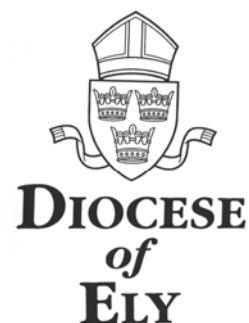


Ely St Mary's Church of England VA Junior School

High Barns
Ely
Cambridgeshire
CB7 4RB

Diocese: Ely

Local authority: Cambridgeshire
Dates of inspection: 12th September 2007
Date of last inspection: 8th October 2002
School's unique reference number: 110842
Headteacher: Mr J. Hickish
Inspector's name and number: Mrs M. Betts 220



School context

This is a large school with 350 pupils aged 7 to 11 years. The local parish church of St Mary's is situated some distance away from the school in the centre of the city. Fewer pupils than the national average are entitled to free school meals. A third of pupils have learning difficulties and disabilities. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and the number for whom English is an additional language is lower than that found nationally.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Ely St Mary's C of E Junior School as a Church of England school are outstanding.

The school has a clearly distinctive Christian vision which is shared by the whole school community. This has a significant impact on the pupils' spiritual, personal, social and moral development. Pupils are fully involved in all aspects of school life. Creative and imaginative opportunities for spiritual development are provided and a high standard of work is produced. Collective Worship holds a very high priority.

Established strengths

- The very effective leadership of the headteacher which contributes significantly to the promotion of the distinctive Christian ethos.
- Very good relationships of respect and care within the school community.
- Pupils' contribution to school life which is actively sought.
- The pupils' outstanding personal, social and spiritual development.
- The strong partnership between the school and the church.

Focus for development

- Improve assessment procedures in religious education so that pupils are aware of how to improve and progress can be monitored.
- Formalise the role of the foundation governors in evaluation of the church school ethos.

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

Pupils at Ely St Mary's School feel valued and special. They are confident, can communicate well and enjoy their school life, praising the care of the staff and the learning gained from their visits out of school. They feel safe in school and appreciate their responsibilities. They have a strong sense of community demonstrated by a picture of each child displayed in the hall. They describe their teachers as "giving 100%", encouraging them with their learning. Pupils of all ages are very proud of their school and are eager to talk about projects they have undertaken such as the year 4's production of an extremely attractive stained glass

display. The pastoral care of the school is very good especially the provision to integrate English as an additional language learners and their families. Pupils' personal, spiritual, moral and social development is outstanding. Pupils understand the Christian values in the RESPECT school motto where each letter represents a word of the school's vision statement. Pupils can communicate the practices in school that demonstrate these. School activities encourage the development and expression of pupils' own ideas such as during their participation of the "Brush with Faith" project where pupils made creative responses to the paintings they saw in Ely Cathedral. The active school council participates in whole school decisions. Pupils' ideas of extra play equipment and a tuck shop were accepted and provided. Pupils undertake class and whole school responsibilities such as Eco Warriors. Opportunities to support younger pupils are provided by older Play Pals who befriend lonely children in the junior and infant playgrounds. Success both of achievement and personal development is recognised and celebrated during assemblies and when being a guest at the "high table", the special treat of taking their meal alongside staff and visitors. Cultural development is enhanced through participation in focused extra activities such as the theatre visits to the school with the theme of valuing diversity. The pupils support local and national charities organising their own ways to raise money.

Relationships and respect between all staff and children are very good and demonstrate the school's Christian context. The whole school is characterised by team work and a sense of positive well-being. Pupils behave well and their attitudes to learning are very good. All pupils know and understand the procedures to resolve any problems.

The school environment encourages pupils' spiritual development very well. Opportunities for spiritual reflection are promoted by the high quality, prominent and attractive displays, many with a Christian theme, created in a variety of materials by the pupils. Outside areas of quiet are distinct from activity areas. One incorporates a small garden where pupils care for and grow vegetables.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

This is demonstrated by the effective planning, high quality of delivery, regular evaluations which are acted upon. Worship is enhanced by imaginative visual and dramatic presentations, performance poetry, and stimulating musical experiences. Song is used very well both to create a prayerful atmosphere and to amplify the theme. This includes Christian based hymns, the Lord's Prayer and 23rd Psalm as well as appropriate words and tunes devised by the music co-ordinator sometimes using poems written by pupils. The worship experience is broadened by visitors, including clergy and a Baptist pastor, as well as Christian groups. Worship develops well pupils' understanding of the Anglican faith. Each session begins with a statement recognising Jesus as the light of the world. All teachers lead assemblies and are supported well by the co-ordinator. Collected Worship evokes a very positive response from the pupils who are stimulated and enthused by the delivery. They are given time to reflect on the theme and its application to their lives. Pupils participate actively in worship by reading the scripture, by sharing their prayers and by acting situations related to the message.

