

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Swimbridge Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School,

Barnstaple Hill,
Swimbridge,
Barnstaple,
North Devon,
EX32 0PJ

Diocese: Exeter

Local authority: Devon

Date of inspection: February 11th 2008

Date of last inspection: 17th & 22nd October 2003

School's unique reference number: 113455

Headteacher: Mr. Garry Reed

Inspector's name and number: Mrs Jenny Petridge (153)

School context

The school is housed in a Victorian building on the outskirts of a small village in a rural setting. The majority of the 78 learners live outside the designated area. The school has a small hard play area, which is supplemented by the use of a small field in the village, a short walk away. The school does not have a hall. A local village hall is used for physical education, dance and drama. Learners have to cross a main road for access to these facilities.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Swimbridge Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding.

The dynamic leadership of the school by the Headteacher and staff is creating a strong Christian ethos. This is making a significant contribution to the high standards achieved by the learners. There is an explicit emphasis on the care of others, which is clearly based on Christian teaching.

Established strengths

- The dynamic and inspirational leadership of the Headteacher.
- The enthusiasm and commitment of all staff and teaching assistants, in implementing the Christian ethos of the school.
- The explicit Christian beliefs and values expressed in acts of collective worship and religious education, and their impact on the Christian ethos of the school.

Focus for development

- Evaluate the overall planning of class / Key Stage/ whole school acts of collective worship, in conjunction with the use of the SEAL (social and emotional aspects of learning) material.
- Develop long term planning for worship.
- Extend and develop the strategic use and range of formal assessment in religious education over time.
- Use the National Society Toolkit as part of the school's self evaluation process. Include all stakeholders in this process.

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

This is a successful school. It has been ranked among the top 5% of primary schools nationally each year since 2001. This is due to a range of factors. These contribute to creating a happy and effective learning community, with a strong Christian ethos. Learners are self-assured and feel safe. This is because of the positive relationships they have with all the adults in the school. The emphasis on, "I must care for others", is reinforced by teachers. For example, in an act of worship, the Headteacher said "being caught being good is lovely." Teachers know and understand the learners' abilities very well. As a result, they adapt their teaching to reflect the particular needs of all learners. This is resulting in a high level of progress. This is the school of choice for many parents, who travel because of the impact of the Christian ethos and the quality of the academic and pastoral standards. The limitations of the small classrooms and the lack of a hall are considerable. Despite these constraints, the teachers are providing a creative curriculum. The spiritual development of learners is based on a Christian worldview. The prospectus clearly refers to the model set by the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. This focus on the person of Jesus means that the Christian ethos is central to the life of the school. As a result, learners know and understand key Christian beliefs. Opportunities for high-quality music, art, drama and dance, mean that learners are given rich cultural and spiritual experiences. For example, a topic on the 'Firebird' in Key Stage 1 and lower Key Stage 2 resulted in art and literacy of a high standard. This topic provided opportunities for reflection and wonder, as seen in learners' work. Learners are given excellent cultural experiences such as in learning about Indian dance and Egyptian art. The school has a topic approach to learning, which means that cross-curricular opportunities for spiritual development are emphasised. For example, in a lesson for lower Key Stage 2, learners were given an excellent opportunity to experience the Chinese story of Pan Gu through dance. The unit included religious education, literacy, expressive arts and physical education. The outdoor environment, although limited, provides an opportunity for quiet reflection as well as play. The beauty of the views from the school are frequently used as a learning opportunity, representing best practice.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding.

