

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Northbourne Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Coldharbour Lane
Northbourne
Deal
Kent
CT14 0LP

Diocese: Canterbury

Local authority: Kent
Date of inspection: 10th February 2012
Dates of last inspection: 2nd and 3rd March 2009
School's unique reference number: 118689
Executive headteacher: Catherine Karunaratna
Inspector's name and number: Quentin Roper 762

School context

Northbourne Church of England Primary School is a small village school serving a wide catchment area. In September 2011 it was federated with a local primary school after a period of considerable instability, during which delegated powers were removed from the governing body. The federation is led by an executive headteacher, with an assistant headteacher at Northbourne. Most pupils are of White British heritage and the proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Northbourne Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School as a Church of England school are good

Northbourne is a good Church of England school where ambitious leaders and governors have achieved significant change in a short period of time, creating a distinctive context through values-led worship, a nurturing, reflective environment and a broad curriculum. They delight in the school's Christian character, which is promoted through inclusiveness, effective local partnerships and opportunities for personal and spiritual development.

Established strengths

- Interactive displays and reflection areas which contribute significantly to pupils' spiritual development
- Learners' positive attitudes to collective worship, with frequent involvement of children in leading daily worship and planning festival services
- Purposeful and cohesive leaders, who express their commitment through a strategic vision which is distinctively Christian
- The provision of pastoral support for staff and children

Focus for development

- Embed Christian values, creating explicit links for learners within worship and teaching
- Extend governors' robust systems for monitoring and evaluation to Church school self-evaluation
- Revise the collective worship policy and monitoring sheets so that references are distinctively Anglican and include an evaluation of the impact on those attending

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

Northbourne is described by parents as a 'gentle, open school' which encourages sharing and kindness. Core Christian values such as repentance and forgiveness are evident within the mission statement, explicit within key documentation and clear in the framework used for worship. Children explore these values through worship, RE and the wider curriculum. They consider the school a happy place which helps them to follow the motto of 'live, learn, laugh', although some are uncertain about the declared values and how these impact daily on attitudes and behaviour. Leaders recognise this and aim to support children by making more

explicit links in teaching and worship and evaluating their impact. In one effective example observed during an RE lesson, a child emphasised that 'we can talk to God whenever we want and he will listen', and another reflected on how people might demonstrate or seek forgiveness. The school environment enhances learners' spiritual development by encouraging reflection and prayer, for example through prayer trees and interactive displays in classrooms and shared spaces. All age groups contribute; one infant pupil, exploring God's kingdom, described it as being 'like a vast sea of wonder and happiness'. The school also promotes a cross-curricular approach, which celebrates similarities and diversity and enables children to explore their cultural heritage. Children are able to explain how knowledge and understanding in RE themes gives 'a taste of others' lives other than our own', connecting learning with experiences in their own lives and helping them to respect other cultures. Furthermore, both the School Council and an association with a school in Uganda enable pupils to be proactive in decision making and fundraising.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Worship is an important and developing element of school life. Leaders have addressed issues from the previous inspection relating to staff attendance and the use of symbols and artefacts to enhance spirituality. For example, colours of the Church year are displayed prominently and children were able to explain the lighting of a candle 'to show Jesus is the light of the world'. During visits and church services ministers use additional Anglican liturgy such as responses, but its daily use by worship leaders is inconsistent. Parents appreciate opportunities to share in special services and pupils have a positive attitude to worship. They listen attentively, sing with enthusiasm and are confident to contribute their thoughts. They particularly enjoy parables, visits from the vicar and times of celebration, seeing 'what our friends have achieved'. Prayer, questioning and wonder often extend into the school's daily life; one class displayed a 'moments of reflection' book which included reflections on being special to God. Worship is planned in detail and includes consistent references to Bible passages, Christian values and symbols. Learners lead significant aspects of worship; older children prepare and deliver themed materials on a monthly basis and all children contribute to festival services. A dedicated action plan, supported by regular monitoring, ensures quality of delivery and consistency of approach. However, the distinction between assembly and worship is not always clear in timetables or from dialogue. The current worship policy and monitoring proformas also require a more significant focus on distinctively Christian and Anglican aspects of worship, supported by evaluative responses from children and parents.

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

During the consultation over federation it is evident that governors developed and shared a vision for Northbourne based firmly on Christian principles. They are supportive and determined and understand how robust systems for monitoring and evaluation, established for learning and teaching, might now be applied to areas of distinctiveness. Christian values have helped to shape a common purpose within a supportive team and continue to influence the community-centred ambitions shared by school leaders. Since the last inspection the school has re-established beneficial links with the parish church, which hosts display boards showing children's learning and is used for festivals and special events in the life of the school. Governors and staff also comment favourably on the spiritual guidance provided by clergy, particularly the gentle, consistent 'stability of presence' of a retired local minister, supporting both staff and children. Personal and professional development for staff is achieved through ongoing training and a mentoring scheme; furthermore potential new leaders are encouraged to establish and manage whole school projects. The leadership of RE is particularly effective; outcomes from regular monitoring including reviews of classroom environments and children's books are discussed with staff and inform development planning. Self-evaluation relating to the school as a Church school currently remains at staff level; however an effective framework is in place within the federation to establish involvement and oversight by governors. The school maintains significant links with parents, who are actively involved in the PTA and school initiatives and describe the executive and assistant headteachers as approachable and accessible. They have confidence that the school addresses concerns swiftly and appreciate arrangements for communication and consultation such as newsletters, class representatives and questionnaires.