



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Benhall St Mary Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

School Lane
Saxmundham
Suffolk
IP17 1HE

Diocese: St Edmundsbury and Ipswich

Local authority: Suffolk

Date of inspection: 15 January 2010

Date of last inspection: 9 July 2007

School's unique reference number: 124721

Headteacher: Mr. Chris Gallagher

Inspector's name and number: Mr Bob Miller 357

School context

This small village school draws about three quarters of its 47 pupils from outside the catchment area. Pupils are aged between 4 and 9 years and taught in two classes and supported by a good number of teaching assistants. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion with special educational needs and or disabilities is average.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Benhall St. Mary as a Church of England school are good

The school provides an ethos in which all learners feel valued and special. Relationships across the school are excellent and are firmly and explicitly rooted in Christian values which are lived and practised by the school community. The school enjoys very close relationships with two churches in the locality and the incumbent is a welcomed visitor to the school.

Established strengths

- The manner in which Christian values motivate the relationships in the school
- The positive attitudes of pupils to collective worship
- The effective partnership enjoyed with parents and the church

Focus for development

- Engage a foundation governor to help drive forward the distinctive Christian character of the school.
- Involve children in the planning of worship
- Survey stakeholders on their vision for the distinctive Christian character of the school

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

Benhall St. Mary is a happy, caring, inclusive school where the staff act as good role models. The relationships with the children are based on Christian principles of mutual trust, love, honesty and understanding. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are cared for in an excellent manner and supported, as they seek to fulfil their potential. Children say they are respected, valued and listened to by staff. The school is actively building links with a number of European schools through the COMENIUS project which is broadening pupils' experience of the wider world. The school environment enhances the church school image. There is a cross at the entrance and Christian iconography is displayed on the inside walls of the

building. This represents good improvement since the last inspection. The school development plan identifies the need for more visits from people of other cultures. Behaviour and attitudes to learning are very good. These features, together with an outside environment that encourages playing games together, all have a positive impact on the good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Acts of Collective Worship, which are an important part of school life, take place in the hall. This space is converted into a special place by virtue of a lighted candle, Bible and cross on a table. This arrangement acts as a focal point for the children. Their behaviour and attitudes during collective worship are excellent. Great care is taken to ensure that worship takes place in a well-organised and peaceful environment. Pupils say that praying at different times of the school day helps them to focus on Christian values and supporting and caring for each other. One said "If we don't pray we can't ask God for help." They are all familiar with the Lord's Prayer. They enjoy being able to organise and take part in re-enactments of Gospel stories. The school has identified, however, the need to involve children more in the whole school planning of worship. Acts of collective worship make a valuable contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development, by encouraging them to reflect on the issues that have been raised in the Bible story recounted. One such example was the healing of the lepers by Jesus and the one returning to give thanks. Children were able to recognise the importance of saying thank you in their daily life.

The incumbent from the parish church, who is a frequent visitor, leads worship in school at regular intervals. Christian festivals are held in the church and these honour the Anglican tradition. There is now an updated worship policy in place, as suggested in the previous inspection.

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

The high quality of the headteacher's leadership contributes to the school's drive for improvement as a church school. This is continuous improvement since the previous inspection. He promotes a clear Christian vision by being a good role model to the whole school community. He leads by example in a quiet but thoughtful and caring manner. He has secured a good team spirit among the staff members. The headteacher and governors have established clear systems that inform the school's good self-evaluation. The governing body is currently short of a foundation governor and this lack of input is affecting the ability to support the school to become more distinctive as a church school. This is to be addressed by the governing body in the near future. The governors do, however, enjoy excellent relationships with the children and headteacher. The governors' monitoring and evaluation of worship is performed on an informal basis. In an effort to raise standards still further, more rigorous evaluation procedures are being formalised. Governors share the Christian vision for the school as do parents, pupils and staff. However the PCC members are not at present involved in the school's evaluation of its distinctive Christian character. The school is aware that if they were, the church profile would be raised still further. The nearby church and the parish church are both well used for school services, to which the village community and families are invited. They are also used as learning resources. Parents speak highly of all that the school does to ensure their children flourish as individuals and reach their potential. The capacity for the school to improve is good.

SIAS report January 2010 Benhall St. Mary Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, School Lane, Saxmundham IP17 1HE