

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Great Gaddesden Church of England Primary School
Church Meadow
Great Gaddesden
Hemel Hempstead
HP1 3BT

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority: Hertfordshire
Date of inspection: 30th January 2012
Date of last inspection: 20th September 2007
School's unique reference number: 117433
Headteacher: Mrs Jackie Lambert
Inspectors' names and numbers: Mrs Lilian Weatherley 42 / Mrs Jane Chipperton 14

School context

Great Gaddesden is a very small, rural, Voluntary Aided Primary School to the north of Hemel Hempstead. The school has encountered much turbulence in recent years and there has been a relatively high incidence of pupil mobility. At the time of this inspection there were 61 pupils on role. Most pupils are white and British but recently there has been an increase in the ethnic diversity within the school. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average and the number of pupils with special educational needs is in line with the national average. Since April 2011 the school has been led by an experienced interim headteacher. The school has now appointed a substantive head who will take up post in September.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Great Gaddesden Primary School as a Church of England school are 'good'.

Since its last inspection in 2008, Great Gaddesden has had a significant amount of turmoil but the appointment of the interim headteacher in April 2011 ensured that the distinctive Christian character of the school was not lost. The interim headteacher, together with the vicar and the governing body have a clear vision of what makes a 'good' church school and have been working hard to establish this. The development of the distinctive Christian ethos has had a significant impact across the school. Pupils are well behaved, thoughtful, courteous and considerate. Prayer and worship play an important role in the life of the pupils. Incidents of bullying are extremely rare and there is a family atmosphere of mutual respect.

Established strengths

- The strong Christian ethos
- The leadership and distinctive Christian vision of the interim headteacher
- The school is a safe, inclusive and well behaved community where Christian values influence the spiritual life of the school
- The pupils enjoy school and speak positively about their learning

Focus for development

- Continue to address assessment and knowledge of pupil standards in Religious Education
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education to ensure greater challenge and rigor and meet the needs of individual pupils
- Further improve the opportunities for spiritual development, reflection and cultural development across the curriculum
- Further develop the links with the church

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

Great Gaddesden is clearly a school with 'community' at its heart. This is informed by the pupils' developing understanding of Christian values. Most have a good understanding of values such as trust and respect although there is little in classroom displays to reinforce this aspect of their learning. Pupils make comments such as 'I like the peace in our small school' and have a concern for the smooth running of the community, citing honesty as an important value. Pupils are polite, confident and welcoming, showing feelings of self-worth and respect for others. They have positive attitudes to learning and value the community spirit of the school. They enjoy good relationships with all adults in the school and benefit from the way in which teachers and classroom assistants work together as a team. A school council has been established but is new to its role. Parents are positive about the changes made by the interim head and vicar and are keen to establish further links between the parish and the school. There is scope for links between the school and the different cultures represented in the school. Parents from a variety of cultural backgrounds understand the community spirit of the school and affirm the 'strong family traditional values' and Church of England ethos of the school. Religious Education is a developing subject; it complements the pupils' knowledge and understanding of new testament teaching which is also experienced through daily acts of worship. The school's support for charities includes local and diocesan initiatives such as The Children's Society and the Bishop's Harvest Appeal.

The impact of Collective Worship on the school community is 'good'.

Worship has been re-developed since the arrival of the interim headteacher and now strengthens the school's Christian ethos, inviting the community to adopt a reflective approach to life. A worship display in the hall is regularly updated to enable the school to connect with the main theme at any time of the day. Parents speak enthusiastically about services in church and the developing partnership between the parish and the school. Pupils look forward to worship, particularly Friday celebration worship and the monthly service in church when 'candles are lit'. They speak positively about their experience of prayer and singing hymns. Behaviour in worship is good and pupils are respectful and attentive. Although pupils are encouraged to be involved in music and drama and can relate to the messages of parables, there are at present limited opportunities for them to plan and deliver worship themselves or for the use of technology to enhance spiritual development. Although worship is central to the spiritual and moral development of pupils, formal planning and evaluation of themes has only recently been introduced. Clergy regularly lead worship which gives the pupils confidence to talk openly about God and Jesus. Services in church introduce pupils, parents and dog-walkers to Anglican traditions in a formal setting.

The effectiveness of the Religious Education is 'satisfactory'.

In recent years Religious Education has not been a priority area for the school and the current self-evaluation is inadequate. Pupils enjoy RE and during class and group discussions show that they are reflective and have a good knowledge and understanding of some key elements of the Christian and Muslim traditions. They are able to talk openly about their own beliefs and those of others. Assessment, however, is weak and the school does not yet have a clear view of standards in the subject. Classes are small and this clearly supports the teaching and pupils' learning, enabling pupils to talk confidently and with enthusiasm about the work they have been doing on parables and the events in Jesus' life. The quality of planning and teaching in RE is, however, inconsistent and the lack of focused assessment and differentiation across year groups means that the needs of individual pupils are not being met. This, combined with the two year rolling programme means a narrow curriculum and pupils making slow progress in their knowledge and understanding of wider RE concepts and ideas. Pupils learn about Christianity by yearly repetition supported by Collective Worship, rather than by detailed, planned for learning in a broad RE curriculum. This results in a lack of knowledge and confusion when pupils begin to discuss wider aspects of Christianity and other faiths. Pupils' cultural development needs to be improved by providing experiences of different local religions and cultures. The school has a range of artefacts and resources but in the RE lessons observed there was insufficient use of sensory stimulus to engage and inspire the pupils with their learning. Many of the staff are new this year and have experienced some training in the subject at the beginning of the academic year. With the appointment of a new Headteacher however, it is important that the new subject leader addresses RE and attends diocesan training to help improve the quality of teaching and learning, develop pupil assessment, self-evaluation and the quality and breadth of the provision.

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

The leadership of the interim headteacher has had a significant impact on many aspects of the school. She has been able to improve morale and give all of those involved in the school, especially the parents, a period of stability. Her experience and personal faith has enabled the distinctive Christian character of the school to be revisited after a period of stagnation. Parents speak highly of her leadership and, although positive about the future with a new headteacher, they will be sad to see her leave. Governors have a vision of how distinctive Christian values influence the school's life and are committed to carrying the ethos forward in the coming years. The links with the Church are good and there are now excellent relationships between the school and the parish. The Vicar is a regular visitor to the school, leading Collective Worship and supporting RE. Self-evaluation is developing but there is still work to be done in the area of RE. Parents are very supportive of the school with a significant number travelling some distance for their children to attend this church school. Although some parents are not in the parish they are committed to the Church. They enjoy the services held in the Church and would like to see more events and Church links with parents. After a period of uncertainty the school now has all of the ingredients to move forward with renewed hope. The new and enthusiastic staff, the governors and parish should work with the incoming substantive headteacher to formulate a clear vision for the future.