

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

### Groombridge, St Thomas' Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Corseley Road  
Groombridge  
Tunbridge Wells  
TN3 9SF

**Diocese: Chichester**

LA: East Sussex

Dates of inspection: May 2006

Date of last inspection: November 2000

School's Unique reference number: 114559

Headteacher: Miss A Nicholls

Inspector's name and number: Derek Bastide

#### School context

The school is a one form entry Church of England Aided primary school with 210 pupils on roll. Most pupils come from the village of Groomsbridge though a number are brought in from farther afield, drawn by the reputation of the school.

#### Summary Judgement

St Thomas' School has developed into an outstanding church school. Deeply committed to the development of every child, it has high expectations of all its staff and pupils. Its strong Christian values are enshrined in its mission statement, its motto and its policies and these values are clearly visible in the life of the school.

#### Established strengths

- A very strong Christian ethos pervading the school in every corner
- A very strong relationship with the church community
- A commitment to continuous improvement

#### Focus for development

- Review the medium term plans in Religious Education
- Develop the assessment of Religious Education

#### How well does the school, through its distinctive Christian character, meet the needs of all learners?

The school is very clear about its strong Christian character which is shared by the whole school community. References to it permeate the school's documentation and it is demonstrated throughout the school building through displays and art work.

The school has a very strong focus upon meeting the needs of all pupils by providing a happy school atmosphere and an environment in which each individual's contribution and talents are nurtured, encouraged and valued. Staff members have high expectations of themselves and of their pupils which results in very high levels of academic achievement but there is also equal concern for the children's emotional and social development.

Relationships within the school, between members of staff, between staff and pupils and between the pupils themselves are exceptional. The 'buddy' system is very well developed and effective; it was praised by pupils who gave many examples of its efficacy.

Children are encouraged to look beyond their immediate community. Pupils made a point of seeking me out to show me a display board about Anna, a South American child they are helping to support - a source of great pride.

#### What is the impact of collective worship on the school community?

Collective worship plays a crucial role in the life of the school and makes a particularly important contribution to the spiritual, moral and social development of pupils. Acts of worship are imaginative, well planned and delivered. Each one is evaluated and this is then used for improvement purposes. Themes are selected for their relevance to the concerns of the pupils.

All members of staff are involved in conducting collective worship on a rota basis. The parish priest has a regular slot, pupils contribute and there are also appropriate visitors. Pupils appreciate the variety. The vast majority of pupils value collective worship: hymns are well sung, prayers are said purposefully and pupils do appear to use the time set aside for reflection. They see the relevance of the themes.

The parish priest and the school are working together on the balance between the traditional and the modern in terms of worship. In the case of prayers, children liked both prayers composed by pupils and traditional ones such as those of St Richard and St Ignatius Loyola.

Church festivals are celebrated. I observed a strong assembly from the parish priest which linked Ascension Day with Whit Sunday. Other major days are kept, some in the church with parents and Governors invited. These are valued by the parents.

Collective worship is further enriched by the school eucharist which occurs twice a year. In terms of the quality of pupil preparation, their full participation in the service and its overall inclusiveness it is outstanding. Feedback from all parties is very positive.

#### **How effective is the religious education?**

Religious Education is very strong in the school and makes a powerful contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. Regarded in the school as a core subject it is given resources and a curriculum time allocation appropriate to its status. It is coordinated and led by two highly experienced teachers representing both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 and monitored by the headteacher. There is an equal focus upon the two aims of Religious Education, to learn about religions and to learn from them. The teaching seen is outstanding: pupils are challenged both to think deeply and also to enter imaginatively into the subject content. Parents are delighted with the treatment of the Religious Education in the school and pupils find it both interesting and valuable; there is genuine enjoyment in the work. Pupils showed a good knowledge of Christianity and Islam.

The school is currently undertaking a review of Religious Education in response to both local and national developments - an example of its commitment to continuous improvement.

#### **How effective are the leadership and management of the school as a church school?**

The headteacher and the governors provide an exceptional level of leadership. The headteacher who is both inspirational and extremely hard working, exercises a genuinely collegial style of leadership and management. Her vision for the school is shared by her senior team and the whole of the staff who feel fully involved in the development of the school. The school is very effectively managed.

The Christian purpose of the school is laid out very clearly in the school prospectus. Parents and pupils are very well aware of this and support it overwhelmingly.

There is a very close relationship with the parish church. The headteacher is a member of the Parochial Church Council and gives a report on the school at each meeting. The parish priest is closely involved in the life of the school and the church as a whole is both very supportive and proud of the school.

The truth of the school's motto, Excellence, Compassion and Enthusiasm, is very evident in the life of the school.

SIAS report May 2006 Groombridge, St Thomas' CE Primary School Corseley Road Groombridge Tunbridge Wells TN3 9SF