



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St George's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

High Street,
Langton Matravers, Swanage, Dorset BH19 3HB

Previous inspection grade: Good

Current inspection grade: Outstanding

Diocese: Salisbury

Local authority: Dorset

Date of inspection: 10 June 2016

Date of last inspection: 23 May 2011

School's unique reference number: 113803

Headteacher: Anita Cubitt

Inspector's name and number: Alison Harris QA Assessor: Margaret James (698)

School context

St George's VA Primary School is a rural school with 104 pupils, educated mostly in mixed age classes. Nearly all pupils are of white British heritage with a small percentage from ethnic minority groups. The number of pupils with learning needs or eligible for free school meals or pupil premium is low. A local authority reorganisation in 2012 moved the school from a first school to a primary, with a virtual rebuild of the school carried out from 2012-2014. St George's is part of the Purbeck Education Partnership which consists of eleven local community and church primary schools and two community secondary schools. The headteacher is retiring in July and a successor has been appointed.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St George's as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The distinctively Christian ethos of the school ensures a high quality of care, nurture and knowledge of the needs of each individual child.
- Engaging religious education teaching is inspiring children to reflect on their own beliefs and empathise with others.
- The strong relationship with the local parish church forms a solid foundation and support for the Christian life of the school.
- High quality acts of worship greatly contribute to learners' behaviour and challenges them to improve.

Areas to improve

- Revisit and review the school vision statement to ensure it leads the school into the future as an effective and distinctive church school.
- Widen the monitoring and evaluation work of governors so that all are more deeply involved in evaluating St George's as a church school.
- Develop children's spirituality by encouraging them to become fully involved with the planning and delivery of collective worship, with the headteacher and governors to track and monitor the impact of this.

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

St George's distinctively Christian values of love, respect, truth and forgiveness are embedded throughout the life of the school, ensuring that children feel extremely safe, understood and well cared for. Both staff and children describe ways in which these values impact on their daily lives, for example through the nurturing of particular children and families. The children are happy to be at the school and demonstrate the school values by accepting and supporting each other, no matter what difficulties they or others may be facing. The Christian ethos is integral to decisions made to support academic achievement, for example whether pupils need academic or emotional support in order to enhance their progress and attainment, which current data indicates is variable across different cohorts of children. Parents describe a family feel to the school stating that every child is known individually and staff are always willing to go out of their way to provide support for any family in need. This approach has directly contributed to a rise in attendance levels and encouraged the children to be more responsible about their own attendance. A commitment rooted in Christian teaching and belief to enable individual children to find their own path in life and flourish in their own way, both academically and through a wide variety of extra-curricular activities, encourages the children to believe in themselves and what they can achieve. The school has improved its approach to children's spiritual development since the last inspection, and a school-wide understanding is resulting in children taking occasions to freely express what being spiritual means to them, through the many opportunities for reflection throughout the school day. Consistent reference to the Christian values ensures that relationships are very good within the school. There is an ethos of mutual respect between adults and children, and mutual care is provided towards children who may find learning challenging. The behaviour of pupils is good and children can apply what they have learnt from the Christian values to their own behaviour. The school behaviour policy particularly focusses on forgiveness and love, with each day being a fresh opportunity. Religious education (RE) is a real strength of the school. It is engaging and well-taught and inspires children to consider the big questions relating to a variety of different faiths as well as their own lives, which is having a positive impact on their spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. This is further enhanced by a wide variety of charitable actions for local community, national and international Christian projects which the children have independently selected to support and which are driven by the well-embedded Christian ethos.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

