

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

WISBECH St MARY Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School,

Church Road
Wisbech St Mary
Wisbech
Cambridgeshire PE13 4RJ

Diocese: Ely

LEA: Cambridgeshire

Dates of inspection: June 22nd and 23rd 2006

Date of last inspection September 2000

School's Unique reference number:278530

Headteacher: Miss Caroline Davis

SIAS Inspector: Jill Pauling 196

Context of the school

Wisbech St Mary VA Primary School has 114 pupils on roll and serves families from the village of Wisbech St Mary and the surrounding area. The area contains a socially mixed rural population and this is reflected in the school community. There are a very high proportion of children who have learning disabilities with statements for their needs. The school is mostly made up of pupils from White British backgrounds and a significant number are from traveller families. The Headteacher has been in post since January. The Headteacher and Governors have recently carried out a thorough review of the school using Diocesan church school self-evaluation materials. This has given them a clear picture of where the school is now and priorities for future development.

Summary Judgement

Wisbech St Marys is a good church school with a distinctive Christian ethos that permeates school life. The new Headteacher is working tirelessly with her staff, to ensure a secure environment in which all children are able to develop and flourish.

Established strengths

- Strong and productive relationships with the Church and local community.
- Confident, polite and well-motivated pupils.
- Good relationships between all members of the school community.
- A distinctive, inclusive Christian ethos demonstrated by the central place that worship plays in the life of the school. Learners know and appreciate what it means to be part of a church school

Focus for development

- Develop agreed strategies and procedures for governors, staff and pupils to monitor and evaluate collective worship.
- Raise the profile and status of R.E. within the school to that of a core subject.

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

The distinctive Christian ethos of the school is good with some very good features and is embedded in every area of school life. Learners from all groups feel valued including those with special educational needs and those experiencing difficulties. They are confident that their voice will be heard. The secure, family nature of the school is reflected in the friendly, outgoing attitude of the children towards visitors. Children are able to identify the special nature and characteristics of their school as a church school. They are keen to identify activities and displays that reflect the Christian foundation of the school and are able to discuss their links with the church. They look forward to visits from the local clergy. They describe a wide range of services and RE lessons that they attend in the church. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the children is good throughout the school, irrespective of their background, as evidenced by the integration of a significant number of children from the traveller community and discussions with learners. Parents are very positive about the inclusive and caring nature of the school. Children with special educational needs thrive. Children behave responsibly and show a high level of independence. Relationships are very strong and children's behaviour is good. They have learned tolerance and forgiveness and show respect for others. A good example of this is the care and concern shown by some older children explaining playground rules to a newly arrived traveller child.

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

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good. Worship occupies an important position in the life of the school and takes place at different times during the school day and in different settings. The children talk with enthusiasm about a variety of acts of worship and recognised that worship could include singing, prayer and reflection. Parents and members of the wider community appreciate being invited to special assemblies and expressed a belief that acts of worship are an important and integral part of this church school. Acts of worship are led by a variety of people but the Headteacher takes most of the whole school worship and the vicar comes to school to lead worship once a week. The themes for worship follow Diocesan guidance and are planned appropriately. As yet there are no formal mechanisms to monitor and evaluate worship but the school has plans to include the children in the evaluation process. There is regular participation by both individuals and groups of learners. Worship has a good impact on the learner because it is accessible and varied in content using story, drama, reflection, prayer and a range of appropriate music. A cross and a candle are used as the focus for worship. Members of staff attend and participate in whole school worship. The children say or sing a short communal prayer every lunch-time and at the end of school. Local clergy regularly participate and the vicar undertakes some very basic, informal monitoring and evaluation on behalf of the Governing Body. Worship is Christian with some strong Anglican elements linked to seasons in the Church year. For example, the whole school attend church every half term for a worship service. In this setting, the children are introduced to Anglican liturgy and use responsive prayers. This makes a strong impact on the learners who are keen to discuss their experiences. The vicar likens his work in the school to the 'Parable of the mustard seed', and feels the governors have a shared vision when it comes to the school proclaiming its Christian status and principles. The school also recognises and is sensitive to the beliefs and traditions of children from other cultures. It takes care to ensure that there is constructive dialogue with all their families. At the moment no child is withdrawn from R.E. or Worship.

How effective is the religious education ?

Overall, Religious Education is satisfactory and has a positive impact on the school community. Standards are average although there is not enough evidence of progression and more care needs to be taken with presentation of written recording.

By year 6 the children are able to learn collaboratively and use research effectively to compare and contrast aspects of worship for a Christian and a Buddhist. Differentiated activities, well thought out resources and the teacher's good subject knowledge enable all the class to access relevant information at an appropriate level. Teaching observed in Key Stage 1 was very good and pupils were engaged in a 'hands on' lesson on life in a Jewish household. Through role play, good use of artefacts and a cross curricular approach to both making and reading the Creation story from a scroll, the lesson made a real impact on the children who gained insight into several aspects of Judaism. The children are able to talk about how religious education affects their feelings and understanding of the world and develops their own beliefs.

The R.E. policy has recently been re-written and has some good features. It recognises the importance of introducing other world faiths and the values they bring to a school situated in a predominately white Christian area. However, the school has plans to look at the balance between the teaching of Christianity and other world faiths and ways in which religious education can be raised to core status throughout the school.

The R.E. curriculum follows the County scheme, supplemented by some good material for use in

Foundation stage. Learners are able to talk confidently about significant features from their R.E. curriculum and describe some of the displays that they have created. A time line of the life of Jesus had made a special impact. . The school makes good use of both the local secondary school and diocesan resources.

Lesson planning is inconsistent and there is insufficient evidence of assessment to establish what pupils know, can do and where they need to improve. The R.E. co-ordinator is experienced and has good subject knowledge. She attends Diocesan meetings and works hard to make certain there is support and training for the staff. There are plans to ensure equality of provision across the school through more rigorous monitoring of teaching and standards of work by senior management and governors.

How effective is the leadership and management of the school as a church school?

The leadership and management of the school, as a church school, is judged to be satisfactory although there are, by contrast, some areas where practice is already good with the potential to be very good. The whole school community has a strong sense of identity. The new Headteacher has quickly assessed the school's many strengths and identified areas for improvement. Much has been achieved in the six months since her appointment. There are plans, involving the whole staff and governing body, to further develop the school as an effective Church school by introducing more rigour into monitoring and evaluating practice. The Headteacher provides strong leadership and all staff feel valued and affirmed. Everyone within the school community is confident that their voice will be heard. They speak of a strong team ethos based on Christian principles. There are few systems, as yet, for Governors and senior staff to monitor and evaluate Worship, RE and the Social and Moral development of the learners. Other systems, such as the use of the Diocesan toolkit, are developing, resulting in a management team who are beginning to know and understand all the aspects of a church school. There are close links with the local Church and there are plans to develop and extend these so that the children benefit from even more prayerful support. Parents feel that the staff are always available for their children and that the school provides unique opportunities for their children to flourish in a compassionate and caring Christian environment.

The adults are all good role models and are working hard to ensure that the improved attitudes and behaviour of all the children are maintained.

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