

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

### **Acton Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School**

Lambert Drive

Sudbury

Suffolk

CO10 0US

### **St. Edmundsbury and Ipswich**

Local authority: Suffolk

Dates of inspection: May 14<sup>th</sup> 2008

Date of last inspection: November 2001

School's unique reference number: 124686

Headteacher: Mrs. Diana Bonnar

Inspector's name and number: Ann Williams 573

### **School Context**

Acton voluntary controlled primary school is situated in the village of Acton. There are 121 learners aged from four to nine years, the vast majority of whom are from white British families, who live in the village. The total number of children with special educational needs is below average, but the number with a statement is above average. Very few children are eligible for free school meals.

### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Acton Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School as a Church of England school are good.**

The school leadership places a strong emphasis on Christian values, which form the basis for its daily life. Learners are confident and feel secure and happy in the calm and nurturing environment. They are proud of their achievements, which are celebrated in a variety of ways and they have excellent role models in the long-serving staff, who are highly valued and supported by the school's management team.

### **Established Strengths**

- The whole staff is fully committed to the Christian principles which emphasise the distinctive nature of the school.
- Underlying Christian values encourage mutual respect and the development of good relationships between all members of the school community.
- Learners achieve well in the supportive environment and are proud of their participation in the life of the school.

### **Focus for Development**

- To develop and implement a revised plan for collective worship, with opportunities for reflective story telling.
- To strengthen the development of learners' spiritual growth and enable them to play an active part in collective worship.
- To give an overtly Christian foundation to governing body meetings by opening and closing with prayer

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

The Christian values on which the school bases its daily life are evident though the mission statement, displayed at the entrance to the school building and prominent on the cover of the school prospectus, and in the attitude of staff and children towards one another. Pupils respect staff and their fellow pupils and, in turn, feel that they are themselves respected. Disputes are rare and are quickly resolved with the emphasis on Christian principles of tolerance and forgiveness.

The children are confident and articulate and eagerly show off displays of photographs and work which demonstrate the Christian life of the school, their achievements and their care for others. They also point out special benches in the playground, one dedicated to one of their peers who died suddenly, and a tree planted in memory of another member of the school community, where there is an opportunity to sit quietly and reflectively. All pupils appreciate the times for reflection and these quiet places to sit within the school grounds.

Pupils support one another and are particularly thoughtful in their behaviour towards pupils with severe difficulties. Boys recently took part in a dance production 'Boys in Babergh', and all were supported to enable even those with profound difficulties to participate fully. Older pupils appreciate the responsibilities they have as play leaders, for which they were specially trained, and as reading buddies with the younger children. All are aware of environmental issues and being an 'Eco-school', and enjoy maintaining their organic garden and a pond, and encouraging recycling. The children are proud of their fund raising for charity, and of the material and financial support they give to their 'twin' school in Sri Lanka, and look forward to the exchange of letters and emails.

Representatives on the School Council are aware of the significance of their role and meet fortnightly to discuss a range of issues from improving table manners to the environment.

Lessons are thoughtfully planned and differentiated and pupils are diligent in their completion of tasks set. Achievements are publicly celebrated each week, with 'Star of the Week' being awarded for kindness and consideration for others or forgiveness as well as more academic prowess.

Parents comment enthusiastically about the happy and nurturing atmosphere within the school and are especially appreciative of the strategies employed with children who have particular needs. For example, some members of staff have been trained in a special 'drawing and talking' programme, designed to help children with emotional difficulties. Parents also appreciate the approachability of the staff, and the ways in which children are known as individuals.

Extra-curricular clubs at lunchtimes and after school are designed to accommodate the wide range of interests and abilities of all the children, and are well attended. One such is 'n.vision', a Christian club for Years 3 and 4, organised and run weekly by volunteers from the local community, which is another opportunity for children to talk about their faith and to explore the Christian message.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is good**

The daily act of worship is integral to the school day. Opportunities for spiritual development are good in that collective worship, based on a diocesan four-year cycle, is well-planned and well-resourced in order to be accessible to all pupils. All members of staff are happy and willing to lead collective worship, which ensures a variety of approach and delivery, to which the pupils respond well. The local incumbent also regularly leads the whole school collective worship, and members of the local church community are frequently involved. One foundation governor attends weekly and monitors content.

Pupils enter and leave quietly, listening to music chosen by members of Year 4, who tell everyone the reason for their choice. All are attentive during story-telling and join in the singing with great enthusiasm, knowing the words of the songs by heart. Opportunities for active participation by the children are limited at the moment. However, they are quiet and reflective during prayers and sometimes say together the Lord's Prayer or another special prayer.

In order to ensure its impact and accessibility, staff evaluate the content of collective worship, and, as a result, some have received training in 'Reflective Story Telling' which will be introduced in the near future.

Worship is further enhanced by visits to the local church where Christian Festivals such as Easter, Harvest and Christmas are celebrated, and to which parents and members of the local community are invited. Pupils are also involved in the making of Christingles for the annual service in aid of the Children's Society. Another tradition is to walk to the church for a special service on Ascension Day, and this year, pupils in Year 4 were especially thoughtful at this time which was the first anniversary of the death of a classmate. They asked to visit and stand in prayer at the grave before returning to school.

Pupils talk openly about the message delivered during collective worship, and staff willingly discuss issues of faith with the children.

Grace is said at lunchtime in the dining hall, children from Year 4 being responsible for the

choice of prayer. Before being dismissed at the end of the day, all classes quietly remember those in need and then say a prayer together, remembering that God is always a part of their lives.

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

The leadership and management teams are wholly committed to ensuring that Christian values permeate the life of the school. The school aims and mission statement are clearly displayed for all who enter the school to see, and they are printed on the cover of the school prospectus, in which prospective parents see that the Christian ethos within the school is given prominence.

The headteacher is acknowledged by all stakeholders as a strong Christian leader and role model. Governors are confident in her leadership and give her their full support. Foundation governors are aware of their role in monitoring the Christian life of the school and, in addition to attending regular meetings, visit frequently both formally and also informally to help as volunteers and to support the extra-curricular activities. The local incumbent is a foundation governor and leads collective worship on a weekly basis.

Staffing is stable and most are long-standing members of the school community. They feel highly valued and supported by the headteacher and governing body and consider themselves to be 'equal parts of a mutually supportive family'.

Parents speak with enthusiasm about the school's Christian ethos and the open and welcoming atmosphere. They belong to and support the flourishing group 'Friends of Acton', which raises considerable funds both for the school and its chosen charities. Their main fund-raising event, a Spring Fair, involves pupils as well as parents and staff, with classes given responsibility for certain stalls, which they man at the event.

The school is at the heart of the local community, accommodating the playgroup and the baby and toddler group on the school premises. These are run by members of the 'Friends' and members of the local church, who also organise a Holiday Club for the pupils under the auspices of the local church. Local companies support the school with sponsorship, and one company organises a competition for the children to design a Christmas card which it prints. The school has also recently opened its doors to organisations from the village which are unable to use the village hall at the present time.

The local church presents Bibles to leavers at their end of year service, and the close links between church and school are mutually beneficial.