



**Abbots Ripton Church of England (VA) Primary School**

Wennington Road  
Abbots Ripton  
Cambridgeshire  
PE28 2LT

**Diocese: Ely**

Local authority: Cambridgeshire  
Dates of inspection: 25<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> April 2007  
Date of last inspection: 4<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> November 2002  
School's unique reference number: 110850  
Headteacher: Miss Helen Wilman  
Inspector's name and number: Mrs Kathryn Wright (436)

**School context**

Abbots Ripton is a small rural primary school serving the local village and other villages in the area. Nearly all pupils are from White British backgrounds and the prosperity of the area is mainly above average. Since the previous inspection there has been a significant turnover of staff, including the headteacher and deputy. The current headteacher has been in place for 18 months. In addition, a major building programme has recently been completed. The school is opposite the local church, where the current vicar, who is also rural dean, has served the community for the last two years. The school has close links with many other local churches in the vicinity.

**The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Abbots Ripton (VA) Primary School as a Church of England school are satisfactory.**

Following significant changes in leading personnel, Abbots Ripton Primary is in the process of rediscovering what it means to be a church school. The school's understanding of its Christian ethos and the outworking of this in practice are at an embryonic stage. The headteacher and vicar have a dynamic Christian vision for the school and are working together to ensure that this permeates through the entire school community. In addition, they are developing ways with the Diocese of fostering ownership of a new mission statement and aims by all stakeholders.

**Established strengths**

- The personal Christian vision and leadership of the headteacher
- The emphasis on emotional literacy
- The family, friendly atmosphere of the school
- The relationship between the school and local churches
- The role of the pupil voice, including the new school council

**Focus for development**

- To create a mission statement and aims for the school based on a clear Christian ethos
- To revise the school policies on collective worship and RE so that they refer specifically to the school's church status

- To formalise monitoring and evaluation of collective worship and RE
- To develop the role of assessment and the recording of children's progress in RE

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

The school is characterised by its family atmosphere and sense of belonging based on Christian values. The impact of the 'social and emotional aspects of learning' (SEAL) programme has been very significant and the development of emotional literacy throughout the school is outstanding. Children are able to talk about their positive self esteem, collaborating with others and working towards peaceful reconciliations. This was observed in practice at playtimes when children were helping each other on play equipment, and during a lunchtime when children were serving food to each other. In Reception, an interactive emotions display is used to help children understand and talk about their feelings. In addition, a buddy system operates to support the youngest children when they start school. Children speak positively about all aspects of school life. They describe the schools as 'fantastic', 'exciting' and 'a community'.

The role of the pupil voice within the school is strong. The recently formed school council has had an impact on the children's understanding of their responsibilities within the community and beyond. They recommended the purchasing of a new litter bin, and organised events for Red Nose Day. The children feel valued and listened to. The children clearly articulate their dreams and aspirations for the future, and this has been supported through the 'Going for Goals' project in Personal and Social Education.

The school promotes its Christian status through prominent displays and posters around the school. In the entrance to the school the children have created a calendar of the church year showing different festivals. In most classes, a prayer is displayed and said at the end of the school day. An example of spiritual development was seen in some Year 5/6 literacy work where children had responded to images of ornate doors. One child wrote, 'there is a mystery behind the door' and another wrote 'happiness creeps over you...behind the door is a different world'. However, the school does not effectively use its Christian character to nurture spiritual development throughout the curriculum. The school utilises its outdoor space well, and has developed areas for quiet reflection as well as sensory spaces and a maze.

**The impact of collective worship on the school community is satisfactory**

Collective Worship plays an important role in the life of the school. Collective worship takes place daily and is attended by the whole school community. The worship is led enthusiastically by a range of different people, including the headteacher, deputy, school secretary, local clergy and GenR8. Parents are invited to attend worship on a regular basis. The acts of worship are explicitly Christian and the presence of God is celebrated. However, the current policy for collective worship is out of date and makes no reference to the school's church status. In addition, the collective worship co-ordinator has not attended any in-service training on collective worship and the planning of worship is inconsistent.

A variety of approaches to worship is taken. These include the use of music and singing, film, stories and biblical teaching. In recent months, the acts of worship have been intrinsically linked to the SEAL materials. There is a focal point for worship, but this is not used effectively and is often hidden behind items of furniture. In one act of worship observed, there was inadequate time for children to reflect on what they had sung and heard. The Anglican faith is affirmed through the use of the Lord's prayer and through the celebration of Christian festivals. Children attend worship in the church at least twice a term. These acts of worship are led by the vicar.