Learners are enthusiastic about collective worship. This is because they are given a variety of age, Key Stage and whole school opportunities for worship, including family groups. All staff are involved in leading worship each week. This means that learners experience an outstanding range of content and styles. As a result, they are interested and understand the relevance of worship in the life of the school. The limitations of the very restricted space are overcome because of the excellent behaviour of the learners. In the act of worship observed, on a theme of "Remembering to do our very best for everyone", learners enjoyed a visual aid and lively storytelling. Jesus' teaching was explained as a context for this theme. The programme of collective worship is organised by themes, which reflect long-term planning. These include an adaptation of the Diocesan plans. This planning ensures a variety of content for learners. The Headteacher is the collective worship coordinator and he regards leading worship as part of his ministry in the school. As a result, acts of worship are meaningful and personal. The introduction of SEAL material (social and emotional aspects of learning) has not yet been formally evaluated. The collective worship programme, including planning, is actively and enthusiastically supported by the Vicar, who leads worship at least fortnightly. This means that he is very well known and appreciated by the school. Learners regularly visit the church for key Christian festivals, and they are familiar with Anglican practice because of this attendance. Parents very much value this Church / school partnership and its impact on the school's Christian ethos. The emphasis in school-based collective worship, on the person of Jesus, is outstanding.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding.

Standards in religious education are comparable to those in literacy, history and geography. The school knows this because of overall work sampling. Teachers also assess the quality and extent of learners' discussions across the Key Stages. Learners are able to use technical vocabulary. They are also confident to talk about ultimate life questions and to reflect on their feelings. The majority of learners enjoy religious education because of, "the interesting independent research." One Key Stage 2 learner said, "there is a balance between listening to the teacher and doing activities." One learner said that it was her favourite subject as she enjoyed discussing different religious approaches and beliefs. The school emphasises the similarities between religions, rather than the differences. As a result, learners' attitudes are positive. Religious education is taught both as a separate subject, and in cross-curricular topics. For example, topics linking religious education and literacy have included the Ramayana in Hinduism and biographies on Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Jesus. This indicates that religious education is given more than 5% of curriculum time. Because of this generous time allocation, learners are able to engage in longer discussions, and creative work. Teachers use a strategy of informal assessments, and respond to the needs of the learners. This means that learners make progress in understanding concepts such as prayer. Formal assessments are in line with the whole school strategy, using a three level approach. Therefore, teachers know whether learners are achieving below, at, or above expectations. The biannual pilgrimage to Exeter Cathedral means that learners have an outstanding opportunity for spiritual development, in religious education. This is because of excellent opportunities for reflection and response following the visit. The involvement of the Bishop in the 2008 visit provided pupils with an exciting and unique learning opportunity. The use of the local Church building as a regular feature of the religious education programme means that learners are familiar with Anglican artefacts and symbolism.

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

The leadership and management of the school by the Headteacher are dynamic and inspirational. His energy, and dedication to the well being and progress of all learners, reflects his vocational approach to teaching. The governors support the model of the teaching Head. The 80% teaching commitment means that the Headteacher has an extensive knowledge of the learners. His management of collective worship and religious education is resulting in positive, creative experiences. All teachers provide these experiences in both Key Stages. Clear Christian principles are expressed in policies and documentation. There is a strong and effective team identity and the school benefits from an enthusiastic body of parental support. One parent said, "the Christian ethos makes the school very special. I am very proud that my children come here." The Foundation Governors are proud of the fact that parents choose the school, "because of its teaching ethic and pastoral care." Governors praise all the staff, who "are an amazing group of people." This enthusiastic endorsement of the teachers and the ethos of the school by the governors, adds to the sense of confidence and well being of staff. Governors were not involved in preparing the National Society Self-evaluation Toolkit. However, governors were involved in a review of the quality of relationships and ethos in the school, in 2007. This reflects the school's approach to on going self-evaluation. The Vicar, who is currently unavailable due to illness, is fully involved in the school, particularly with the collective worship programme and the special-needs committee. Currently, the Vicar does not attend full governing body meetings. However, the foundation governors and Headteacher speak highly of the relationship between the school and the Church. The chair of governors, who is also a foundation governor, is currently the unofficial representative of the Vicar. The Vicar is concentrating on a pastoral ministry within the school. This particular definition of the Church / school partnership is effective in the current circumstances in the life of the school.