

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Ditchingham Primary School

Rider Haggard Way
Ditchingham
Bungay
NR35 2RE

Diocese: Norwich

Local authority: Norfolk CC
Dates of inspection: July 12th 2013
Date of last inspection: March 2009
School's unique reference number: 121033
Headteacher: Mrs. Sue Sweet (acting headteacher)
Inspector's name and number: Ann Williams 573

School context

Ditchingham is a small rural primary school, serving the local village community near Bungay in Suffolk. The acting headteacher was brought in by the Local Authority following the long illness and untimely death of the headteacher just after a difficult OFSTED inspection in 2012. The culmination of all these problems led to a number of families and some staff deciding to leave the school. Those who remained positive about the future of the school have been struggling to come to terms with their bereavement and to see the way forward. Local clergy, the diocese and the whole of the local community have supported the school through this very difficult time and the outcome of an application for academy status under the umbrella of the diocesan trust is awaited. The school has recently moved out of special measures.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Ditchingham Primary School as a Church of England school are good.

The strong and committed leadership team has worked tirelessly to build on the school's underlying strengths and to overcome the difficulties of the past year. Their Christian conviction and determination have been paramount in taking the school forward, sharing with the whole community their vision of a school firmly based on Christian values. Pupils and staff understand the need to respect, trust and care for one another. All now work in a calm learning environment, where success is celebrated and pupils are proud of their achievements.

Established strengths

- The commitment and enthusiasm of the leadership team to move the school forward as a church school, with Christian values at its heart.
- The strong and growing links with the local ministry team and church community.
- The determination of parents to support the school as it emerges from past difficulties.

Focus for development

- To make the space and time of worship special and more meaningful, with an obvious visual focus and a pause for reflection.
- To encourage and demonstrate use of the area for quiet reflection so that pupils may access it freely and see it as a truly spiritual experience.
- To build on the already positive relationships with parents, by engaging them more in their children's learning and using their talents to enhance the curriculum.

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

By revitalising the Values for Life scheme, the leadership team has given Christian values pertinence to daily life and a firm Christian foundation on which the school is being rebuilt. With an emphasis on mutual respect, classroom behaviour is now good and this, in turn, has led to more positive attitudes to learning and improved inter-personal relationships. Pupils are able to explain how they stop and think before they react. Their calm and thoughtful approach leads to the positive atmosphere in the classroom, where pupils make accelerated progress above expected local and national levels. Intervention strategies, involving outside agencies where necessary, ensure that progress for those pupils with particular needs is maintained.

The prominence of religious education (RE) is increasing, following the appointment of a committed and enthusiastic RE co-ordinator, and active support from the diocese and the RE adviser. RE now has a place throughout the curriculum, and is also taught as a discrete subject to all classes. From September 2013 this will be by the RE coordinator herself. The church building is used as a resource for RE.

PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) is a way of enabling children and staff to indicate their feelings visually, by displaying one of a series of pictures. This has led to even reticent children being able to talk about their emotions and gives staff an opening to discuss possible problems within the safety of spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. Pupils speak with feeling as they show to visitors the garden in memory of their late headteacher, showing how sensitively their bereavement was handled.

Activities which enhance the curriculum, such as clubs and residential experiences, are available to all pupils, and achievements, especially for living according to Christian values, are celebrated every week.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is satisfactory.

Collective worship is carefully planned using the Values for Life scheme. There have been difficulties engaging the children, but their attitudes are improving and feedback from a recent questionnaire shows that most pupils appreciate some aspects of worship. The lively delivery by members of the local ministry team is the most popular, but, while pupils remember the fun of seeing the puppets, they have little recollection of the Bible story or message contained in it. Local clergy regularly lead worship and pupils enjoy participating in dramas through Open the Book. The church is some distance away, but is used for special services.

The act of worship does not give the impression of a special time in God's presence. The time devoted to it is short and classes sometimes arrive late, so the lighting of the candle, for example, is forgotten in the hurry to move on. Prayers, especially those written by the pupils, seem rushed, with no time to quietly reflect on why we are talking to God. However, one member of the local ministry team offers Godly Play to each class on a monthly basis, which gives more space for quiet reflection.

Christian values are understood and can be explained, but often because of bright displays and classroom reminders rather than from the message during the act of worship. Pupils are aware of the reasons for prayer and some put short prayers on the prayer board which are read by the worship leader. A prayer tree, ready for use in the new school year, is in place in

the renovated area for reflection. The thought-provoking qualities of other activities in this area need careful explanation as they are not readily understood by pupils.

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

The acting headteacher, supported by two senior members of staff, is the driving force leading the school towards its Christian vision, proud of its church foundation and living according to firmly embedded Christian values. The school has applied for academy status and, in recognition of the progress the school has made under her leadership, the acting headteacher will remain in post until the outcome of that process is completed.

The staff are now a cohesive and mutually supportive team, working together, with pupil achievement at the centre of their planning, to develop an inspiring and stimulating learning environment. Their relationship with parents is positive and parents value the commitment of all staff for the benefit of the whole school. The Friends of Ditchingham School, organised by parents, is an active organisation and members are hard-working to raise money to enhance the environment or to offer further learning opportunities for the pupils. Parents are willing to organise and help with extra-curricular activities.

The good links with the church and local ministry team are being strengthened through more regular input to the church magazine and the advertising of events to both communities. The church holds one service each month in the school hoping to encourage families to worship together.

The school is also supported by the local community and has just received a donation from the local shop as its charity of the year. Residents from the village come to school events and are enthusiastic to see the school as a vibrant part of the community.

The governing body is only six strong at present and this dedicated team shares the school's Christian vision. Monitoring visits are linked to the school's development plan, and at present, governors are concentrating on the academy application and are looking forward to the challenges of the new status in the not too distant future.

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