

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

### **Prestbury St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Junior School**

Bouncers Lane,  
Prestbury,  
Cheltenham  
GL52 5JB

#### **Diocese of Gloucester**

Gloucestershire LA

Date of inspection: September 20<sup>th</sup> 2006

Date of last inspection: March 2000

School's URN: 115696

Headteacher: Mrs Nicki Bennett

Inspector: Rev Brian Torode. NS 111

#### **Context**

Prestbury St Mary's is a mixed school of 237 pupils in the village of Prestbury on the outskirts of Cheltenham. Most pupils live in privately owned houses although some live in nearby social housing. All have English as a first language. The proportion with learning difficulties and disabilities is a little higher than average. At the start of Y3 pupils' attainment is above average, with a relative weakness in writing.

#### **Summary Judgement**

**The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Prestbury St Mary's CofE School as a Church of England school are good with some outstanding features.**

This is apparent in the emphasis it places on the spiritual and personal development of its learners. It receives strong support from the Church and the church community. Christian values and attitudes are embedded in the relationships that exist between all its stakeholders. The positive way in which learners speak about these values illustrates the impact the Christian ethos of the school has upon their lives.

#### **Established strengths**

- The quality of personal relationships that exist reflect the strong Christian ethos which permeates the whole life of the school.
- The confidence with which the learners articulate the perceived Christian ethos of the school supports the school's published mission and aims.
- The importance given to worship and RE has a very significant effect on the children's attitudes and their behaviour.

#### **Focus for development**

- Produce a discrete policy on Spiritual Development
- Establish strategies for more frequent pupil self assessment in RE units of study.
- Consider including some Saints Days and teaching about significant Christian lives in the programme for collective worship.
- Include visits to places of worship belonging to religions other than Christianity in the RE curriculum.

**The school, through its outstanding Christian character, meets the needs of all learners.**

The ethos of the school bears testimony to its Christian foundation. This is evident in the welcoming, exciting and motivating environment in which the whole school community works. Static displays and artefacts in public areas of the school and in all classrooms reflect the distinctive nature of the school as a Church school. The school Mission Statement is prominently displayed. The behaviour and attitudes of the learners illustrate a mutual respect and appreciation of all the school's members. Parents gave this as a reason for choosing the school for their children.

All children speak confidently about the school and the provision made for their education and well being –“The behaving is brilliant“ and “There is always someone to talk to” were just two of many opinions expressed.

The children talk openly and confidently about the impact of Christian values upon their lives. The many extra curricular activities provided reinforce the Christian ethos, and all learners are encouraged to participate. Every Child Matters is one of the strong foundations upon which the ethos of the school stands and evidence for this is to be seen in the programmes for healthy eating and personal and social education. Many initiatives undertaken by staff, governors, the clergy and parents ensure that every child has access to the many stimulating opportunities provided by the school. The children appreciate and take great pride in their environment. Parents value the dedication and commitment of all the staff.

The clergy input into the life of the school emphasises its Church of England status and parents and children comment on this frequently and positively.

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

The daily act of worship is well planned and resourced. The Values for Life scheme forms the basis for worship and there is much evidence in displays and dialogue of the importance attached to Christian values. Children participate with confidence and enjoyment and value Worship time as a time for “Sharing God with your friends” or “Joining in with other people’s good news”. The children enter and leave with respect. The structure of worship time encourages spiritual development and the majority of learners take back to the classroom some thoughts that have been shared in worship. They are quite at ease articulating their opinions about the effects of such values. This is further promoted through the worship areas in each classroom. In worship children experience different styles of prayer and also know certain prayers by heart, including a school prayer. Prayer at transition times throughout the day is a strong feature of school life.

The Parish clergy lead a weekly worship time and some of the children know some Anglican responses. Further input to this aspect of Anglican liturgy will be valuable.

The children’s visits to the Church and the Cathedral are valued and raise awareness of the different styles of worship in the Church of England. The children are developing a good understanding of the formal and informal use of their church building through the varied opportunities for worship and spiritual experience offered by the clergy both during and outside school time.

Visitors to worship bring experiences of the wider world and the children were well informed on issues such as fair trade, justice and current world conflicts. Children talked seriously about practical ways to respond to people less privileged and were well able to articulate their understanding of right and wrong.

**The religious education provided is good**

Religious education is given a high profile in the school and the planning for the implementation of the new Syllabus has been well thought through. The commitment and enthusiasm of the co-ordinator is inspiring and motivates her colleagues. The governing body was involved in the training for the introduction of the new RE syllabus. Governors monitor the subject and reports are shared with the full governing body, ensuring a whole school participation and a high profile for this area of the curriculum.

The learners were confident in their evaluation of RE. The older learners appreciated the opportunity for discussion and sharing of opinions. Appropriate time is given to learning

about other faiths and visits to places of worship need to be essential elements in the Medium Term planning. Lessons observed showed sound knowledge and understanding. They were well prepared with resources and artefacts appropriate to the focus. It was evident from discussion with the children that the Attainment Targets – Learning About and Learning From – are both being addressed. In lessons observed by the inspector interesting, appropriate and challenging tasks were set for the children. Work is marked as conscientiously as that for other subjects and reports to parents are descriptive, evaluative and set appropriate targets. This goes a long way towards drawing attention to the high profile that this subject already enjoys. One parent expressed some reservations about her child learning about faiths other than Christianity.

Several parents spoken to said that their child/ren often commented about worship and what they had studied in RE, and they felt that this indicated good teaching.

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

The head teacher, staff and Governors have a shared vision for Prestbury St Mary's and this is apparent in documentation and in practice. There is an overwhelming ethos of trust, support and corporate responsibility. All staff are happy and feel valued. The head, through her open door policy, is readily available and very approachable. Her knowledge of the children and staff ensures that she is fully aware of all that takes place in the school. She is therefore able to praise and sympathise with sincerity and if necessary, to challenge. Her encouragement of initiatives in and outside the school confines contributes towards the broad and exciting experiences so valued by all stakeholders.

The head works closely with the governors in promoting the Christian character of the school and encourages them to be pro-active in monitoring and evaluation. Relationships between governors and staff are good. Advertisements for new staff emphasise the need for commitment to the school's Christian aims and values.

The head's excellent working relationship with the governing body and the church ensures that they participate fully in the life of the school. The children know the governors and welcome their contributions. Parish clergy and governors participate in the organisation of some extra curricular activities and the work of the Parish Youth Worker with the Y6 children is valued. The Best Bible Club is very successful and is the product of a very close working relationship between staff and governors. There are strong links with the neighbouring Infants' School and chairs of governors and heads meet to discuss prevention of curriculum overlap and related issues.

Through offering a Christian Voice in Education Prestbury St Mary's School sets its hallmark "to provide the best possible deal for all pupils".

SIAS report September 20<sup>th</sup> 2006 Prestbury St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Junior School Bouncers Lane, Prestbury, Cheltenham GL52 5JB