

**Spellbook Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School**

London Road  
Spellbrook  
Bishop's Stortford  
Herts. CM23 4BA

**Diocese: St. Albans**

Local authority: Hertfordshire  
Dates of inspection: 28<sup>th</sup> September 2011  
Date of last inspection: 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2008  
School's unique reference number: 117405  
Headteacher: Gillian Vise  
Inspector's name and number: Catherine Large 482

**School context**

Spellbrook is a smaller than average primary school. The vast majority of pupils are from white British backgrounds. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average. The headteacher was appointed a term before the inspection after a period in an acting capacity.

**The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Spellbrook as a Church of England school are good.**

In recent years, the school has strengthened its Christian ethos and its links with the local church are now excellent. Pupils have a powerful sense of belonging and they are happy and confident. The changes to the staff and governing body since the last inspection have given a fresh and positive impetus to the further development of the school's Christian identity.

**Established strengths**

- The outstanding quality of relationships between the pupils themselves and the strong sense of community rooted in Christian values of care and trust.
- The outstanding contribution of the local church which ensures that pupils have a clear understanding of Christian faith and practice.
- Pupils' enthusiastic and reflective response to collective worship and the impact this has on their spiritual development.

**Focus for development**

- Build on the strong foundations already laid and undertake some Diocesan training for new governors and teachers.
- Take greater account of pupils' views of collective worship and widen opportunities for the participation of others.

**The school through its distinctive Christian character is good at meeting the needs of its pupils.**

Pupils feel safe and valued and speak of the caring ethos of the school, describing it as 'like belonging to a family'. They are very aware that they belong to a church school and give a range of examples including, 'We do a lot about God here' and, as one Year 6 pupil expressed it, 'Everyone cares for each other and I will be very sad to leave'. As they move through the school, they grow in confidence and their overall spiritual, moral and social development is good. They are clear about the difference between right and wrong, behaving well inside and outside the classroom. Pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, make good progress. Older pupils, particularly, benefit from taking on significant responsibilities for aspects of school life, including caring for younger pupils in the playground, helping with collective worship and acting as prefects. There is a powerful sense of community in the school and relationships between the different year groups, and between teachers and pupils, are excellent. 'Even if you only got 1 out of 10, you'd get help and kindness' is how one pupil described it. The school recognises that, at present, pupils have insufficient opportunities to understand cultures and needs beyond their own experience. When given such opportunities, pupils respond well and the school supports the pupils' initiatives. For example, one pupil is organising fund raising for Christian Aid as a result of hearing about famine in parts of Africa and pupils themselves in Years 1 and 2 have initiated their own daily prayer of thanks for their afternoon snack. The school grounds are extensive and varied but their potential is not realised. This was raised at the last inspection but the school now has creative plans in place to maximise their use in a range of ways, including planning reflective and environmental areas. These plans, together with opportunities for display in the new entrance area, are needed to strengthen the spiritual dimension of the general school environment.

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

The sense of community and the high quality of pupils' awareness of Christian belief and practice is most evident in collective worship. It is a very meaningful and joyful occasion which is valued by pupils and by the staff. It promotes the Christian ethos of the school very well because it reinforces key Christian values and explores how they apply to everyday life. Pupils engage enthusiastically in the liturgy that has been developed to reflect key elements of Anglican worship. In addition, the pupils observe the wearing of vestments during Holy Week and Easter. Their relationship with the local vicar is excellent and they respond to all the opportunities to participate, including in prayer, quiet reflection and singing. Planning for worship is good, identifying key Christian festivals and themes throughout the year and, more recently incorporating a range of Christian values themes. The plans meet requirements although there are insufficient opportunities for all staff to plan and lead worship. There are other occasions for worship in school, including before lunch and at the end of the day but there are no significant focal points in classrooms to make the links with worship and everyday school life. There is a school prayer and pupils know this well. The support of the church further enhances pupils' understanding of and participation in worship when the school community celebrates in church at festival times and when Year 6 pupils leave. These are very special occasions in the minds of the pupils. Overall, worship makes an excellent contribution to the spiritual development of pupils. However, the school does not systematically undertake a review of pupils' or parents' views. This is restricting further developments and was an issue at the last inspection.

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

At the last inspection, the Christian identity of the school had just begun to have an impact and links with the church were being forged. Since then, there have been major changes in leadership and management and in the staffing of the school. The new team has really strengthened the Christian ethos and there is now no doubt in the minds of the pupils and parents that this is a church school. It is much more strongly embedded in the daily life of the school and is having a good impact on pupils' personal development. Teachers also feel valued and supported. The involvement of the local church is a very significant factor in this progress. For example, in addition to collective worship, the Christian community holds a special day each year when the whole school works in the church on church related projects. The day starts with the celebration of the Eucharist. This experience is valued by the pupils. The governing body and the leadership and management team are fully supportive of the school's status and appropriate developments feature in the School Development Plan. In particular, they recognise the need to identify the Christian character more explicitly in public documentation and to maximise the school environment for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They also recognise that new teachers and governors, whilst fully and actively supportive, are not fully aware of the potential for further growth. There has been little consultation with parents on issues relating to the implications of church school status but overall links with parents are very good and there is enthusiastic support for the caring ethos and work of the school. Links with the wider Christian community are underdeveloped although there have been some links with the Diocese.