

St Leonard's Church of England Voluntary Aided First School

Brookfields Road
Ipstones
Stoke-on-Trent
ST10 2LY

Diocese: Lichfield

Local authority: Staffordshire
Date of inspection: 19th January 2012
Date of last inspection: 21st September 2009
School's unique reference number: 124381
Headteacher: David Mellor
Inspector's name and number: Julie Moore 579

School context

St Leonard's Church of England Voluntary Aided First School is a very small village school with 39 pupils. Almost all of the pupils live in the surrounding area and all of them have White British heritage. The school has been completely rebuilt and the buildings are spacious, bright and attractive.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Leonard's as a Church of England school are good

The very strong links between the school family and the church family enable everyone to grow together in their faith. Alongside this, the involvement of the local community is second to none which results in a truly cohesive community in which everyone is respected and valued. Christian values and the Anglican tradition successfully underpin all aspects of the day-to-day life and work at St Leonard's school.

Established strengths

- Pupils are fully engaged in a wide range of prayer and worship experiences which extend and develop their spiritual awareness in a meaningful way.
- High quality teamwork drives the school forward at a very good pace and no time is ever wasted.
- The entire school community demonstrates care and thoughtfulness towards the church and village communities as well as towards those living in the wider global community.

Focus for development

- Drive forward the implementation of an effective system for formally monitoring and evaluating the quality of pupils' worship experience as well as their learning experiences in religious education.
- Decide a realistic time scale for this work to be completed and implemented in this very small school.

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

The firmly held Christian values that underpin all aspects of the life and work of St Leonard's school successfully enable all members of the school family to care and support each other whilst at work and at play. Parents are very pleased about this and, as one parent commented, *'Teachers go out of their way to make this a very good school. The right Christian values help all the children to share and to be kind to one another. These are family values as well'*. Pupils have an excellent range of experiences which support their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well indeed. Spiritual development is central to school's ethos with many successful opportunities for spiritual development in lessons, during

the worship experience, in church and school as well as outdoors. Participation in church and community events such as the Ipstones Festival, alongside charity work and activities with other schools, enable pupils' to have first-hand experience of living their lives within a truly Christian context. Relationships are excellent. Staff, pupils, parents, governors and clergy work together as a cohesive team which serves its community very well indeed. As one pupil commented, *'God is the light of the world and this means we are all in God's family together'*. The school environment provides tangible evidence that St Leonard's is Christian school. Interactive displays and artefacts, alongside prayer areas, crosses and Bibles, which are positioned at suitable places around the school, leave no-one in any doubt of the strength of the school's Christian ethos. That said, faiths other than Christianity are studied, respected and valued as part of the rich and vibrant curriculum that the school provides.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship was a significant issue at the previous inspection which has been tackled very well by senior leaders. Pupils are now adept at planning and leading worship which strengthens the impact of worship for the whole school as well as successfully developing pupils' spiritual growth. Younger pupils led an act of worship of the highest quality as they told a story from the New Testament. Initially, the young worship leader used questions very effectively to remind everyone about previous worship experiences. For example, when responding to a question *'Why were Mary and Joseph worried about Jesus?'* the response, *'Because he was lost and they found him in his Father's house'* indicates a mature level of understanding for young pupils. Prayers, written by pupils, were read out with sensitivity and reverence indicating a true understanding of the nature of prayer and why it is so important to Christians. Anglican traditions, for example, saying the Peace and greeting each other, were a truly integral part of the service which contributed very effectively to the total worship experience. Worship in church is enjoyed and pupils' familiarity was clearly demonstrated by the enthusiasm with which they talked about visiting their church *'for special events.....'* Worship has a high profile at St Leonard's and this has a positive impact on all members of the school family. What is yet to be put in place is a more formal system for monitoring and evaluating the quality of the worship experiences which the school provides. Plans are in hand to expand the current informal system and these plans need speeding up.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Religious education was also a significant issue from the previous inspection and good progress has been made in tackling the issue. Assessment evidence shows that standards in religious education (RE) are above average by the time pupils leave St Leonard's at the end of Year 4. Very good progress is made overall because teaching is very good. Effective planning means that tasks are pitched at the right levels, assessments are accurate and up-to-date so that learning moves along at a cracking pace. Pupils are keen and eager to learn because lessons are stimulating and interesting. A good example occurred in a lesson with older pupils which focussed around how artists use colour to express feelings that are important to religious people. The teacher made excellent use of a range of different paintings of Jesus which successfully enabled all pupils to empathise with Jesus at different points in his life. Challenging questions by the teacher, alongside on-going discussion, enabled all pupils to talk about their ideas of Jesus's feelings in a particular situation which enhanced their spiritual and moral awareness very well indeed. The richness and the vibrancy of the RE curriculum reflects very successfully the Christian character of the school as well as providing a number of opportunities for pupils to experience other faiths and religions through visits to a Synagogue and a Hindu Temple. Monitoring and evaluation of RE is at an early stage and this needs to be speeded up. However, RE has a high profile throughout the school as it successfully strengthens the Christian character of the school as well as promoting an effective understanding of different faiths to Christianity.

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

St Leonard's school is well led and the headteacher provides very clear and effective leadership. Teamwork is excellent. Clearly understood Christian values are pivotal in driving the school's Christian vision forward and teachers, governors, clergy, pupils and parents work cohesively together to achieve their goals. Many roles and responsibilities have to be shared and priorities decided amongst the very small team and everyone is fully committed to improvement. Communication is very good and pupils and parents are positive in their comments, *'We play together and we help each other'* from a pupil and, from a parent, *'Our*

school provides the whole package. Children are happy and safe, they enjoy learning and the teachers go out of their way to make this a very good school which has the right shared values'. All of which shows that everyone is secure in their shared vision for the school. Regular and systematic monitoring is in place for almost all aspects of school life. However, there are gaps in some aspects which the school has identified through its own self-assessment and plans are in hand to tackle these. Good progress has been made in tackling the majority of the issues from the previous report. Everyone is well aware of the importance of training to enhance their skills and governors and staff regularly attend relevant training sessions. St Leonards is a very successful church school that is outstanding in the way it provides a focal point for the entire community to live and work cohesively together for the benefit of the children in their care.

SIAS report January 2012. St Leonard's CE (VA) First School, Ipstones, Staffordshire.
ST10 2LY.