



Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS)

St Nicolas Church of England Infant School (VA)	Portsmouth Road Guildford GU2 4YD
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese/Methodist District	Guildford
Previous SIAMS inspection grade:	Good
Local authority	Surrey
Name of multi-academy trust/ federation [delete as appropriate]	N/A
Date/s of inspection	14 September 2016
Date of last inspection	4 May 2011
School's unique reference number	125189
Headteacher	Kate Woodhouse
Inspector's name and number	Richard Wharton (835)

School context

St Nicolas is a smaller than average infant school with 120 pupils currently on roll, organised into four classes. The children come from a very wide range of nationalities and from mixed socio-economic backgrounds, though the number of pupils eligible for pupil premium is relatively low. The headteacher has been in post for ten years but there has been a significant turnover of staff during the past year, with none of the teachers having been at the school more than two years. The school has become increasingly popular over recent years and is frequently over-subscribed.

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

- The values-based learning approach has a significant impact on the daily lives and achievements of learners.
- Relationships between the school and St Nicolas church are highly regarded by all members of the school community and contribute significantly to the school's distinctive character.
- Religious education makes a central contribution to the Christian character of the school.
- The school is highly inclusive and its ethos ensures that the wellbeing of pupils is absolutely paramount.

Areas to improve

- To make the Christian basis of the school's values more explicit in order that all members of the school community are able to articulate this and draw upon it in living out the values.
- To embed a systematic process for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the school's distinctive ethos in order to generate further strategies for continued improvement.
- To introduce a focus on God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in collective worship.

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

Values-based learning lies at the heart of all that St Nicolas Infant School does and as a result, the overall attainment of pupils at the school is very high. As the recent Ofsted inspection confirmed (December '15), because personal development and welfare of pupils is at the heart of the school's work, no child is allowed to be 'left behind'. Excellent relationships and a very positive family environment lead to a focus on individual needs, resulting in good progress for vulnerable pupils. Following action by the school, pupil attendance is within the top quartile nationally, with no child's absence being a cause for concern. Parents speak in absolutely glowing terms about the extent to which the Christian character of the school shapes relationships among the whole community and of the highly supportive ethos which this engenders. One parent spoke movingly of the 'overriding sense of God's love' which the school had given her daughter and how this had equipped her with a spiritual framework to cope with the death of her grandmother. Parents say that the Christian ethos of the school is lived out implicitly in its day-to-day life and that children come home and discuss stories of faith that they have talked about and raise 'big questions' about faith. Parents from a range of faith backgrounds spoke of the inclusive way in which the Christian ethos is conveyed. Children are able to make connections between Biblical stories and the school's values and are able to speak with assurance about the ways in which values inform their decisions. One child said that, 'We have all of the different values on the wall in case you forget but love is the most important because that's what God wants for us.' School evidence files contain rich examples of ways in which the Christian character of the school has a significant impact on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of learners and show they clearly understand the diverse nature of their community and the world in which they live. The school has involved parents from a variety of cultures and faiths in sharing their customs and the children are taken on visits to a local synagogue and mosque. RE makes a significant contribution to the Christian character of the school, as evidenced in a lesson about the 'Good Shepherd', where one child said that, 'the story reminds me of our values of responsibility and thoughtfulness and helps me to know why these are important.'

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good.

Collective worship is of central importance in the life of the school and plays a key role in enabling children to make connections between Bible stories and the school's values. The worship observed enabled children to make links between the wonder of creation and the value of kindness. A link was also made to Anglican traditions through discussion of the church year and the start of the creation season. The worship effectively demonstrated the children's willingness to engage in quiet reflection and thoughtful singing. Children say that collective worship is a special time for them and are able to talk about ways in which they sometimes contribute towards it. One child said that, 'We think a lot about Jesus in collective worship and how he was thoughtful, kind and courageous'. The children particularly enjoy 'special assemblies' at key points in the cycle of the church year and look forward to visiting St Nicolas' church for worship. Prayer has an important place in the life of the school and children were keen to discuss the school prayers that they know by heart. The school evidence files contained impressive examples of the children having combined prayers that they know by heart with their own ideas to create spontaneous prayers and 'Red Nose Day' prayers. Prayers are said at lunchtime and at home time but children said that 'you can say prayers anywhere you like'. One child said that, 'it's nice to go out onto the field and say a prayer to God to thank him for all of the lovely outside space.' Collective worship is planned around the school's cycle of values and is led by the headteacher, the local vicar and a range of other visitors. The children particularly enjoy Open the Book, which they say enables them to learn 'all the stories in the Bible by joining in.' Collective worship is monitored informally but governors plan to incorporate more structured monitoring into their annual plan. The headteacher recognises that a focus on God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in collective worship needs to be developed further.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good.

The school follows the Guildford Diocesan Guidelines for religious education and RE is regarded as a core subject within the school. RE is monitored rigorously through lesson observations, work scrutiny and moderation sessions facilitated by Guildford Diocese which confirmed standards in RE are consistently high across the school. Individual observation sheets show that attainment in RE for each child is carefully assessed in both attainment targets and teachers meet annually to moderate judgements against level descriptors and to ensure that standards in RE are as high as those in other core subjects. The headteacher says that standards of teaching in RE are never less than good. This was verified in the two lessons observed as part of the inspection which both contained very effective open ended questioning of children and demonstrated the growing ability of the children to make links between subject content and the Christian character of the school. In a lesson based on the parable of the Good Shepherd, one Year 1 child said that, 'God is like the good shepherd not the other one and that is why we have our school values, so that we can learn to be like the good shepherd.' There was strong evidence in the children's books of the way in which RE contributes to SMSC where, in a piece of work on the Good Samaritan, one child had written, 'I think the story shows us that we have to be kind even to people who we don't know and try to help them and then everything will be better.' There was further evidence of their depth of understanding of religious concepts. In a piece of work on the crucifixion, one Year 2 child had written, 'I think God wanted Jesus to suck up all of the bad things that people had done so everyone could be friends again.' Community members and parents from faiths other than Christianity have been drawn on to support the teaching of RE and this has enabled the children to make links between faiths. Leadership of RE has been particularly strong and the subject manager has a clear development plan, conveying ambitious expectations for improvement.

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

The headteacher is passionate about values-based learning to promote the school's ethos and as a role model she sets the tone for other staff and the wider school community. Through the values approach, the headteacher has created a climate in which all learners are able to flourish and within which positive relationships and the well-being of all is paramount. There is a need to make the Christian basis of the school's values more explicit in order that all members of the school community can articulate this and draw upon it in living out the values. Parents speak effusively of the extent to which the values lived out by the headteacher mean that she is always available to listen to their concerns and is never dismissive of them. One parent of a child with particular difficulties spoke in glowing terms of the support which she and her child have received from the school in order that barriers to inclusion could be overcome. The links with St Nicolas church are particularly valued by the whole school community and parents spoke in the highest terms of the value that they and their children place on Father Andrew's pastoral support. The school development plan has a clear focus on ensuring that new members of staff are thoroughly inducted into working in a Church school and are equipped to express the Christian distinctiveness of the school within their teaching and relationships. The governors have carried out some recent monitoring visits but it remains a priority to make the process of monitoring more systematic in order to gain a thorough understanding of the school's performance as a Church school and be clear about next steps for improvement. The headteacher says that the leadership of the RE coordinator, on sabbatical leave this year, has been an example to others and documentation provided confirms that RE has been led and managed very effectively. The school meets the statutory requirements for RE and Worship.