

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

### **Potters Gate, Church of England (VC), Primary School**

Potters Gate  
Farnham  
GU9 7BB

#### **Diocese of Guildford**

Local authority: Surrey  
Dates of inspection: 29/06/2011  
Date of last inspection: 17/09/2008  
School's unique reference number: 125161  
Headteacher: Miss Jane Whittington  
Inspector's name and number: Mr Andrew Rickett (NSI 201)

#### **School context**

Potters Gate is an average size primary school of 240 pupils from varied socio-economic backgrounds. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is lower than the national average. There is a high number of children with statements of educational need. The majority of children are from a white British heritage. The school runs a Children's Centre on site. The school is currently experiencing a significant expansion in pupil numbers.

#### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Potters Gate as a Church of England school are outstanding**

Potters Gate is a school that lives out its church foundation. The Christian values that underpin the school ethos have created an environment in which children enjoy their learning, where each child is valued as an individual and enabled to thrive academically, socially and spiritually.

#### **Established strengths**

- The very high quality of the leadership of the headteacher.
- The opportunities for children to engage in prayer and reflection.
- The quality of relationships between all members of the school community.

#### **Focus for development**

- Build on the existing opportunities to give children an even greater depth to their understanding of prayer.
- Governors to be more involved in talking with small groups of children as part of their monitoring role of the impact of the school's Christian character.

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

The strength of the school's distinctive Christian ethos lies in the values and principles that underpin its vision to celebrate each individual as a person in their own right. These values include trust, acceptance and belonging and are shared and acted upon by all members of the school community. Each person spoken to expressed how these values are what make the school special. Parents, for example, spoke of the trust that exists between the teachers, themselves and their children. This was evident in the relationships between child and adult observed in lessons; they have trust in their teachers and peers to be able to express their views in an atmosphere where their opinions are respected and valued. This acceptance was also seen in the way that all members of the school community respond in a positive manner to the school's Christian character. It is evident too in the way that all children, some with special needs, respond to the encouragement of teachers to accept the school's expectations of how to behave towards each other. This sense of belonging permeates the life of the

school through the acceptance of each individual regardless of difference. These values, working very successfully together, have created an environment in which children are happy at school. This gives them very positive attitudes towards their learning. Opportunities for children to develop their spirituality are excellent. Whether it is through something specific, such as prayer, or time for reflection generally, children respond very well to these experiences. For example, the visit from an outside group to give children opportunities to experience prayer in a variety of forms enabled them to explore what prayer means to them and how it can influence someone's life. They entered into this experience with great enthusiasm and a sense that prayer is both something that can be part of everyday life, but is also something very special. The school is keen to build on such opportunities to ensure that children continue to grow in their appreciation and understanding of prayer. The children are closely involved in the local community and the school ensures that they experience the diversity of faith and culture in Britain. The recent link with a school in Tanzania has given the school the opportunity to establish a relationship with a community abroad.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding**

Acts of worship are a very important part of school life and one of the main ways through which the school expresses its Christian character. They are distinct times of fellowship when the school comes together to explore the Christian faith. These occasions have an inclusive atmosphere which children say gives them the opportunity to reflect on issues they have explored that are important to them. Collective worship is very thoroughly planned by the headteacher and incorporates a wide variety of themes that cover the children's personal development, events in the Christian calendar and the opportunity to respond to recent world events. The use of social and emotional aspects of learning as the basis for planning means that acts of worship are relevant to the needs of the children because they touch matters within their own experience. Acts of worship are delivered within an explicit Christian context which means that children make the connection between the meanings of Bible stories with events in their own lives. Because class teachers are given differentiated material for their class acts of worship, children have the opportunity to explore the themes in greater depth within a more intimate atmosphere. Acts of worship are delivered in stimulating ways that engage the children and enable them to take part and respond to questions. They show a keen interest as a result. For example, in the worship observed, siblings took part in a quiz to see what they knew about each other. This was very popular and held the children's attention. Children respond well to prayers and times for quiet. They show appropriate respect and reverence and join in confidently with 'Amen'. They are given opportunities to feed back their views on what they like about collective worship and these have led to some changes. For example, class worship is now more age-appropriate. The school is keen to look at further ways to involve them as leaders in worship. The collective worship experience is enhanced by the involvement of the local ecumenical worship team who regularly visit to lead worship and work with the children in the classroom. Parents say that these are very special times for the children who treasure the things they have made as part of the worship team's work in the school.

The school meets the statutory requirement for collective worship.

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

The headteacher is committed to the promotion of the school's distinctive Christian character and ensures that it is at the centre of all that the school does. She has an excellent understanding of the purpose of being a church school and how this can make a difference to the lives of the children. One parent described this commitment as the headteacher's 'drive and beliefs' being like an 'umbrella' under which the success of the school as a church school is founded. Foundation governors share this commitment. Governors have developed strategies to gather the views of parents through face-to-face interviews and these are proving very valuable forms of feedback. Governors are knowledgeable about the school and have a good grasp of its strengths and weaknesses. They recognise, for example, that expectations as to what a church school is are constantly rising and that the school needs to move forward to reflect these changing standards. For this reason, governors need to be further involved with the self-evaluation process by talking directly to small groups of children to evaluate the impact of the Christian ethos. The school is very proud of its links with the parish church and regard the celebration of major Christian festivals in St Andrew's as very important times in the life of the school. The rector contributes to the spiritual life of the school through leading acts of worship and the school has close links with ecumenical groups who also regularly lead worship. The recently appointed religious education (RE) leader has identified areas for further development. She has a good understanding of the place of RE within the wider curriculum and clearly understands how it makes a major contribution to the life of the school. Parents feel strongly that the school has the right approach to its church foundation. They say that the school promotes its Christian ethos well but does this in a way that allows children to make their own informed choices about matters of faith and belief and that they trust the teachers, knowing that they care for their children and strive to ensure that the children's experience of school is a happy one in a safe and secure environment.

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