



Great Gidding Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Main Street
Great Gidding
Cambridgeshire
PE28 5NX

Diocese: Ely

Local authority: Cambridgeshire
Dates of inspection: 5th and 10th December 2007
Date of last inspection: September 2004
School's unique reference number: 110813
Headteacher: Mrs Hilary Westcott
Inspector's name and number: Peter Adams (205)

School context

This smaller than average primary school serves a group of villages in West Cambridgeshire. Over half of the pupils at the school come from beyond the catchment area. The school is situated on a compact site adjacent to the Parish Church. The accommodation consists of a modernised Victorian building and Mobile classrooms. This presents a challenge to the school community, which is successfully met through careful planning and good organisation. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and have pre-school/nursery experience. The proportion of children with learning difficulties and special educational needs is above average.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Great Gidding C of E (VC) Primary School as a Church of England school is outstanding

This is an inclusive school where pupils are valued and there is a high level of concern for the care of the individual. There is a unity of purpose and an excellent 'team spirit' within the staff. Christian values and ethos permeate and drive the life and work of the school. The personal and academic development of the learners is well supported through high expectations and a carefully balanced and stimulating curriculum. The leadership and management of the school are outstanding.

Established strengths

- The leadership of the headteacher gives a strong commitment and impetus to the delivery of a Christian ethos.
- Learners are valued and treated as individuals enabling them to develop in a safe and inclusive Christian environment.
- There is a warm 'family' atmosphere based on good relationships and effective communication.
- The links and partnerships with the local community are well-developed and mutually supportive.

Focus for development

- To consider the use of appropriate Christian symbols to give a tangible focus and reminder of the church foundation of the school for learners, staff and the wider community.
- Improve and develop systems for the evaluation of Collective Worship including pupils' views, to show how it supports spiritual growth and affirmation of faith.
- Design an induction programme to enable new staff to 'catch' the Christian ethos and be integrated into the team.

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

The school sets high standards in terms of behaviour and academic achievement all underpinned by a strong Christian ethos, a unity of purpose and care for the individual. A parent described the school community as like a 'close knit family.'

Every child is valued and encouraged to reach his/her full potential. Carefully structured targets matched to individual needs provide challenge and enable good progress to be made. The vast majority of pupils enjoy school life and see the school as a happy and secure place, where they are treated fairly. A member of the school council said; 'You are allowed to have your own opinions here and the teachers listen to you.' Learners are made to feel special and have good levels of self-esteem. A Teaching Assistant at the school commented on the attention to detail given in establishing good relationships.

There is a strong emphasis on building trust with families and evidence of successful strategies in dealing with difficult and disturbed children. The use of appropriate praise and encouragement is a powerful tool that is used to re-inforce positive behaviour. The children are involved in the caring – a parent said: 'they prefer to celebrate friendship rather than focus on anti-bullying strategies.'

Christian values are at the heart of the culture of the school and have a significant impact on the personal development of the learners. Comment from the recent Ofsted inspection suggest that the learners have 'an exceptional awareness of the needs of others.'

Staff are encouraged to use current issues and the experiences of the pupils as opportunities to develop SMSC. There is an impressive range of activities designed to develop the spiritual awareness of the learners. This is well illustrated through the books of prayers written by the pupils which tackle issues including life, death, family break-up and forgiveness in a sensitive and mature way.

The adults in the school are excellent role models for the learners. Staff wholly identify with the Christian ethos and work in an atmosphere of mutual support. Communication systems within the school community are effective. A member of the support staff said: 'I absolutely love working here, there is a lovely rapport between the staff and children.'

Pupil voice is seen as important; the school council brings a positive influence to the school community. Learners have mature views and are willing to support and respect the opinions of others.

The school environment and accommodation have been thoughtfully developed to provide appropriate places for reflection and worship. Displays and messages through the school are well-presented and support the Christian ethos. However, there is not a permanent Christian symbol to demonstrate the Church foundation of the school. Good use has been made of the historic buildings, despite their limitations, to provide a rich learning environment

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective Worship is seen as a fundamental part of the schools' Christian character and takes a central role in the daily life of the school.

Worship is well planned and co-ordinated, varied and structured to meet the needs of the whole school community. There are plans to develop a long-term programme for the evaluation of worship. Care is taken to provide an appropriate 'spiritual' atmosphere and focus.

Collective Worship at the school is overtly Christian in context, inclusive and demonstrates a respect for other beliefs and cultures. Provision is made for a family who do not wish their children to attend.

Pupils are given opportunities to reflect and consider issues during Worship. Different worship styles are included that support Anglican heritage and practice. Services are held through the year to celebrate all major church festivals. Visitors and other church groups are invited to lead Worship, as are members of staff. The Priest –in-charge works closely with the school and her contribution and support is greatly valued. The school ensures that learners are involved in Collective Worship – older pupils lead worship on occasions. In a time of collective worship, the children demonstrated a good knowledge of the symbolism of Christingle. On another occasion they were able to recall detail of the Bible account of the Magi and show how parts of the story were relevant to their own lives. The budget provides a generous amount for resources - reflecting the high status given to Collective Worship. The school gains benefit from the mutual support provided by the village church community – there are many examples of initiatives and activities that enhance the life of the school and contribute to the personal development of the learners. These include fundraising for different charities such as ‘Love in a box’ at Christmas time, Christian Aid and Cancer Research. The proximity of the local parish church provides a useful resource and venue for Festival and ‘Special’ services. An example of this was when pupils were involved in a re-enactment of a Christian wedding ceremony, held in the church earlier in the year. Collective Worship provides an important focus to the daily life and work of the school. It makes a profound contribution to the key Christian values that underpin the ethos of the school. The learners value times of Collective Worship and respond in a positive way.

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

The Headteacher is committed to the Christian ethos of the school and gives an effective lead and inspiration to the school community. This is based on personal faith and conviction. Ofsted (Nov '07) acknowledged that the main reason for the schools' exceptionally high standards is the 'outstanding leadership of the headteacher.' There is evidence of a reflective and thoughtful approach through self-evaluation and continuous improvement. The staff are valued, supported and encouraged to participate in CPD activities. The school has gained prestigious awards including Health Promoting school status, Investor's in People and the Primary Quality Mark.

Appropriate performance management strategies are well established in the school. The Headteacher gives a clear and effective lead to the 'spiritual' dimension of school life. She is sensitive to the needs of the staff, who feel valued and supported and promote the Christian values of the school. One boy said 'She's a diamond – she always knows what to do!' The distinctive Christian vision is made clear in the school documentation and written aims. The statement of purpose is well established and supported, there are plans to revise this in the near future with input from a cross section of the community, including the learners. The school has clear procedures for recruitment – prospective candidates are made aware of the expectations and ethos of the school. A planned induction programme would help new staff members to effectively 'catch' the ethos and support integration.

The Foundation Governors uphold the Christian vision of the school and provide appropriate support to the headteacher. The input and support provided by the Bishop's Visitor is valued by the school leadership.

Parents/carers have reported that they are well informed and the vast majority are supportive of school activities and ethos. Their views are regularly sampled and acted upon. The work of the school is appreciated by the local community.

The Headteacher has been co-opted onto the village Parochial Church Council, which facilitates a positive relationship with the local church community – there is evidence of a variety of co-operative activities, including a Christmas tree festival in the church.