The worship co-ordinator is a member of the senior management team. Worship is central to the daily programme. Recently the vicar, two foundation governors and two parishioners, monitored worship formally. The comments were extremely positive especially concerning the spiritual support that the worship offered. Pupils are also interviewed regularly for their opinions.

Worship promotes well the pupils' spiritual and moral development. The themes explain Christian values as well as follow the liturgical year. Classroom prayers are said twice daily. Prayer is often adult led but occasionally pupils are encouraged to compose their own prayers.

The school celebrates major Christian festivals by the whole school being present at services at the local church. Easter worship will involve the school, church and take place in the local community. Parents and parishioners are invited.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Pupils recognise religious education as an important subject. The school gives religious education a high profile shown by classroom displays, the generous budget provided and the status of the religious education co-ordinator. The co-ordinator is enthusiastic and has good

plans for the subject's future development. She leads training and monitors teaching and learning. Teaching is good and some outstanding lessons were observed. There are extremely effective cross curriculum links made which motivate pupils in their learning. Religious education makes a very good contribution to pupils' spiritual development. Creative expression is encouraged within religious education and pupils have produced art and drama work of a high standard. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on the learning and apply it to their own life and experiences. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well to motivate and interest. In one lesson observed pupils were comparing speed of access to bible references using the computer with using the bible book. Teachers plan and prepare well. The pace of the lessons is good. Questioning is used well to extend and challenge pupils' thinking. Most pupils enjoy religious education especially when learning activities are practical. They particular enjoy the many visits to Christian churches and places of worship of other faiths. Clergy are invited to contribute to the learning. The standard of work is good, slightly higher than that achieved in literacy. Pupils have a good understanding of the Christian faith and are knowledgeable about other faith traditions. The pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are good. Verbal feedback of praise and encouragement is given to pupils. No assessment data linked to national levels, is recorded at present. Assessment is a planned area for development. Two pupils have been appointed to be involved in the curriculum monitoring of religious education.

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

The headteacher and governors provide very effective leadership which contributes significantly to the Christian vision of the school. All governors were actively involved with staff in devising the wording of the RESPECT school motto which supports this vision particularly in the dimensions of spirituality and partnership. It cross references with the school development plan. The whole school community, including parents, understand the meaning of each letter and what this means in practice to school life. The vision is reinforced daily by the home partnership book, hall banners and art displays. The school badge makes explicit the Church of England distinctiveness of the school. The pupils are very aware of the Christian vision promoted by the school leadership. The staff understand, strongly support and implement the school's expectations of their roles in this Christian community and feel appreciated for their work. There are effective recruitment procedures in place to explain the school's Christian character. The self-evaluation of the school as a church school is accurate and comprehensive. The foundation governors were involved in this evaluation. Links with the local church are very strong. The local vicar regularly visits the school and is known well by pupils, staff and the local community. Another clergy member runs a chess club. The staff value the supportive role of the Bishop's visitor. The church and school newsletters publish events at each community. Parents, parishioners, and the local community are all invited to the school's half-termly worship celebrations. The school's partnership with the local community is good. Pupils sing at three different residential homes each Christmas. The school has effective links with local schools and other Christian schools. Pupils visit Ely Cathedral and the Education Centre regularly. Pupils' work following their visit to an exhibition at the Cathedral was displayed on Cambridgeshire Portal and published in a national magazine "RE Today".

Links with parents are exceptionally strong. Parents are made aware of and support the Christian ethos of the school. They feel welcomed into the school, and encouraged to work in partnership with the teachers through daily interchange of a comprehensive curriculum home/school book. A prayer group led by parents meets regularly to pray for the school. Parents appreciate their views being considered through questionnaires.