



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Stisted Church of England Primary Academy

The Street
Stisted
Braintree
Essex
CM77 8AN

Diocese: Chelmsford

Local authority: Essex
Dates of inspection: 5th July 2013
Date of last inspection: 1st October 2008
School's unique reference number: 137544
Headteacher: Mr Martin Hawrylak
Inspector's name and number: Mr Andrew Scott 744

School context

This is a small rural school located in a small Essex village. In October 2011 the school converted from Voluntary Aided to Academy status, retaining its religious character. There are currently 100 pupils on roll, most of whom live outside the village. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is close to the national average. The great majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Stisted Church of England Primary Academy as a Church of England school are outstanding

As a direct result of the outstanding leadership provided by the headteacher, the school proudly proclaims its exceptionally strong Christian ethos in every aspect of its life. All members of the school community, not least the children, are very clear about the Christian values upon which its success is built, and about the contribution of these values to the excellent quality of relationships and the highly effective learning that takes place within the school. This is a happy, caring, inclusive school with a very special atmosphere.

Established strengths

- The outstanding Christian leadership provided by the headteacher, supported fully by senior leaders, staff and governors.
- The exceptionally strong Christian ethos manifested in every aspect of school life and in the school's core Christian values of love, forgiveness and reflection.
- High academic results coupled with welcoming and supportive approach towards children with special educational needs.

Focus for development

- Integrating 'learning about' and 'learning from' non-Christian religions more widely into the religious education (RE) curriculum.

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

This is an extremely successful school characterised by a positive atmosphere of calm enthusiasm and exceptionally good relationships among all members of the school community. Relationships between staff and pupils are loving, caring and supportive, enabling children to flourish academically, spiritually, socially and in terms of their personal development. For the past four years the progress and attainment of most children across the school have been significantly above the national average. For the past three years, attendance has been above the national average and no pupils have been excluded on a fixed term or permanent basis. All members of the school community attribute the success of the school to its clear Christian ethos, expressed in the school's core Christian values of love, forgiveness and reflection and in the widely displayed phrase: 'Following in the footsteps of Jesus'. The local vicar expressed the school's distinctiveness in the following way: 'You can't turn a corner in this school without bumping into Jesus'. The Christian identity of the school is also made explicit by the Christian symbols displayed throughout the school and in the various 'special places' around the building where the children can engage in quiet reflection. RE and collective worship enhance the school's distinctive Christian character, and the popular Bible Club, run by an imaginative and creative governor, provides further enrichment. An important way in which the school's Christian commitment finds practical expression is in the welcome it extends to children with special educational needs. The school is rightly proud of its reputation in this area, with many parents/carers of children with special educational needs seeking out places at the school. To meet the needs of these pupils even more effectively, the school is introducing a Montessori curriculum. The 'spiritual objectives' of the curriculum have been formally identified which means teachers identify and utilise opportunities for spiritual development as they naturally arise in lessons, school visits (e.g. to the Isle of Wight) and extra curricular activities. The headteacher recently evaluated how well Year 6 pupils understood the notion of spirituality. The children's responses showed they clearly understood that spiritual experiences centred on deep thoughts and feelings. The children also show awareness of the wider world and their responsibilities as global citizens, for example by fundraising and writing letters to children in Nepal.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Acts of collective worship at Stisted are central to the life of the school. They are profoundly spiritual occasions and of high quality. As school documentation appropriately expresses it, collective worship provides, 'a sacred place to experience a holy moment'. The school policy for collective worship, written by the headteacher in collaboration with the local vicar (also a governor), shows that the school has thought deeply about the meaning and purpose of collective worship. Conversations with pupils and children's contributions to the recently introduced 'reflections' book show that collective worship has a profound impact on them, deepening their understanding of God and what it means to be human. During collective worship children are well behaved, reverential and engaged. A noteworthy feature of the act of worship that was observed was that as children came into the hall they joined in the singing that was already taking place. This set an appropriate tone. Collective worship takes place in a calm atmosphere and mirrors the main elements of worship through a stimulus/reflection/response model. Children use prayers and silence as aids to personal reflection. Collective worship is well planned by the headteacher to ensure that pupils learn about the traditions of Anglican worship, although at present the Eucharist is not celebrated. The themes for each of the three school terms are effectively linked to one of the three persons of the Trinity. Children are involved in the preparation and delivery of special services held in the local parish church for occasions such as Christmas, Easter, Harvest Festival and the end of the school year. Plans are in place for pupils' current involvement in the planning and delivery of class assemblies to be extended.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

RE is given high priority within the school. Children's attainment and progress with regard to their understanding of Christianity are generally in line with and sometimes above national expectations for national curriculum subjects. Pupils talk enthusiastically about their RE lessons and respond very well in terms of attitudes, personal development, attainment and progress. In the lessons that were observed, pupils across the school demonstrated excellent knowledge and understanding of stories from the Bible. In the language they used, many younger children showed a sophisticated appreciation of the metaphysical nature of the Kingdom of God. The subject is well led by the headteacher and effectively planned, taught, resourced, assessed and monitored. Regular half termly formal assessments mean that class teachers and the headteacher are clear about the degree of progress the children are making, the levels at which they are attaining and what the next steps in their learning should be. An appropriate balance is struck between 'learning about' and 'learning from' religion. A range of methodologies is used by teachers and plans are in place to extend the use of Philosophy For Children in RE lessons. Learning in RE is focused mainly on Christianity and is enhanced by specialist providers including Barnabas in Schools, Christian Youth Outreach and visits to Stisted parish church, Chelmsford Cathedral and a church on the Isle of Wight. It is usually the case that the main opportunity for children to explore a non-Christian religion is through a whole school 'focus day' in January, with follow-up work being carried out in each class during the succeeding fortnight. The current arrangements for the study of non-Christian religions need to be extended to provide a more balanced approach and to ensure that any child missing the whole school 'focus day' through absence is not disadvantaged when it comes to learning about non-Christian faiths. A further reason for enabling older pupils to learn other religions in a more continuous and integrated way is to provide them with the opportunity to exceed national expectations for attainment in RE at the end of Key Stage 2. If pupils are to have the opportunity to attain Level 5 or higher, they will need to study different religions in depth.

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

The school's success and its distinctively Christian character are the direct result of the outstanding leadership provided by the headteacher, with senior leaders, staff and governors providing strong support. The headteacher is the main driving force behind the explicit Christian vision that shapes all that the school does and he leads by example, modelling the Christian values for which the school stands. These values provide a unifying vision for the whole school community, underpinning all that the school does now and creating the context for future development. All members of the school community embrace the Christian vision that the headteacher has set out and model the values. This makes the school a harmonious and happy family. The headteacher is totally committed to the principle of inclusion, which is reflected in the welcome and support given by the whole school community to children with special educational needs. The school engages in rigorous self-evaluation. Staff, governors, children and parents are routinely consulted and the school is clear about future priorities and how they are to be achieved. The headteacher engages regularly in professional development activities, for example with regard to promoting children's spiritual development, and he ensures that all members of staff also receive appropriate professional development. The school enjoys excellent relationships with parents and carers. They speak very highly of the school and feel informed and involved. They are consulted about key decisions made about the school's future. The school also has very good relations with the local church and community. As part of the school's Christian outreach, children pay annual visits to a retirement home, entertain the Over 60s Club, write letters to the elderly people and make personal gifts.

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