Children respond well in worship. They are particularly enthusiastic in their singing, including doing actions to most of the songs. The children are generally engaged and are active participants. Currently there are few opportunities for the children to lead worship, although a small number have led acts of worship about festivals important in their home tradition such as Thanksgiving Day and Independence Day. The positive impact of collective worship was demonstrated when children talked about trying not to lose their temper and remain calm in response to a story they had heard in collective worship. In addition, in response to the story

of Saul's conversion a child said that this meant people should go and tell others about Jesus. Children have also organised activities to support collective worship, such as a competition using friendship tokens and a photographic display.

Whilst informal discussion about collective worship occurs between the Headteacher and vicar, the formal monitoring and evaluation of collective worship is not currently in place.

### **The effectiveness of religious education is satisfactory**

Religious Education has an important place in the school. The curriculum is well planned and is in line with the new Cambridgeshire Agreed Syllabus. However, the policy is out of date and does not match the current practice in the school.

There is a good balance of 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion. A variety of approaches to learning are taken, including the use of creative and expressive arts. For example, in Foundation Stage children participate in 'Godly Play' and act out aspects of a Holy Communion service.

Lessons observed were good. In Key Stage One, children explored the nature of the bible and took part in a treasure hunt to find out different facts about the bible. This creative approach motivated the children and reinforced the learning already undertaken using an interactive whiteboard. The teacher made good use of children's own experiences encouraging the children to talk about their own special books. The outcome of their learning was good, with children's responses including 'The bible is very special to Christians because they learn about God', and 'God speaks to people through the bible'. In Key Stage Two, children were observed on a visit to the local church. They undertook a variety of tasks to meet the needs of different learners. The children were given time to reflect on the atmosphere of the church, some describing it as 'peaceful', joyful' and 'gentle'.

The majority of children have positive attitudes to the subject and achieve well. The children describe RE as 'fascinating' and 'fun'. Many spoke about the value of learning about different religions. In addition, in Year 5/6 children's evaluations of their learning showed that they had reflected on their knowledge and understanding, one child wrote 'I think it would be very hard being Muslim'. Whilst many of the pupils observed achieve above expectations in the syllabus, there is currently no assessment of RE in place. Many children are unaware of how well they were doing in the subject or how to improve. The records of pupils work are very limited and do not enable teachers to track pupil progress.

RE makes a good contribution to children's spiritual development. In Key Stage One, children who had learned about Jonah and the whale responded in writing about the importance of saying sorry. In addition, children who had recently learned about the Prodigal Son said that 'you shouldn't walk away from God'.

The newly appointed co-ordinator has enthusiasm for the subject and is taking a pro-active approach to ensure improvements take place. However, whilst she attended the launch of the new agreed syllabus, she has not yet attended any further training in the subject. In addition there are no formal monitoring or evaluation procedures in place.

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

The headteacher articulates a clear Christian vision for the school. She is passionate about creating a school which demonstrates its Christian distinctiveness in policy and practice. She is supported in developing this vision wholeheartedly by the vicar. The school community is holding a 'Church Day' to explore the nature of what it means to be a church school and formulate a new mission statement and aims. This is being organised with a neighbouring church school, the diocese and local clergy. It includes an outdoor act of worship, the use of Christian music from around the world and the use of film to explore the Christian faith. The headteacher has previously led in-service training to explore some of the issues surrounding church school status, including a discussion about the school emblem and its meaning.

The development issues from the previous inspection have been acted upon. The governing

body were involved in using the self evaluation materials provided by the diocese prior to this inspection. However, further monitoring and evaluation of the school as a church school by foundation governors is not currently in place.

The well being of staff is a high priority in the school. All staff feel valued and supported in the work they do. The headteacher has identified the strengths and gifts of many, including support staff, and has nurtured these very effectively. The headteacher meets informally with staff each day to encourage teamwork and a sense of belonging. The staffroom has been redesigned to create a quiet reflective space. In addition, some teachers spoke of opportunities for their own spiritual development, especially in some acts of worship.

There are outstanding links with the local church and with other clergy in the area. The vicar regularly visits the school and provides pastoral support for families. In addition, one of the local clergy has supported the school through a bereavement and continues to provide counselling. The headteacher attends local parish meetings and the school produced an article for the new parish newsletter. The school supports local events such as the Christmas bazaar and coffee mornings.

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