



Elton Church of England V.A. Primary School
School Lane
Elton
Cambridgeshire
PE8 6RS

Diocese: Ely

Local authority: Cambridgeshire
Dates of inspection: 4th and 6th December 2007
Date of last inspection: 10th and 22nd March 2004
School's unique reference number: 110847
Headteacher: Mrs Claire Drake
Inspector's name and number: Mr Stephen Cutts 495

School context

Elton Church of England Primary School is a small mixed primary school. The Diocese has carried out considerable building work over the past year. The church is conveniently situated next door to the school. Few pupils are from minority ethnic groups and none have a first language other than English. Many pupils travel from nearby village communities. There is good parental support and the school and church are at the centre of village life.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Elton as a Church of England school are outstanding

Staff, incumbents and governors work as a very efficient and strong team to provide a stimulating and happy learning environment with the love and teachings of Jesus at its centre. This Christian ethos permeates all areas of school life and reaches out into the church and village community. Children are valued and special. Behaviour is excellent and relationships are loving, supportive and strong. Teaching in RE is imaginative, very well planned and dynamically delivered. Abundant praise and rewards encourage the children to work hard and care for each other. Monitoring and evaluation of RE is good at all levels. There is a wonderful atmosphere in this school that leaves visitors in no doubt that this is a thriving centre for Christian learning. The school is proud to share and advertise its church foundation.

Established strengths

- Teaching and learning in RE is excellent and has a positive influence on the children.
- Rigorous monitoring of Religious Education takes place.
- The school has a positive role in the life of the church and the village.
- Team work is first class and everyone feels ownership of the school's vision and mission statement.
- Collective Worship is of a high standard and plays an important part in the life of the school.

Focus for development

- Extend the excellent monitoring of Religious Education to Collective Worship.
- To continue to foster links with the local churches, village community and the World Wide Church.
- To maintain the present high standards.

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

At Elton Church of England School the Christian ethos permeates all areas. The school is friendly and welcoming, behaviour is very good and everyone is valued and made to feel special. Good behaviour, work and effort is rewarded and celebrated during a special assembly every Friday. This is a small school with a family atmosphere, so members of staff know all children well and are able to meet their individual needs. The head teacher is justly proud of teamwork in the school as it involves all stakeholders in care, respect, support, encouragement and planning. Pupils and staff feel that their opinions are sought and respected and the governors are very supportive of the school and the individuals within it. This care extends to parents too. Governors and staff have recently developed policies for dealing with divorce and bereavement and have also produced a booklet to help families through these difficult times and offering support from the church ministers. Elton's brochure is an excellent introduction to the school leaving no doubt that this is a centre of Christian learning where every child matters and everyone is valued. Indeed, all documents, notepaper and signs proudly bear the words "Church of England School" with the footnote, "Providing a high quality primary education within a Christian context". The school's aims are clearly stated and firmly rooted in Christian values, and their message, "creating stars for the future", is reflected in many displays around the school. Similarly, on entering the school building, it is obvious that one has entered a Christian Centre with many signs and symbols displayed. Every classroom has a prominent area featuring a cross, a Bible, prayers and religious artefacts. At the time of inspection, a nativity scene greeted visitors. New children and staff settle quickly into the school due to the quality of induction. Although there are few children from other faiths or cultures, the school raises awareness, respect and understanding of other faiths not just in RE lessons, but by inviting visitors into school and taking children to other places of worship. For a small school they offer a good range of extra-curricular activities covering arts and sports, whilst residential visits also add to children's enjoyment and teach them how to live with each other, sharing, helping and working as a team. Opportunities for moral, social and spiritual development are included in lesson plans and cross-curricular links are highlighted. Working with the church congregations, the school participates in many charity fund raising events throughout the year, ranging from Children in Need to equipping a school in Kenya. The school rightly states that "staff well-being is paramount" and this claim is backed up by the recent Investors in People Award. Incidents of poor behaviour are rare and minor. Children say that these rare incidents are quickly and fairly dealt with and they could remember no occasions when bullying had taken place. Everyone spoken to, including parents and grandparents attending the class assembly, was full of praise for the school and said it was a very happy environment where children are well-prepared for life. A playground buddy system is used to ensure that no children are left out of games and a "concerns box" allows pupils to write down anything that is worrying them. The children appreciate this idea and said that concerns are quickly sorted out by the class teachers.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Importance is given to this special time of the day when teaching staff and children gather together as a school family. It is distinctively Christian and clearly provides a focus for the day. Children said that they learn a lot about religion, how to behave and how to care for each other from assemblies. This is important said one boy because "God speaks to us through the Bible and He is always watching us". They clearly enjoy collective worship, especially when chosen to be actively involved in the presentation, and they particularly like the stories and singing. Indeed, they sang enthusiastically to recorded music and it was good to see that all staff joined in with the actions, adding to the children's enjoyment and the

family atmosphere.

Two acts of worship were observed which showed the variety provided for pupils. One was led by the head teacher and the other by the reception class which was very well attended by parents and grandparents. The class assembly had cross-curricular links and was appropriate to the children who were fully involved. This also made good links to the head teacher's assembly, which was focussed on the season of the church's year. Children entered the hall quietly to calming music and were extremely well-behaved throughout. Worship usually begins with a cheery "good morning friends" and the lighting of a candle to welcome Jesus as Light of the World. Many children referred to this later. A central display including a Bible, Praying Hands and a cross was a focal point for children during prayers. The presentation was lively and varied and kept the children's attention all the way through.

