

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Hilgay Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Church View
Hilgay
Downham Market
Norfolk
PE38 OJL

Diocese: Ely

Local authority: Norfolk
Dates of inspection: 16.01.07 & 17.01.07
Date of last inspection: Spring Term, 2001
URN: 121072
Headteacher: Mr James McBurney
Inspector's name and number: Mrs D Lenton 460

School context

Hilgay Church of England Voluntary Controlled School is a small village primary school. At present there are 58 pupils taught in three mixed-age classes. The accommodation is cramped and would benefit from being extended. However, the school uses the available space well and the welcoming atmosphere overcomes this difficulty. Virtually all pupils are of White British backgrounds. Attainment on entry is broadly average. However, the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is above average. The rector of the parish is also the chair of governors at the school. He is responsible for three churches within three villages.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Hilgay Church of England Voluntary School as a Church of England school are satisfactory.

Hilgay Church of England school is well placed to become a good church school under the leadership of the present head teacher. There are elements of the school already judged to be good. The SIAS Self Evaluation document is proving to be an excellent working tool. Through it the head teacher and the chair of governors are developing their distinctive vision for the school as a church school. This will need to be shared and discussed further with the staff and the governors as a whole.

Established strengths

- The warm and welcoming atmosphere throughout the school, along with the care and support of all pupils, particularly those with special educational needs
- The leadership of the head teacher, particularly in establishing and activating a section in the School Development and Improvement Plan devoted to realising the distinctive vision for the school as a church school
- The good behaviour of the pupils and the reverence with which they approach collective worship

Focus for development

- Raise the profile of the church within the life of the school
- Plan for spiritual, moral, social and cultural opportunities
- Give staff appropriate training opportunities for leading collective worship
- Give foundation governors the opportunity to be more effective in their role through appropriate training

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

The Christian aims of the school are included in the school brochure. In this it explains that the school is a church school and that its values are based on Christianity. At present the children and adults of the school are working on a new logo. This incorporates the Christian cross and a stained glass window and will demonstrate the school's status more clearly. The head teacher is keen to enhance the status of the school as a church school through training of staff in leading collective worship and through closer liaison with the local rector. The school supports many charities, including Water Aid for Africa, as well as supporting the diocese's charities.

Although there is an implicit climate of spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness, it is an area that the school recognises requires more structure, with more planned opportunities for recording of children's individual development. During Religious Education the children have the opportunity to work on different faiths and cultures. They are at present looking at the Jewish faith.

The cramped entrance to the school does not allow for large displays of welcome. At present there is only a small poster which states that "Hilgay is a happy Christian school, in which adults and children always try to think of others showing good manners and care for everybody." The school has plans, however, to extend its facilities and is working on a large "Tree of Life" display that will be hung in the entrance. In the main corridor during the inspection there was a large and lively display of Noah's Ark and in one of the classrooms work on Christian symbols could be seen. The only information about what is happening in the local church is a leaflet that explains when the services are held there. This is displayed on a notice board on the outside wall of the school.

The school's Christian values enable good support of individual pupils, particularly those with special educational needs. A parent of a child with severe special educational needs is "really pleased" with the way in which her child has settled into the school and how the needs of her child are being met, both educationally and emotionally. Parents, when asked how they saw the school as a church school, testify to the calm and friendly atmosphere, to the individual care of each pupil and to good behaviour of the pupils. The children's politeness and courtesy to each other and to adults was observed during the Inspection. The children are quick to make friends with new pupils. One parent was delighted to see her child playing with a group of children, of different ages, on the day that she and her son came to visit the school for the first time. The recent Ofsted report confirms these observations, stating that the children "treat each other with care and their teachers with respect".

There is a strong emphasis in the school on applying Christian love and kindness in practical ways. For example, the children are able to demonstrate it through the "Buddy" system that has recently been introduced in the playground. One girl said, "if anyone has a problem they can speak to anyone who is wearing a Buddy badge, and they will always help".

For such a small school the children have access to an excellent variety of extra-curricular opportunities. These include music, art and sports clubs. The school has close ties with the community Silver Band, who lend the school instruments for the children to practise with. One was being used during the inspection. They take part in several sporting events with other schools and have won trophies in football and netball, which are on display. The older children are given the opportunity to attend a residential course in May or September, which the majority take up.

