

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Preston VC Primary School

Back Lane
Preston
Hitchin
SG4 7UJ

Diocese: St Albans

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| Local authority: | Hertfordshire |
| Date of inspection: | 21 st September 2012 |
| Date of last inspection: | 6 th June 2007 |
| School's unique reference number: | 117403 |
| Headteacher: | Mrs Alison Brooks |
| Inspector's name and number: | Mrs Judith Ruff 528 |

School context

This school is smaller than average with 93 pupils during the inspection. 19% of pupils are identified with special educational needs, slightly higher than the national average. The majority of pupils are of White British origin. Some are from different ethnic minority heritages. Pupils attend from Preston village and surrounding areas extending to Hitchin and St Ippollyts. The church of St Martin is a ten minute walk from the school.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Preston VC Primary as a Church of England school are good.

'Preston is a school which embodies Christian values and nourishes the spiritual and whole life of each child' said a parent. The caring, loving and individualised support is apparent across the whole school. Community members are there for each other, celebrating the good times, but steadfast during the more difficult and traumatic times. The welcoming atmosphere envelops visitors and makes them feel special and part of the school family.

Established strengths

- High quality, nurturing relationships, built upon Christian values and modelled daily by parents, staff and pupils in school resulting in pupils' personal development being outstanding
- The impact that 'Values Education' has had in giving pupils, staff and parents a common vocabulary forming solid building blocks for developing well rounded future global citizens
- The outstanding behaviour of the pupils and the structures in place to develop self responsibility, respect and care for others – their thoughts and beliefs

Focus for development

- Agree with all stakeholders the special distinctiveness of Preston VC as a church school and publish a statement that informs all of what this looks like in practice within the school
- Improve the monitoring and evaluation of action plans relating to inspection areas, so that clear, systematic, regular and embedded practice is established
- Increase the involvement of pupils in planning, delivering and evaluating collective worship

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

The introduction of 'Values Education' two years ago has strengthened the ethos of the school considerably, giving pupils and staff the language to describe how to apply each value. For example through the 'Wordles' displayed in the hall, encouraging pupils to think of other words closely associated with each selected value. Staff new to the school speak of their confidence being raised through consistency of practice in the use of the '6 Golden Rules' and clear aims and ethos that they are very willing to subscribe to. Spiritual development is well developed through opportunities for reflection, moments of awe and wonder through the butterfly's life cycle and the incubation of chicks. Moral and social development is outstanding through initiatives such as the lunchtime 'Trouble Busters' a peer mediation opportunity and the 'buddy' system which is very well embedded throughout the school. Older buddies speak with great affection and pride at watching their younger partner grow in confidence and ability to grasp the school's practices. Several buddies spoke of developing in understanding and tolerance of younger children through this system, giving them experiences that they did not have in homes where there were no younger siblings. The school has worked hard to build the pupils' understanding of different cultures, through a well planned RE curriculum, 'Multi-Cultural' days in school, visits to a Sikh gurdwara and enabling parents from different cultures and beliefs to share their festivals and customs. The recently installed tiled picture of 'Everybody Smiles in the Same Language' emphasises the inclusiveness of the school community. The school has recently sought the views of parents and pupils on the distinctiveness of the school as a church school, but this discussion has not yet been formalised at staff or governors' meetings. The school community and local community has raised an impressive amount of money for a new extension to the school opened in February 2012. This has considerably enhanced the school's provision for accommodation of classes and provision of meeting or group rooms.

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

Collective worship is an important part of the school day, providing good opportunities for reflection, celebration of achievements, time to sing songs and pray to God. Pupils thoroughly enjoy their singing, so much so that the Early Years pupils whilst celebrating the birthday of 'Preston Bear' in the afternoon session spontaneously burst into singing the 'Halleluiah' hymn from the morning's assembly. Worship is enriched by the fortnightly contribution of the local vicar in leading worship. Recent pupil survey outcomes about collective worship show that pupils enjoy opportunities to participate. 'Active assemblies make it more fun. We learn better that way.' Pupils interviewed were articulate, thoughtful and reflective about worship and RE. They showed how much they are capable of understanding, promoted well through an associated 'Philosophy for Learning' approach. As one pupil put it, 'RE really twists your brain about what you are thinking.' The potential for pupils to plan, deliver and evaluate worship is currently under-developed. Although prayer is part of the collective worship, learning the Lord's Prayer and other well known Anglican prayers is not yet embedded. Worship is planned and delivered well, but the evaluation of worship is a weaker element.

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

The partnership established between the headteacher and the two foundation governors has successfully deepened and strengthened links between the local church and the school. This partnership has good capacity to move forward the discussion about the school's distinctiveness as a church school. The role of governors in monitoring, discussing and evaluating aspects of the school as a church school is under-developed. Action plans have not been sufficiently detailed with time related outcomes that are easy to follow and discuss at regular intervals. The RE Subject Leader has good levels of expertise and enthusiasm and RE significantly enriches the life of both pupils and staff within the school. Pupils are keen and motivated to engage in discussions around faith and beliefs. For example, a pupil had written, 'Determination does get you far in life, but you also need other things like support, bravery, hope, courage and encouragement to reach your goal.' Pupil voice is a powerful advocate and role model within the school. Parents are overwhelmingly confident in the headteacher's leadership, describing her as 'approachable' and 'hands on'. Newly appointed staff value the ethos enabling them to discuss faith issues freely and openly. The school was ably summed up by a pupil who said, 'This is a school where everyone smiles. Even when people are tired, people still put their best efforts in.'