

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Laddingford St. Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Darman Lane,
Laddingford,
Maidstone,
ME18 6BL

Diocese: Rochester

Local authority: Kent

Dates of inspection: 11th December 2007

School's unique reference number: 118637

Headteacher: Mrs. Yvonne Harris

Inspector's name and number: Ms Jan Thompson (NS 92)

School context

Laddingford St. Mary's is a Voluntary Controlled Church of England primary school, situated in the small Kent village of Laddingford, near Maidstone. It has 71 pupils, mostly White British. Only a few families are committed church goers; and there is one devout Muslim family that currently has three children at the school. The original Victorian building has been modernized and extended and there is a small mission church attached to it, which is used by the school as its hall. Much energy went into saving the school when it was under threat of reorganisation in 2006. The headteacher was new in September 2007. Ofsted judged the school to be satisfactory, with good personal development of pupils.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of 11th December 2007 as a Church of England school are satisfactory

Laddingford St. Mary's Voluntary Controlled Church of England Primary School is a satisfactory and improving Church school. The new headteacher has brought about a number of improvements that need time to become embedded.

Established strengths

- The support of the governing body, under the Christian leadership of the Chair of Governors.
- The pupils' positive attitude to Collective Worship.
- Good teaching and learning in Religious Education.

Focus for development

- Examine the distinctive Christian nature of the school and clarify this in school documentation.
- Involve pupils in the evaluation of Collective Worship.
- Involve clergy and church workers more frequently in leading Collective Worship.

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

This is a small school where individuals are well cared for and where both adults and pupils are friendly and open. Pupils learn to be honest and respectful of each other and they work together well. The Muslim pupils are supported during Ramadan and appropriate concessions are made on school uniform. Pupils behave well and relationships are good at all levels. The school sees all this as part of its Christian ethos but the governing body has not stopped to consider why these values are Christian. A governor's shield is awarded for 'Helping, sharing and showing respect' but although this emerged from Christian motivation, it has not been explained as such to the pupils. Consequently, pupils see a distinction between moral and Christian education. Both Religious Education (RE) and Worship make some contribution to pupils' spiritual development, particularly when teachers relate the RE to the

pupils' own lives and encourage them to debate and ask questions. The new headteacher has begun to make good use of the school environment to promote spiritual development, for example, with notices at Christmastime declaring 'Jesus is the reason for the season', which pupils have noted.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is satisfactory

The new headteacher has placed more importance on daily Collective Worship by giving plenty of time to it and ensuring that all teachers attend. The Christian 'Family Trust', which leads worship in many schools in the Maidstone area, is becoming more involved in the school. Parents are also now invited to join in more frequently with the school's worship, which they enjoy and which boosts the singing capacity of this small school. Pupils enjoy Collective Worship and engage with it well. They have a reasonable understanding of the purpose of Christian worship, with one pupil saying that it was 'To say we believe in God and thank Jesus for dieing for us.' They show some appreciation of opportunities for prayer. For example, Year 5 and 6 pupils, who recently attended a school residential week, chose to write their own prayers to feed back in an assembly on their experiences of the week. The headteacher, as worship co-ordinator, plans the worship to follow the Church's Year, with the celebration of Christian festivals. However, not all Collective Worship is entirely Christian and denominational, as it should be in a Church of England school. Pupils do, however, benefit spiritually from having Collective Worship in a simple and beautiful church building, where the altar is the focal point and where other Christian symbols are used, such as an Advent ring of candles. They use the Lord's Prayer frequently and are beginning to use liturgical greetings at the beginning of worship, as they light the candle. The top class also attends the Church Schools Festival in Rochester Cathedral every two years, where they recently experienced a Eucharist. However, pupils have not yet been helped to evaluate their worship experiences and consequently are not used to articulating what they get out of it.

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

The new headteacher is a committed Christian leader who is working hard with the support of the governing body to improve the Christian aspects of the school. The impact of this is already apparent, for example in some elements of worship; but it generally needs more time to become embedded. However, they do not yet promote the Christian status of the school effectively in the school prospectus. Significant members of the governing body have attended diocesan training on leadership and management of a Church school in the past few years, but their energy has been diverted to fighting for the school's survival rather than in monitoring and developing the Christian aspects of the school. The new headteacher has begun to rectify this and has already sent out a questionnaire to parents. They are very happy with the Christian education that their children receive; and some parents from outside the village specifically chose the school because it is a Church school. There are traditionally close links with the local church within the village community; but the Vicar serves three Church schools and therefore leads worship here infrequently. Teachers have implemented the new Kent agreed syllabus with enthusiasm, using a scheme of work recommended by the diocese, with the result that pupils are gaining good knowledge and understanding in the subject.