

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St James' Voluntary Aided CE Infant School

Sandrock Road. TUNBRIDGE WELLS, Kent TN2 3PR

Diocese: Rochester

Local authority: Kent

Date of inspection: 14 February 2013

Date of last inspection: 30 April 2008

School's unique reference number: 118725

Headteacher: Melanie Shackleton

Inspector's name and number: Jan Thompson (No. 92)

Chair of governors: Ed Peacock

Incumbent: Rev. Canon Jim Stewart

School context

St James' Church of England Infant School is a very successful and popular Voluntary Aided school in Tunbridge Wells. Established in 1866 in Quarry Road, it moved to a new building on its present site in 1981, which it shares with St James' CE Junior School. It has increased its intake over the past three years and is now three form entry, with 269 pupils. Most pupils are local, with about 25% from worshipping church families. Twenty pupils follow other religions.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St James' Infant school as a Church of England school are outstanding

St James' CE Infant School has made progress since its last inspection and continues to be an outstanding Church school.

Established strengths

- The Christian values and beliefs that underpin every aspect of this school.
- The enthusiasm, expertise and effectiveness of the Religious Education (RE) leader.
- The Christian commitment of the headteacher and the governing body.
- The strong links with St. James' Church.

Focus for development

- Establish interactive prayer stations as a regular feature in each classroom.
- Implement the diocesan ideas for the formal evaluation of collective worship, which will include a wide range of stakeholders.

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

The school's Values and Vision Statement identifies its fundamental Christian values as friendship, thankfulness, forgiveness and trust. These underpin all school policies and therefore affect every aspect of school life. Together with other Christian values, they are taught particularly through RE and collective worship. As a direct result of its Christian mission, this school is a friendly, welcoming, joyful Christian community, where every individual is valued and cherished and where special concern is shown for the vulnerable. An example of this is an extra small class to help the least confident of the youngest pupils to settle well into the school. The school prides itself on its exciting, creative curriculum that encourages imagination and reflection, for example, through 'I wonder' questions. This results in high standards of learning and spiritual development. Christian teaching about right and wrong leads to good behaviour and very good relationships throughout the school. Parents recognise that 'The Christian ethos is a positive foundation for the children.' Pupils show concern for the needy by supporting charities. For example, a pupil whose father is a doctor in Malawi appealed for pencils to take out to the children there, and was almost overwhelmed by the response. Pupils learn to appreciate the outdoor environment and develop a particular love of animals, since the school's chickens and rabbits regularly produce young. The indoor environment is well used to promote Christian knowledge and understanding, with excellent RE displays. Parents particularly comment on their children's

enjoyment of the 'RE Days' for Christmas, Easter and Pentecost, when pupils are involved in cross-curricular activities. All classes have Bible story books in their reading corners, which are well used, but interactive prayer areas are not regularly in use in classrooms.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is different on each day of the week and is very well prepared and presented. Consequently, pupils enjoy it and are fully engaged. Pupils like singing the Christian songs in and out of worship time. One parent commented, 'It can be quite a surprise at 6 am to hear him singing about God!' Worship is an effective means of helping pupils to learn about the Bible and the Church's year. Pupils also say that it teaches them 'to do good things'. Pupils describe the worship as 'fun' and like to participate, but even these young pupils also appreciate the opportunities for reflection and prayer. They say that they 'like time to think about God' and that some of the songs are 'calming'. They know that they can tell God things in secret and can say sorry for things they have done wrong. The school has begun to encourage pupils to take more of a leading role in worship. The RE leader has devised a book to help pupils choose the different elements of worship, which they have begun to use enthusiastically in their class-led acts of worship. Pupils also enjoy sharing their prayers with others, especially within their classes. Pupils experience and are familiar with some aspects of Anglican practices, particularly as the vicar or curate leads worship once a week, and Christmas and Easter services are celebrated in church. Pupils have been taught to sign the Lord's Prayer as they recite it, and it has been explained to them through a teaching method called Godly Play. A group of senior leaders and governors plans the worship themes, drawing on diocesan schemes. Records are kept, but evaluation is not yet thorough or regular, nor does it involve all stakeholders.

The effectiveness of the Religious Education is outstanding

The last report commented that the lesson content did not always set tasks to allow pupils to achieve the lesson objective. Since then, the new Diocesan RE Syllabus has been adopted, with a much greater focus on learning intentions and more help for teachers in planning lessons. Assessment practices have also been improved in the school. The RE leader has successfully moved from teaching most of the RE across the school, to equipping and supporting class teachers to do this. She has benefited from diocesan, national and international training, and her enthusiasm for the subject is infectious. She fulfils the monitoring role of a subject leader very well, whilst also influencing all other aspects of the Christian life of the school. Pupils are excited by the lessons, which are creative, imaginative and interactive. Teachers have high expectations, with the result that pupils make very good progress in learning about Christianity and respond well to opportunities to apply their learning to themselves. For example, in a lesson on Jesus' feeding of the 5,000, Reception pupils explored the idea of sharing. All this results in pupils achieving high standards, in line with the other core subjects in the school.

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

This school has very strong Christian leaders, particularly the headteacher and RE leader. They are very well supported by the governing body. Many governors are members of St James' Church and the vicar is very committed to the school as vice-chair of governors. They benefit from diocesan briefings and advice, and have achieved the Bishop's Commendation for Church Schools. The governing body has successfully dealt with the focus for development from the last report, as well as moving forward in many other areas, to maintain their status as an outstanding Church school. The annual School Improvement Plan has a section on Church school distinctiveness that enables this on-going development to take place. Their self-evaluation is detailed and their judgements are accurate. Staff are given good support in their professional development and particularly in understanding the distinctive character of Church schools. There are strong links with St James' Church. For example, a parent prayer group meets frequently in the church to pray for the school and the church runs the Breakfast and After School Clubs. Parents recognise that the school and St James' Church are at the heart of the local community.