

Ardleigh St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Colchester Road
Ardleigh
Essex
CO7 7NS

Diocese: Chelmsford

Local authority: Essex
Dates of inspection: September 24th 2012
Date of last inspection: March 12th 2008
School's unique reference number: 115084
Headteacher: Ms Donna Parker
Inspector's name and number: Bronwen Ferland 736

School context

Ardleigh St Mary's Church of England School, with 111 pupils on roll, is a smaller than average village primary school which is currently oversubscribed. Approximately 45% of pupils come from out of the catchment area. The majority of pupils are of white British origin. The school's original Victorian building has been extended in recent years and been largely refurbished to provide a stimulating learning environment. The outdoor area is large and incorporates a growing area, an area for Forest School, and two developing areas for reflection in addition to a hard playground and good-sized playing field.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St. Mary's Ardleigh as a Church of England school are good.

The welcoming Christian ethos of this school as a church school is immediately apparent to all visitors. The impact of its Christian ethos is clearly shown in the way in which staff, pupils, governors and parents relate to each other and in what they say about the school. The school actively fosters an environment in which all pupils are encouraged to learn and become lifelong learners.

Established strengths

- The leadership and vision for developing this school which emanates from the headteacher is shared with and inspires governors and colleagues
- The headteacher is able to draw on the support of the associate governor in planning and delivering collective worship and in leading the faith club.
- The excellent relationships which are clearly demonstrated between all stakeholders in the school community and between the school and the local church

Focus for development

- To develop a systematic evaluation of collective worship by pupils to enable the governors to monitor this aspect of school life and plan for future development
- To work towards the pupils having an even greater level of participation in the planning and delivery of collective worship

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

The Christian values of this school are distinctive and acknowledged by everyone. All stakeholders see these as important in setting standards for all and fostering mutual respect. These shared values result in very high standards of behaviour and excellent relationships between all members of the school community. Parents are keen to emphasise how the nurture programme supports all who have any issues, as families as well as pupils are well-supported. Members of the school council were keen to describe the way in which staff respond quickly to any problem so that the pupils have confidence that any issue will be speedily and fairly resolved. Work in Religious Education clearly supports the spiritual, moral, cultural and social education of all pupils as is demonstrated by the recent whole

school project looking at different world faiths and comparing them with the tenets of Christianity The links with St Paul's School in Kutus, Kenya, with a number of staff exchange visits having taken place, has further raised the awareness of pupils to life beyond their own environment. Pupils enjoyed the videos of life in Kenya which brought home to them the differences and similarities of school life. One pupil expressed it as, "we can each learn from each other." Pupils support each other in solving playground issues and in ensuring that everyone has someone to play with. There are colourful crosses displayed in every classroom and throughout the school there are other overt signs and displays which show the distinctive Christian character of the school. Children are keen to describe how much they appreciate having areas for quiet reflection provided outside and are actively involved in planning and developing the new Peace garden.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Worship has a place of central importance in the life of the school. All staff acknowledge the value of the daily act of worship by their attendance and all lead worship from time to time. Pupils participate with confidence, responding to questions and reading prayers. Pupils sit in "family" groups rather than in class lines and are clearly engaged and drawn in by the skill of the leader in addressing all ages. Prayer is seen as important and all pupils have recently been writing their own prayers. Older pupils are responsible for the music and displaying the hymns. Effective planning of worship ensures that the daily act of worship follows a weekly theme selected by the worship co-ordinator and headteacher. In planning themes for worship the school has remained wedded to the principles of following the learning dimensions of the ELLI (Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory) project on which their whole curriculum is based. Thus their worship plans are closely focused on current needs rather than on what staff feel might be a more sterile long term plan. Although there is at present no formal opportunity for pupils to give their views on the different types of worship offered by the school, the Associate Governor has discussed this in some detail with pupils in lower Key Stage Two. As a result these children were given the opportunity to prepare a whole school assembly. It was clear that they had really enjoyed this. Although parents rarely attend collective worship within school they keenly support worship held on special occasions at the local church. They also mentioned appreciation of the information on weekly collective worship which is given on the school web-site. The incumbent and the head teacher have recently introduced a weekly session on the Eucharist which led to a Eucharist forming part of the leavers' service in July. Children remarked on how useful the weeks of preparation had been in giving meaning to this service. The school has worked hard to develop the focus point for collective worship, which reflects the colours of the church year, and is largely interactive. Nearby boards and displays help to reinforce ideas of Anglican practice.

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

The headteacher has a very strong and clear vision for the school based on Christian values. The central tenet is one of respect for all, so that loving and caring for each other follows easily from this. This vision is also clearly shared by parents and pupils, and all stakeholders can describe the working out of this vision within the life of the school, evidenced in the positive relationships between staff and pupils and other stakeholders. Pupils and parents also see this in the way in which all problems are quickly and compassionately resolved. The mission statement was established by the governing body and staff following the last inspection and is in evidence in displays around the school and in the parents' room. The children chose the final wording which was selected. Governors support the school on a regular basis, making monitoring visits and supporting individual year-groups. Few families regularly attend the church but the school links to the parish church are strong and are the result of efforts made by school and church together. The school features regularly in the church intercessions and work done by pupils is displayed within the church. These links enable the schools' Christian character to be shared with the church community. The headteacher and incumbent together have introduced a school eucharist in the church which was well attended by parents. Pupils feel comfortable in the church environment and there is evidence that a growing number are now attending such services as the annual Remembrance Day service. Staff and governors have attended various courses provided by the Diocese in recent years. As in many small schools, succession planning is not easy. The headteacher and senior staff are aware of the need to ensure that the church school ethos is upheld by all, rather than just a few key members of the community.