

St Peter's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

School Road
Sible Hedingham
Halstead
Essex
CO9 3NR

Diocese: Chelmsford

Local authority: Essex
Date of inspection: 25th January 2012
Date of last inspection: 16th February 2008
School's unique reference number: 115070
Headteacher: Mr John Smith
Inspector's name and number: Mrs Caroline L'Estrange

School context

St Peter's Primary School is a village school in a rural setting. Currently there are 202 pupils on roll. Almost all of these pupils come from White British backgrounds. The school has gained a number of awards such as Healthy Schools, Activemark, Eco-Schools and Basic Skills.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Peter's as a Church of England school are good

St Peter's is an inclusive community where each member is cared for, valued, affirmed and accepted just as they are. The headteacher's leadership and vision moves the school forward in its drive to be a distinctively Christian school.

Established strengths

- Christian values are particularly evident in the quality of care
- Leadership of the headteacher and the role models presented by the staff
- Effective links between the school and the local Christian communities

Focus for development

- Systematic monitoring and evaluation of the school as a church school by the leadership team and the governing body
- To raise the profile of Anglican tradition and practice in collective worship
- To recognise and celebrate the school's distinctive church status in the school environment

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

At St Peter's children's individual growth is nurtured in all areas of school life. Implicit Christian values underpin the life and work of St Peter's and this is demonstrated in the behaviour and attitude of the whole school community. Children clearly care for each other. Behaviour is very good, with the children showing respect for one another. Parents value the approachability and availability of the staff, with one parent expressing this as, 'they are there for our children; they will sit and talk'. The children feel safe and know that they can always talk to a peer mentor or a member of staff, sure in the knowledge that they will be listened to. The school's inclusive approach is a natural way of life and valued by parents. The concept of responsible citizenship is effectively fostered through the wide range of responsibilities undertaken by the children – peer mentors, playleaders etc - with the children freely giving up their time to put other children first. Staff speak of how the children will look out for others, rather than putting themselves first.

Governors recognise the distinctive Christian character of the school, with a foundation governor sharing that "it is there, it is the blood that brings the place to life."

The school council members articulate their opinions about the school well and are involved

in decision-making activities. 'Gold Awards' celebrate a broad range of achievements and are spoken about by the children with pride, knowing that all of their efforts are noticed. Christian symbols and displays are not very evident throughout the school and as such there is scope to increase their impact and contribution to the school's spiritual environment and Christian distinctiveness. Religious education [RE] contributes to the children's spiritual and cultural development, giving them opportunities to understand more about Christianity as well as other faiths. The school has a link with a school in Zambia and a UK school in a contrasting setting. The full impact of these links is yet to be seen.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship is important to the life of the school, supporting the children's spiritual development. Parents appreciate how the children are nurtured and feel free to ask "big questions", recognising how this gives their children a "rounded perspective". The themes used within collective worship stem from the children's own experiences which lead to keen responses and good engagement throughout the school. The children sing with conviction and demonstrate an understanding of what they are singing; "it helps us look forward to what is ahead." Children enjoy participating in daily worship by writing prayers. One child said that the prayer time "calms you down." As part of Christian Unity week the children have been keen to contribute prayers for the joint prayer times in the village churches. The children would like opportunities to get more actively involved during collective worship. Children are now involved in the evaluation of worship, with a pupil noting "it got me in to believing in God even more". The children can reflect upon how their experiences in worship have developed them as individuals, sharing that "you shouldn't be impatient, you could hurt other people's feelings, don't just jump in there." The children enjoy the breadth of worship experiences, with different teachers and clergy leading the worship. The incumbent's involvement is valued by all, with parents commenting that "there is a bond between school and church". Planning of collective worship is good, but the overall programme does not reflect the breadth or variety of opportunities within Anglican traditions and practice. The major Christian festivals are celebrated annually with the school going to the parish church for services at Harvest, Christmas and Easter. The children speak with pride about the role played by the school choir at these services. As a result of the children's involvement, attendance is good.

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

The shared vision and commitment of the headteacher and governors provides satisfactory leadership. The headteacher has a clear vision for how the distinctiveness as a church school influences the life of the school saying "there is no embarrassment in talking to the children about God's grand design". The headteacher works with passion and with a supportive governing body and staff team, to ensure that there is an atmosphere in which every person is important. The school is supported by both the incumbent and the Baptist minister in both collective worship and the daily life of the school. Parents feel part of the school and greatly appreciate the welcome and openness they experience.. Following on from the last inspection the links with the Parish Church have been strengthened. This has included new governors being commissioned at a church service. The school is now included on the PCC agenda and the school is informed about parish activities. Currently, however, the distinctiveness of the school's Christian character is not monitored effectively. The school's self-evaluation understates the importance placed upon the school's church status and Christian values. The school is receptive to the parents' views, although no specific evidence has been collected with regard to its Christian character.

SIAS report January 2012, St Peter's Church of England VC Primary School, Sible Hedingham, CO9 3NR