

St John the Baptist Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Pebmarsh
Halstead
Essex
C09 2NH

Diocese: Chelmsford

Local authority: Essex
Dates of inspection: Tuesday November 1st 2011
Date of last inspection: Thursday December 11th 2008
School's unique reference number: 115137
Headteacher: Mrs Amanda Mitchelson
Inspector's name and number: Mrs Ann Bard 728

School context

St John's is a smaller than average rural village primary school. Almost all of the pupils are White British. Although the number of pupils with special educational needs is low a relatively high number of those have a statement. The take up of free school meals is below average. The school is well resourced and the children benefit from extensive and carefully maintained outdoor areas. The parish church is a short walk from the school and the school make use of this although there has been no incumbent in post since December 2010.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St John the Baptist Pebmarsh as a Church of England school are good

St John's is a happy caring and friendly community. Christian values underpin the strong relationships that exist and help ensure that all children are valued and nurtured as unique and confident individuals. The school is highly regarded in the community and strongly supported by the parent body. The parish is appreciative of its church school and supports them where possible. Good progress has been made against the issues since the last inspection.

Established strengths

- The strength of relationships within the school community which are based on its Christian values.
- The high level of care given to individual children by all staff which is much appreciated by parents and the children, enabling them to become confident, happy individuals.
- The quality of leadership of the Headteacher which acts as a role model for all in the school community.
- The care and concern that children show for each other.

Focus for development

- Provide opportunities to increase learners' understanding of the school's Anglican traditions
- To promote the school's distinctive Christian values so that stakeholders, especially learners, are more readily able to understand and articulate them.

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

The school places great emphasis on the importance of each child as an individual and on ensuring that all children feel that they have a voice in the day to day life of the school. This view is supported and appreciated by parents, who spoke about the importance the school places on encouraging their children to become confident and happy learners who are not afraid to take risks. Parents remarked that children will 'have a go at everything.' Children who join the school outside of the normal admission time settle quickly and both they and their families appreciate the time and care shown to them. The framework for this is provided by the school's implicit Christian values which are embodied in the 'Pebmarsh Polish.' These values are supported by all members of staff and children speak about them as the basis for their behaviour and the way that they support each other. This is clearly demonstrated in the strength of relationships and in the way that all are valued. As a result of this children enjoy coming to school and make good progress in their moral and social development. Children are taught and encouraged to hold strong values which equip them well for secondary school

and beyond, but they struggle to express the connection between these values and their Christian roots. All children are part of the school council, making decisions and planning how to support charities through fundraising, for example Seeds for Africa at harvest and Operation Christmas Child. Through this children are able to respond to those in need: 'It makes us realise how lucky we are.'

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Worship plays an important part in the life of the school and its planning and implementation is well led by the headteacher. Careful planning ensures that themes support other areas of the curriculum such as RE and Personal Social and Health Education. These themes help to increase children's understanding of the Bible and of important events in the church calendar. During the act of worship observed, children made thoughtful responses – one child said when being asked during an assembly on saints how they could do something 'saint-like' that day. 'It's doing something kind for someone and not expecting anything in return.' All children speak positively about their experiences of worship and also benefit from a range of visitors such as Open the Book led by local church members, and a neighbouring incumbent. These visits 'help us learn more about the Bible.' Children are sometimes involved in the writing and reading of prayers at the church services and in the planning of special services at the church. There are regular opportunities for the whole school community to worship in the local church and these services are appreciated and supported by many parents. One parent remarked that nearly all families are represented at these. Governors are beginning to formally monitor the impact of worship and there are plans to involve children more systematically in this.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

The school has responded well to the last Section 48 inspection and standards in religious education have been raised so that they are in line and sometimes above national expectations. This has been achieved by staff commitment, the enthusiasm shown by the subject leader and by the raising standards across the school generally in teaching and learning. Lessons are creative and challenging. Children are encouraged to express views and to discuss some difficult issues such as poverty and injustice. Children are enthusiastic about RE and appreciate its importance within the curriculum. 'It helps us to learn about the views of others and what they believe.' Planning and teaching takes into account individual needs and there are many opportunities for cross curricular work. During one lesson children in Years 5 and 6 were being encouraged to think about the mystery of the Christmas story from the perspective of the star and to use their skills in literacy to express this as a poem. Use of assessment and marking is also helping to ensure that pupils' needs are met as is the use of the Chelmsford Diocesan syllabus. The subject leader has identified the need for there to be more consistency in levelling children's work and is developing an assessment grid of useful examples of level descriptors which will help assist staff and will also help children to know how well they are doing and what they need to do to further improve. Children's views on RE and perceptions are gathered by the subject leader and these help to inform future developments.

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

The leadership of the school, including the governors is committed to the school's Christian ethos and promotes this effectively to its parents and the wider community. The strong and dynamic leadership of the headteacher is evident and she and the governing body have worked effectively to ensure that the school's vision and values are understood by parents and the wider community. Induction procedures for new staff ensure that all joining the school are clear about its Christian character and able to support it. Governors have recently surveyed parents about the school's distinctiveness as a church school and are also beginning to formally monitor standards in RE and the impact of worship. Leaders, including governors, now need to decide on how these views will be incorporated into the school's development plan and to monitor the impact of any actions. Parents believe that the school's Christian ethos plays a significant part in its success. There are strong and productive partnerships between the school, its parents and the local community, for example the local community responded to the school's need to improve the outside play area and contributed to its fundraising efforts.