cultural and global awareness is enhanced in RE and worship and by the school's strong links with the Beautiful Gate orphanage in Lesotho as well as sponsoring two children in Malawi. Fundraising activities for Operation Christmas Child and Slough Refuge enable pupils to experience the Christian values of service and gratitude. There is a strong music tradition in the school, with the choir singing at residential homes and the local supermarket. Bright, prominent displays around school, together with reflection spaces in classrooms and the quiet areas in the school grounds, enhance pupils' spiritual development.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

The attitude of pupils to collective worship is good because the quality of worship offered to them is making a real difference in their lives, contributing greatly to their spiritual development. Prayerful and meaningful worship takes place, with a focus on Christian values and Jesus' teaching in The Bible. This is embraced by all staff. Pupils say they appreciate singing in worship as it helps them 'think about God'. They also enjoy the weekly 'Open the Book' led worship as seeing the Bible stories acted out with their participation helps them to make the connection with 'real life and not just being told the story'. Pupils say they learn how 'not to give up on the work we are doing' when, for example, the focus is on courage and looking at the life of Gideon or Gladys Aylward. They also state that worship 'helps me get through the day'. Key festivals such as Harvest, Christmas, St Nicolas' Day, and the Leavers' service are celebrated in church, where the children are very comfortable. Year 3 make a pilgrimage to Christchurch Cathedral annually when they are presented with their own bibles to use throughout their school life and when they leave St Nicolas'. An important feature of the life of St Nicolas' is the termly prayer lunch when the children write their own prayers, as well as having the opportunity to pray in different rooms on prayer walks. Pupils say the prayer walks 'help us to bless everybody in that classroom and the things we have in that classroom'. They use the prayer box as they 'want God to be there for you and bless you'. Currently, no formal evaluation of worship takes place. One of the pupils enjoys the role of recording worship. Pupils welcome taking on the planning and leading of worship 'with our class to become more confident in leading worship'. However, governors recognise the need to heighten their monitoring and evaluative role so they can be more actively involved in this important aspect of school life. They value pupil voice and to that end have recently established a worship committee to include pupils as well as governors in order to give this important feedback. They acknowledge the need for collective worship to be 'on the agenda of every single meeting of the governing body'. They have rightly identified areas for development to include a focus on teaching about The Holy Trinity. In all these ways, worship is continually improving in quality

and integrity.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Pupils clearly enjoy their RE lessons in this school where RE is important, saying 'RE helps me to understand about other people's lives'. Teaching and learning are good and standards are in line with other core subjects. Pupils are making good progress in their RE lessons where they enjoy 'expressing our opinions'. This helps them to achieve well and supports their spiritual development. Pupils collaborate well, think independently and show respect to teachers and each other. Their learning challenges include discussing such aspects as Who is responsible for looking after our world? Year 2 have the opportunity to enquire about the world's beginning from the viewpoint of the three Abrahamic faiths who all believe that God created the world. Year 6 are enabled to debate how being part of a community affects our actions, choices and behaviour. Pupils have a good theological literacy, knowing that The Holy Trinity encompasses God, Jesus and The Holy Spirit. They show awareness of hymns which speak of the different members; 'God, a little bit about Jesus, and all of them'. They explain Incarnation as 'Jesus had a human body but had God inside him. He was born in a stable as a normal human being'. The RE subject leader has been in post since September. RE is reviewed every year as are the other core subjects, with pupil tracking taking place annually. Good use is made of local places of worship for other faiths, such as Maidenhead synagogue and mosque. Pupils know how to improve in their work, and acknowledge that teachers' comments in their books and their own responses to them are helpful. They enjoy asking big questions and welcome the opportunity to discuss deep questions of faith, such as 'the meaning of life' with their vicar who is a welcome visitor to school. There has been no monitoring of RE recently, but governors recognise the need to make this a termly priority.

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

The school's Christian heritage is embraced by the Senior Leadership Team, clergy, governors and staff so St Nicolas' Church of England foundation is celebrated and secured. The effect of the school's procedures on every child's learning is good. Positive relationships show the key role that Christian values play in the life of the school. Parents praise the Christian values here where all staff work hard to support pupils. Foundation governors, including a number of new governors, are committed to the life and work of the school, and are open to new ways of helping the school move forward. Governors had embarked on a more rigorous approach to self evaluation, following the last inspection. However, they recognise the need for church school distinctiveness to be a standing item on every governing body agenda so that its profile, action and progression, in order to enhance pupils' learning progress, is regularly and robustly raised with all governors. There is a renewed vision and impetus to enable this to happen. Daily worship supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and there is a new RE link governor in place. The RE subject leader has attended diocesan courses which has proved very helpful. Governors value diocesan training and the support they have gained in their understanding of what it means to be a church school. The school has identified key priorities for development, such as revisiting the school vision, and establishing a working party of governors and the RE subject leader to regularly monitor church school effectiveness, as well as establishing a worship council to include pupils' valuable comments. The vicar helps foster positive attitudes to the Christian faith and the Anglican tradition. Partnerships with the village community and local schools are strong.

SIAMS report January 2014 St Nicolas' CE Combined School, Taplow, Buckinghamshire SL6 0ET