



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Abbey Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary

Grove Road, St Albans AL1 1DQ

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority:	Hertfordshire
Dates of inspection:	26 June 2013
Date of last inspection:	20 November 2008
School's unique reference number:	117449
Headteacher:	Miss Emma Fenn
Inspector's name and number:	Lilian Weatherley 42

School context

Abbey Church of England VA Primary School is situated in the heart of St Albans town and is set in the beautiful grounds adjacent to the Abbey Church of St Alban. The school is popular and is oversubscribed. There are few pupils eligible for free school meals and few requiring support with their learning.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of the Abbey VA Primary school as a Church of England school are outstanding.

Abbey VA Primary School is at the heart of the Diocese of St Albans, being situated next to the Abbey Church. The school is a credit to the Diocese of St Albans. The creative, vibrant and imaginative curriculum is underpinned by a strong distinctive Christian character. High expectations and Christian gospel values provide an atmosphere of mutual respect, ensuring that pupils achieve well, feel safe, enjoy learning, and are polite and well behaved.

Established strengths

- The ways in which the distinctive Christian Character of the school contributes to high expectations and academic achievement
- The excellent relationships based on Gospel values
- The high profile given to worship, prayer and Religious Education
- The links with the Abbey Church and its clergy for worship
- The creativity of the staff in developing opportunities for prayer, worship and reflection

Focus for development

- Evaluate the current assessment procedures for RE to ensure they reflect a true picture of pupils' ability
- Audit the school's provision of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in order to make explicit what is currently implicit and share with all stakeholders
- Develop future succession planning for the SLT and subject leaders

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

The Abbey School is a vibrant and exciting place to grow and work, and all pupils interviewed spoke with passion about their school, the staff and the way in which they feel cared for. As one pupil said, 'The teachers are very kind'. Academic achievement is high and shown in the ROL and FFT to be significantly above the national average. Attendance is outstanding. The recent work on equality and inclusion ensures that every child is viewed as being 'unique in the sight of God' whatever their ability or faith background. The 'Star of the Week' awarded each week to celebrate pupils' efforts are valued by all the pupils.

The school's distinctive Christian character is evident in every aspect of school life and is clearly having an impact on pupils' learning and development. The school is divided into four houses, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; a simple but effective way to encourage the pupils to read the Gospels. All pupils know the school's Gospel values. Behaviour and discipline are exceptional. Pupils are polite and show respect to adults and to each other both in lessons and around the school.

Relationships are excellent making the school a harmonious and cohesive society. The school is a happy place to work and learn. Staff plan exciting enrichment days on particular themes, to enhance the pupils' learning. For example the World Religions food tasting day. As one member of the active school council explained 'the teachers try really hard to make our learning fun'.

All displays are vibrant and reflect the high expectations and respect shown to all pupils and their work. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is generally outstanding and evident across the school curriculum. For example, Music is a strength with the majority of pupils learning to play an instrument. Sport and teamwork also play a key role and the pupils are proud of their vast selection of trophies. The school is, however, aware of the need to further develop its global links and pupils' SMSC development is not yet fully articulated in the school's own self-evaluation.

The school enjoys close links with St Albans School and benefit from the partnership Scheme. The pupils use the Science and DT facilities and the sixth form students visit on Friday afternoons to support PE. Charitable giving is a regular feature of school life with pupils raising considerable amounts for those in need.

Religious Education and Collective Worship are given a high priority in the school and the regular visits to the Abbey are viewed as being very special by all of the pupils and their parents, including those from other faith backgrounds.

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

Collective Worship and an understanding of the Anglican tradition is a key aspect of the school day and underpins the life of the school. The worship is clearly planned and monitored. The newly-formed 'Faith Council' meet regularly with the Sub-Dean and are having a clear impact on the style and format of the worship. Pupils talked with enthusiasm about the altar cloth made by the pupils, the prayer tables in the classrooms and the prayer box that they take to the Abbey each week. The Faith Council suggested that the prayer forms used for the prayer box were adapted to contain an additional box, which the pupils could tick if they wanted the prayer read out. This small and simple addition is valued by all. One pupil commented that they like the prayer box 'because you can say a prayer to God or secretly if you want to'.