An excellent coordinator's file contained long and short-term plans with a two year rolling programme of themes, as well as resource information and links to the Diocesan web site. At the end of each Worship session, two children volunteer to write a brief comment in an evaluation file. They are encouraged to think what they will do during the day as a result of the assembly. As yet, staff and governors are not fully involved in a formal monitoring of Collective Worship. All teaching staff lead acts of collective worship and children enjoy seeing visitors in assembly. Both the local vicar and the Methodist Minister regularly lead the worship and this has created useful links between the school, Sunday school and the Five-Alive service. Pupils said the vicar makes the worship fun. Many special festivals are celebrated in Church as well as the Leavers' Service at which all school leavers are presented with a Bible. School Eucharist in Church has been suspended whilst a more child-friendly format is developed. Meanwhile the Vicar has incorporated some elements of the Eucharist in school assemblies, for example taking the theme of Bread and Wine.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

The teaching of Religious Education has a high profile in Elton Church of England School. Lessons are imaginative and lively and are obviously enjoyed by pupils and staff in both key stages. Children's debates and ideas were particularly impressive and displayed deep thought, understanding and admirable maturity for the top years. Teacher's questioning was open-ended and stimulated thoughtful discussion in which pupils clearly drew on previous knowledge and teaching. A variety of teaching styles was used and in all observed lessons, the children were actively involved, using clay, drama, paints, collage and pastels. A year 3/4 class videoed their own interpretations of the Lord's Prayer whilst reception children made Christingles and were able to explain exactly what they were using and why, describing Jesus as the Light of the World, the maker and the Saviour who died for us all. Indeed, Christian imagery played a central part in all lessons either being created by the children or used by the teacher as stimulus for discussion. In all classes children were keen to offer ideas, answer questions and listen sympathetically to others' opinions.

Throughout the school there were attractive displays of work that linked to RE and a file showed photographs of further examples, and this is sometimes also displayed in church. The school has a comprehensive scheme of work based on the agreed syllabus and teachers produced detailed lesson plans with clear aims. These aims were shared with the children at the start of the lesson. All lessons were sincerely delivered, there was lots of praise and in some lessons awe and wonder. RE adds significantly to spiritual and moral development and children are proud to share their faith. Visitors and visits are used effectively to teach other faiths, and by the end of year six the school aims to have given all pupils first hand experience of four major religions. Work in RE is often linked to other subjects, collective worship themes and everyday experiences. A weekly session for older children called "In the News" regularly involves issues of culture and faith, adding relevance to the children's learning. Teachers have good subject knowledge and RE is part of the staff training programme. Most recently all staff have been introduced to Godly Play in which pupils use wooden resource materials to learn about their faith through creative play based on Bible stories.

Monitoring of work in RE is excellent at all levels. Teachers' planning sheets include an evaluation table to comment on each child. Assessments are recorded at the end of each

block of work and these are mostly knowledge based. The link governor often visits lessons and, with the head teacher, he carries out a thorough monitoring every three years when all RE lessons are observed over a two week period. His report is shared with staff and governors and forms the basis for future development. Children's views are also sought as part of this process. Children's red books showed evidence of excellent progress over the key stages.

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

The head teacher is a pro-active and enthusiastic leader who enjoys good support from colleagues, governors and parents. Together they have taken positive steps to develop the Christian ethos of the school, its links with the church and community, and the care it provides for pupils and families. All adults see themselves as role models for the children. They share a clear vision for the school, speaking of inclusion, opportunities, aspirations and a safe, happy environment in which all children can achieve and develop individual skills and talents, whilst at the same time "building a relationship with Jesus". They believe that this Christian influence should be easily recognised in all aspects of school life. The vicar and Methodist minister give good support and visit school regularly. The school hosts the Five Alive Service and is used for church meetings. The school's mission statement, aims and Golden rules are well publicised and the admission statement reflects the school's Christian foundation. All documentation clearly promotes the school as a centre for Christian learning. There are good home-school relationships and mutual support between church, school and village communities, such as links with the Senior Citizens Club, and hosts a pre-school group every week. Governors meetings begin with prayer, and there are regular opportunities for prayer and reflection for children during the school day. The Christian foundation of the school influences new appointments, interviews and induction. Both the School Improvement Plan and individual teacher's planning sheets include the development of Christian teaching and understanding and everyone recognises Elton as being a "special" place to work, play and learn, understanding clearly what it means to be part of a Church School.

Regular revision and evaluation of all areas of school life is built into the development programme and aspects of church teaching are included in staff training. The school values links with Ely Diocese and makes good use of guidance and resources from the diocesan web site. There are dedicated link governors for both RE and Collective Worship who continually monitor and feed back to appropriate committees, and they have attended training sessions enabling them to carry out their roles effectively.

The full range of policies linked to the child's spiritual and moral development covering issues such as behaviour, racism, equal opportunities and sex education are all firmly rooted in Christian teaching. The school's self evaluation is secure and governors have an influential role in this process. Everyone feels ownership of the Mission Statement and Aims of the School and these are recognised and supported by parents who told me that this is a "smashing" school where there is always something exciting happening. They also highly praised discipline, behaviour and the dedication of staff. There is a strong and active parents group called Friends of Elton who organise events throughout the year. The head teacher's collaborative and consultative style, ably supported by the deputy head, was evident and this contributed to high staff morale.

The school features in weekly prayers and messages at Church where school is seen as an integral and important part of the church's mission work. Year Six children recently produced a guided tour of the church detailing its history and work, and pupils then invited their parents to participate in the tour which was informative, stimulated interest, and brought the community into the church building. The school choir sang at the new vicar's inauguration and they look forward to welcoming the Bishop when he officially opens the new extensions. Displays, religious symbols and signage leave visitors in no doubt that this is a Church School that is truly alive.

