

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Isham Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Church Street
Isham
Kettering
Northants
NN14 1 HD

Diocese: Peterborough

Local authority: Northamptonshire
Dates of inspection: January 8th 2007
Date of last inspection: October 15th-16th 2001
School's unique reference number: 122023
Headteacher: Mrs Kirstin White
Inspector's name and number: Mrs Hilary Spenceley 370

School context

Isham CEVA Primary is a small rural school to the south of Kettering. Pupils come from the village and surrounding area; almost all pupils come from a White UK background. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals and the number with Special Educational Needs is below average. The Headteacher has been in post since April 2005 and the Deputy Headteacher since September 2005. Building work on an extension is due to start at Easter 2007 to provide improved facilities for both pupils and staff.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Isham Primary as a Church of England school are good

This is a good school with some outstanding features. Christian values permeate the education offered. There is a desire for continuous improvement through self-evaluation and expectations are high. Close links with the church and community encourage all to explore and embrace the Christian faith.

Established strengths

- Strong collaborative leadership inspired by the Headteacher's example of commitment to the Christian foundation of the school
- Christian principles and values, which are actively promoted and are evident in the pupils' attitudes to learning and their relationships
- The inclusive nature of the school reflected in an awareness that each individual's contribution is valuable
- Strong links with the parish church and village community and the high regard in which the school is held as an integral part of local life

Focus for development

- Survey parents' views on being a church school
- Offer pupils further opportunities to broaden their cultural awareness and understanding

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

A commitment to providing an education based on Christian teachings is at the heart of Isham School. Everyone works together harmoniously, understanding the value of Christian values such as love, forgiveness, respect and empathy. The quality of relationships is excellent. Parents speak highly of the distinctive character of the school; they truly appreciate the moral teaching offered to their children and the resultant effects upon their children's lives and behaviour. One describes it as a "privilege" to have her child educated at

the school, where she feels home and school work as one to equip children with a sound foundation for later life, both academically and spiritually. A survey of pupils' views on Worship and RE (Oct '06) reveals that they value attending a church school; particularly important to them is the opportunity for prayer – daily during Worship, at lunchtime and before going home – and the knowledge that all contributions and achievements will be valued by their fellow pupils and the adults in the school family. Responses to a question asking what it means to belong to a church school include, “ It makes me feel supported by God,” and “I know people in school will understand what I tell them”. The Christian ethos makes a strong impact on the pupils' spiritual development. Pupils can explain the application of what they learn to their own lives; discussions I had with pupils of all ages revealed a depth of both understanding of Christian principles and their impact, which was impressive. Pupils are articulate and responsive when asked about spiritual issues and obviously used to considering the bigger questions of life. One pupil told me confidently that the school is “the best”, because all abilities and talents are acknowledged. He cited the “Good Works” assembly when particular achievements are rewarded, “and they may not be for reading and writing, although everyone has to do some of that”! Links between the school, parish and community are strong. The Rector is a regular visitor to school, taking Worship and providing valued support. Many pupils attend the Sunday School, which meets in the school building; Sunday School leaders liaise closely with the school, and parents and pupils find the seamless link between church and school a natural part of their life. Charitable giving is important to the pupils and they can identify Bible stories which teach that it is good to give to others less fortunate. Foundation governors are exploring with the Rector the possibility of admitting children to Holy Communion and also of extending opportunities to parents to further their knowledge of the Christian faith through an after-school course.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Planning and evaluation of Collective Worship are good and shared by all who contribute to the leading of Worship; this includes all staff, the Rector, Bishop's Visitor and occasional visitors. As mentioned above, pupils' views on Worship have been sought, and acted upon. The RE and Worship Governor regularly observes Worship and reports to the Governing Body. The focus of worship in the school hall is a table on which stand a Bible and candle, lit at an appropriate moment to signify a time for quiet and reflection. In the Worship observed pupils behaved immaculately, singing well to the accompaniment of a piano, and responding thoughtfully to the Rector's talk about choices in life, using as a tool the game of Snakes and Ladders, with the good choices of the ladders and poor choices of the snakes. Pupils were able to identify appropriate sources of help if they required support in making choices. Those talked with said that they had enjoyed the Worship. They were able to draw a parallel between parables in the Bible and the way in which the game had been a vehicle for relaying the real message about choices. They have good recall of previous acts of Worship and relate how what they learned has affected their thoughts and actions. They like the variety of styles and activities in Worship. All Christian festivals are celebrated, as are the major non-Christian festivals, which feature in various areas of the pupils' curriculum. Exploring ways of involving parents in worship has been identified as an action point by governors and staff. The local Anglican parish church, St Peter's, is the venue for many school services throughout the year. These services are very popular and attract a wide attendance. Parents are particularly impressed with the way in which the pupils lead these services without adult intervention.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Pupils enjoy RE lessons and their responses in the pupil survey reveal how they value what they learn; particular aspects mentioned include the Bible, other religions and ways in which RE teaches how faith can affect life. In the two lessons observed teaching was well planned, pupils worked purposefully and co-operatively together. They understood the lesson objectives. Care was taken to include all ability levels in the lesson and activities were arranged to allow all pupils to participate. Planning, monitoring and evaluation of RE is good; it is led by the RE Co-ordinator who provides willing support and advice when requested. Training opportunities are made available where appropriate. A recently introduced tracking system for RE, which has now run for one complete year, provides detailed current evidence of pupils' progress. Attainment levels are on a par with those in core subjects and there is

good evidence in pupil's books and folders of the expectations and standards achieved. Discussion with pupils demonstrates a good level of learning and understanding arising from this work. Marking and constructive comment follows the school practice, where both pupils and staff evaluate the work; this joint system means that pupils are always aware of their progress and can communicate to staff those areas where they would like more help. In an effort to integrate RE into other curriculum areas, recent innovations have seen greater use of creative arts as a medium for the enhancement of RE teaching. Dance, symbols and technology are some of the methods explored thus far to enrich pupils' experience and understanding. Pupils are enthusiastic about this cross-curricular working, greatly enjoying the recent Egyptian project which involved a visit to the British Museum to investigate artefacts from an artistic and technological perspective and the mastering of a dance in the Egyptian style. The school self evaluation identifies a need to institute closer working links with other faith groups to widen pupils' knowledge and understanding of other cultures and religions. Current ethos, Worship and RE practice provides a good basis for addressing this aspect.

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

The school's collegiate approach results in a shared vision and commitment to Christian education. The Headteacher sets a strong example, providing a firmly grounded Christian lead to the whole school community. She welcomes input from all and all know that their contributions will be valued. The recent OFSTED report describes the Headteacher and governors as being "passionate" about their school; this is borne out in documentation, survey findings and the focussed way in which the school is managed. Governors and teaching staff met last term to identify ways in which the school/church relationship could be improved. An action plan highlights priorities such as involving parents more in worship and providing more opportunities for pupils to develop independent prayer. There is an obvious pride in the school's status as a church school and a desire for continual growth and improvement. The recent remodelling of the governing body roles has led to a greater clarity for individual governors, who now feel confident to fulfil their responsibilities. The Chair of Governors has high expectations of his members, leading in a proactive way, prompting the governing body to look for new ways in which the school can continue to provide education grounded in Christian teaching and inclusive of all. Parents are regularly involved in aspects of school life, their views are sought and acted upon. A survey is planned for October '07 to gauge parental views on aspects of being a church school. The village and local community keeps in touch with school matters through a monthly letter from the Headteacher which appears in the village magazine.

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