The school has introduced a good method of celebrating achievement, which underpins the church school ethos: there are special achievement assemblies every half term, which parents attend by invitation. The children are awarded points for many things including, being helpful, trying hard and for academic achievement. When enough points have been achieved the children receive bronze, silver or gold certificates. These they can design themselves. The school council can also nominate children for awards, and these are handed out in assembly by the chair of the council.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is satisfactory

The daily act of worship takes place each afternoon in the central classroom. . There is a small cross at the top of the wall, which is used as a focus. Despite the cramped seating arrangements and inevitable classroom disruption, the school has created a good sense of reverence during this time together. Each member of staff takes collective worship on different days, but they do not all attend each day.

Collective Worship clearly meets the requirements for worship in a church school. On the day of the Inspection the worship leader and children recalled the story of Moses from a week before. The children responded very well and remembered many details. They watched a short clip from a video of the story to which they responded with close attention. The children sang "Sing Hosanna" with enthusiasm. At the end there was a time for reflection, and on the day observed, the message was, that if we trust in God then we need not be afraid. Children are being introduced to the Lord's Prayer regularly.

The second observation of Collective Worship was led in the form of a hymn practice. The children learned "The Water of Life". They sang well, and the time together was quiet and reverent. There was prayer and a time for reflection. However the children, when asked, were not able to explain that Jesus said that he was the water of life and what that implied. The head teacher did well to ask the children to think about it further and how it might tie in with "give us this day our daily bread" from the Lord's Prayer for the next lesson.

Adults and children interviewed speak highly of the school as a church school. One girl is particularly looking forward to the Leavers' Service in the local church and says that her school is special because "we go to church to sing for others". One parent says: "The children are learning how to worship and be respectful by spending time in the local church building – there is a different atmosphere for the children to experience. Candles are used, and children sing solos."

The local rector until recently led collective worship regularly. At the moment his other commitments for the diocese have not made this possible. However he speaks of trying to introduce a Friday collective worship to which parents are also invited. He feels that this is a good opportunity to introduce parents to worship, and the inspector supports this suggestion. The school uses the church building regularly for services such as Harvest, Christingle and Easter in which the local community is invited. The children also perform their Christmas play in the church. These are well attended and the school has difficulty in getting everyone in.

The school has good links with the local Methodist church, and the minister from there visits the school and leads collective worship twice a term. Many of the children attend the Methodist Shell Club, which is for children from six to ten years of age.

There is little evidence of planning and evaluating of collective worship at present. The school is aware of this and is engaged in developing a collective worship policy. No governors are at present responsible for monitoring collective worship, other than the rector through discussion with the head teacher.

Children are satisfactorily involved with collective worship, through reading of prayers, answering questions and singing, but they are not, at present, actively involved as worship leaders. The head teacher speaks about involving the children more in the future, and the inspector supports this suggestion.

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

The head teacher and all the staff worked through the self-evaluation process for SIAS and this highlighted areas not previously considered by the school. The main "areas for development" in the SEF demonstrate that the school is thinking about raising the profile of the school as a church school by changing the school logo and organising inset training on church school issues and the inspector encourages the school to proceed with these. The head teacher meets regularly with the rector to discuss the vision for the school and how this

can be most effectively presented to the community. At present the other foundation governors, although involved in the school on a day-to-day basis, need to widen their role to see how the school will continue to grow as a church school.

The head teacher receives spiritual support from the local rector through prayer and discussion. The bishop's visitor also regularly acts as a listening ear for the head teacher, as well as spending time talking to the children and helping in the classroom. The school secretary has offered to attend any diocesan meetings that will help the school. She is also the wife of the local rector.

There is evidence that the school plays an important part in the local community, through its school plays and its involvement with the local brass band and youth club. All the adults in the school act as good role models for the children. Although part-timers, they work well together as a team, meeting regularly, planning and giving each other good support. The classroom support staff are given equal respect and value. When a child made an interesting point in collective worship the teacher dealt with it with respect and understanding.

The school has a strong friends' association in which a large percentage of the mothers are involved. Parents feel that they are involved in the life of the school and those interviewed said that they can visit and speak to a teacher at any time if they have any concerns. Parents value the way in which their children's personal development and well-being are nurtured.

SIAS report January 2007: Hilgay Church of England School, Church View, Hilgay, Downham Market, Norfolk PE38 0JL.