All classes have a prayer table and RE lessons end with a time for reflection and prayer. The year 2 class were eager to share their 'Window into Heaven' where they are able to place images and ideas about what they might see. Pupils told me that this was a very special place and it included images of pets and grandparents who had died.

Pupils speak with fondness of the wicker 'thinking hearts' positioned around the school and the grounds. These are inspirational in giving the pupils a place to stop and reflect. So too with the foundation stage reflection tree. Standing tall in their recently improved play area it gives an opportunity for the youngest members of the school to think and pray about those things that are of concern to them. The Easter mood masks are a wonderful example of this.

During worship in the Abbey pupils processed across the field in a dignified manner and showed total respect when entering the building. The hymn singing was outstanding and all pupils including the very young knew the words of the hymns and the Lord's Prayer. All of the pupils interviewed viewed these occasions as very special, and the Abbey as an extension of the school. Parents too spoke with appreciation of the weekly opportunities to join their children for worship in the Abbey.

The Bible is a key book in each class and pupils enjoy reading Bible stories and hearing the weekly Bible readings in worship. An understanding of the Trinity is being developed through worship but additional material from the Diocese might be added to the Agreed Syllabus.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good.

Standards of attainment and progress in RE are outstanding by the end of Key Stage 1. Pupils are excited by their learning and have an excellent knowledge and understanding of Christianity and the other faiths studied. Pupils are given creative tasks to challenge their ability. In the year two class studying 'Creation' pupils were asking God such questions as 'What are you going to call the parts of the human body?' and 'Are you 100% sure you want animals to eat other animals?' Attainment at Key Stage 2 is less secure. The school focus has been on AT2 at the expense of AT1 and although pupils' knowledge and understanding of the Christian tradition is excellent and enhanced by the Collective Worship, pupils' understanding of key aspects of other faith traditions studied is confused. The school has worked hard on assessment but inappropriate lined worksheets are often used for formative assessment. This does not give an accurate picture of pupil ability and progress. Pupils are unable to fully show what they know, understand and can apply, giving a false picture of their ability. Teaching is judged to be good to outstanding across the school and this was confirmed by the lessons observed.

There are excellent RE displays across the school which reflect the positive attitudes the pupils have to RE. All pupils interviewed said how much they like RE and would like longer RE lessons. 'The RE lessons are fun and interesting'.

Staff are currently implementing the new Hertfordshire Agreed Syllabus. Resources are good and will be able to support the curriculum changes needed.

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

The headteacher and governing body have a clear vision of a school with a distinctive Christian character. This vision is understood and acknowledged by all stakeholders. There is a strong commitment to improvement. Staff and governors engage in regular self-evaluation and parents' and pupils' surveys are effective at moving the school forward and have helped to develop a Church of England school with a robust sense of purpose, energy and enthusiasm. The school has an infectious atmosphere with a love for learning, based on Christian values, at its heart. The headteacher's musical talents and enthusiasm have had a significant impact on enhancing the quality of the hymn singing and music across the school. Parents speak with admiration and praise for the distinctive nature of the school and its musical strength. Parents from other faith traditions take a full and active part in the Christian traditions and Abbey worship of the school. They see the Christian values and work on inclusion and equality as supportive to their own traditions. One parent explained that the school is 'like a large family with the older pupils taking responsibility for the younger ones ensuring that they are safe'.

The school has rightly identified succession planning as a key area for development in order to retain the high standards within the Christian tradition, as staff move on in their careers. There are excellent links with the Parish, Abbey clergy and the Diocese however as the school is currently implementing the New Hertfordshire Agreed Syllabus additional support from the Diocese would help in interpreting this for an aided school with a high proportion of bright and articulate pupils.

SIAMS report June 2013 Abbey Church of England VA Primary School, St Albans ALI IDQ