The Christian teaching embedded within collective worship at St George's leads learners in fully understanding the distinctive nature of the school values. Worship is focussed on the life and teachings of Jesus and the interrelationship of the Trinity, which children explain by referring to a three-wick candle, present in each class reflection area, and as 'one God with three elements'. Children across the school describe how the school values explored in worship shape their behaviour and spirituality and challenge them to improve it, both in and out of school. Acts of worship are led by staff, members of the local church and a wide variety of other leaders, including those from other Christian churches, which allow rich experiences and result in high-quality provision. The use of coloured sashes to symbolise the Church year ensures that the children understand and can describe the seasons and Christian festivals. Children enjoy being active participants, and all members of the school community evaluate worship in order to develop it further. The children do not, however, independently plan and lead acts of worship. Worship is central to the life of the school, and is seen as an opportunity for spiritual and reflective time, enhancing the impact participation has on the adults and children. The relationship between the school and church community is strong and mutually beneficial, with joint celebrations of Christian festivals. Prayer is central to the life of the school and children are given both formal and informal opportunities to pray and reflect with specific areas in each classroom, a central space and a prayer garden which is due to be further developed. This has enhanced the children's ability to express their understanding of this in some depth. Children from all year groups are able to explain confidently how prayer is their time to talk with God and they use the analogy of 'teaspoon' prayers to say thank you, sorry and please.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Religious education (RE) is a key strength of St George's and is making a strong contribution to the Christian distinctiveness of the school. Significant progress has been made in the development of RE since the last inspection. The adoption of the Discovery RE scheme of work in conjunction with Christianity Unpacked resources created by the diocese has transformed the RE teaching by inspiring and engaging the learners, and ensures appropriate coverage and the balance between Christianity and other world religions. Robust monitoring and evaluation by the head-teacher as the subject leader ensures that pupil progress and attainment are coherently tracked, with standards at least in line with national expectations and a number of children attaining above the expectation. Succession arrangement alternatives are already in place for the next academic year to ensure that this continues. Assessment has become embedded and this leads to clear knowledge of the pupils' needs, informing future planning. The children are very enthusiastic about RE and can articulate their learning extremely well. They make thoughtful contributions in lessons, making links between their learning and the Christian ethos of the school. One pupil cited the similarities and differences she had noticed between Christianity and Islam and explained 'but we all respect the same God and as long as we are respecting God, that is all that matters'. Others describe how acting as Noah allowed them to put themselves 'in his shoes' and empathise with his difficult job of being a prophet 'which means he has to give people divine messages from God'. There are a variety of teaching styles ensuring that the children have a rich diversity of experiences, and the enquiry approach to teaching is allowing children to express how the learning is impacting on their own thoughts and faith journey, enhancing their opportunities for SMSC development.

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

All school leaders can articulate the distinctively Christian vision for St George's as a church school, and live out the values and ethos in their commitment and dedication to the school. The current vision statement is ambiguous in identifying the Christian distinctiveness, however. The chair of governors has an impressive understanding of the actions needed to be taken by governors to further improve evaluation of the impact of the Christian nature of the school on the life of its pupils. The governors are well informed and provide strong support to the school, and are willing and eager to be further involved. The Christian ethos is embodied by the headteacher and she ensures high levels of provision, particularly in her personal care and nurture to children across the school, which ensures that all learners are celebrated as individual and unique. She provides high quality leadership in RE and collective worship, supported by the vicar as link governor for these. Together they effectively monitor the provision of RE and collective worship by seeking the views of the school community. Both areas are regarded highly within the life of the school and are making an important contribution to its Christian distinctiveness. The vicar is a consistent presence in the school and plays an important part in supporting the spiritual development of members of the school community, as well as supporting the teaching of RE. The church is considered by all to be an integral part of the school community and reciprocal activities are mutually beneficial. There are strong links with the diocese which have resulted in the progress made in developing the children's spirituality, and which support the governors in further enhancing the distinctive Christian character of the school. Relationships with parents are excellent and they appreciate the approachability of all staff who listen to their concerns and then swiftly act to alleviate them. Parents praise the community sense of the school and the Christian values it is teaching their children. One commented, 'they celebrate all achievements and respect the children. The children then echo this'. They also value the communication from the school in providing details of the academic curriculum as well as supporting materials for collective worship. The good relationships with other schools within the Purbeck Education Partnership have particularly helped in supporting the school raise attendance by adopting a common policy, which was then personalised to St George's through the actions of the school leaders and governors to ensure that the Christian distinctiveness of the school was embedded. Statutory requirements for RE and collective worship are met.

SIAMS report June 2016 St George's CE VA Primary School, Langton Matravers, BH19 3HB