



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Ely St. Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Junior School

High Barns
Ely
Cambridgeshire
CB7 4RB

Diocese: Ely

Local authority: Cambridgeshire
Dates of inspection: January 20th and 22nd 2010
Date of last inspection: 12th September 2007
School's unique reference number: 110842
Headteacher: Mr. James Hickish
Inspector's name and number: Ann Williams 573

School context

Ely St. Mary's Junior School is situated on the northern edge of the city of Ely and draws pupils mainly from the local area, although some travel from out of catchment because of the school's strong Christian ethos. The 309 pupils are taught in 12 classes, according to their year group. The parish church is some distance from the school.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Ely St. Mary's Junior School as a Church of England school are outstanding.

The Christian foundation, on which this school is built, is firmly embedded throughout its daily life and is expressed and demonstrated with conviction by staff and pupils alike. Relationships between all members of the community have Christian values at their heart, and the care shown for the pupils and their families extends beyond the school day and out into the wider community.

Established strengths

- The strong and overt Christian leadership of the headteacher
- The firm Christian foundation that underpins and is embedded in the whole life of the school
- The mutually beneficial and caring relationships between all members of the school community

Focus for development

- To institute more rigorous and formal assessment of Religious Education
- To build up the profile of the school at the parish church and develop closer links with the whole of the church community
- To introduce visitors from other faiths to enhance pupils' personal experience of a variety of faiths and other cultures

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

The Christian character of this school, expressed so naturally in its daily life, is proudly displayed throughout the building and in the colourful banners produced by the pupils. The children work in a calm environment where they feel secure and happy, and where each one is valued. Staff know the pupils as individuals and have excellent relationships with them and their parents. They have high expectations of all, with strategies in place to nurture, in an atmosphere of Christian love, those who have particular needs or have experienced difficulties in other schools,

Of special note is the motto 'RESPECT', with every letter representing a Christian value, and which is prominent in classrooms and in each child's 'Home-School Partnership' book. 'Family groups' allow Year Six pupils to express any concerns of younger pupils, and a teaching assistant has trained as a counsellor to work with parents as well as their children both in and out of school.

Emphasis is placed on developing the whole child, and the range of extra-curricular activities is designed to engage learners of all abilities and talents. Steps are taken to ensure every child is able to access these, through funding or other special arrangements.

Success of all kinds is celebrated, with personal qualities rewarded alongside other achievements. Pupils welcome responsibility as house captains, monitors or playleaders, or by leading games and befriending pupils at the adjacent first school. The active School Council suggests charity fundraising ideas which their peers organise enthusiastically, and pupils are spontaneous in their reaction to global crises, through prayer as well as giving money.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is central to the life of the school, and involves all members of the school community. As children enter, they join in singing prayerfully, and a pupil opens the worship with an appropriate sentence. A number of different leaders, including the headteacher, members of staff, local clergy and other Christian visitors, give pupils a broad experience of styles of worship. They enjoy many opportunities to participate by reading Bible passages, drama and offering prayers they have written and put on the prayer board. Periods of quiet reflection are used thoughtfully and meaningfully by all, and pupils respond confidently to discussions relating Bible stories to their lives.

Pupils have an excellent understanding of the Christian values in the 'RESPECT' statement and are able to give examples of the impact each has on their daily lives. Their spontaneous use of prayer for thanksgiving or in times of difficulty is to be commended.

Worship is carefully planned and documented, and well-resourced. Governors are involved in the planning and take seriously their role to monitor and evaluate its impact.

Despite its distance from the school, the parish church is used for special services to celebrate Christian festivals, to which parents and members of the local community are invited. Particular effort was made to engage the children in the 'Prayer Labyrinth' at the church, and pupils attend Cathedral days. The church, which uses the school building each Sunday, has worked hard to involve families, who would have difficulty attending elsewhere.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Religious education (RE) is delivered well even though there have been some difficulties during changes within the management of the curriculum. The RE co-ordinator is new in post and is yet to receive training for this responsibility.

The Cambridge agreed syllabus is used, Christianity through Bible stories and Anglican sacraments being taught in Years Three and Four, with Christianity and other world religions being taught in Years Five and Six. Lessons include a variety of resources and techniques and work is differentiated according to pupils' abilities. In addition to factual knowledge learned, younger pupils broaden their experience through drama, and question and answer sessions where feelings and opinions are explored. Older pupils are encouraged to

investigate and discuss spiritual issues, and are given time to consider their own spirituality. There are few opportunities for first-hand experience of world religions other than Christianity, and seeking ways to enhance pupils' knowledge of other faiths and cultures is noted as a focus for development.

Although time is given to RE as a discrete subject, good links are made across the curriculum and staff seek ways of including an RE dimension throughout their teaching.

Because of the time devoted to discussion and investigation, assessment of RE is informal. Progress made by pupils is good and is reported to parents as with other subjects, but the requirement to formalise assessment and for governors to be more rigorous in their monitoring of this subject is also noted in the RE action plan.

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

An outstanding feature is the exceptional Christian leadership given by the headteacher, who, in order to be of greater service to the school as its spiritual leader, is undergoing training for ordination. He gives a strong Christian example to all members of the community, and the staff respond by seeing themselves also as Christian role models to their pupils.

Management responsibilities are devolved to all staff, who welcome the opportunity to be closely involved in the school's Christian vision, in planning and decision making.

Staffing is stable with several long-serving members; all feel themselves to be part of the whole school family, with a duty of care to one another and to the children and their families. Parents talk warmly of their open relationship with the headteacher and all staff, and the drop-in sessions to discuss any concerns informally.

There is an active Friends' group who organise events to involve the local community and to raise money for the benefit of the school. The school opens its doors to local organisations, including the New Connections church group who meet each Sunday and welcome pupils to the Sunday School. However, forging closer links with the whole community at the parish church is a planned focus for school development.

Governors have a strong conviction to ensure the continuing progress of the school through its distinctive Christian character. They are supportive of staff and consider the well-being of all members of the community, maintaining funding for strategies that benefit the school, despite a falling roll.

SIAS report January 2010 Ely St. Mary's VA Junior School, Ely, Cambs CB7 4RB