



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Brancaster Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Market Lane
Brancaster
Kings Lynn
PE31 8AB

Diocese: Norwich

Local authority: Norfolk
Date of inspection: 6 June 2009
Date of last inspection: July 2006
School's unique reference number: 121131
Headteacher: Linda Hothersall
Inspector's name and number: Simon Windmill 182

School context

This small rural primary school in Norfolk serves the village of Brancaster, though most pupils live outside the area. The proportion of pupils with learning or special educational needs is above average, as many pupils who had difficulties in other schools come to Brancaster under 'managed move' arrangements. All pupils are from White British backgrounds. Brancaster has achieved Artsmark Gold, Health and Well Being, Activemark and Chartered School award, and is working towards Eco School and ICT status.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Brancaster as a Church of England school are outstanding

Brancaster's Christian ethos and values are embedded in school life and have a strong positive influence on pupils' values and attitudes. As a result, supportive and caring relationships give the school a family atmosphere which is evident to all. Collective worship lies at the centre of the school's life and work.

Established strengths

- The school's Christian ethos, which is fundamental to school life
- Pupils' excellent behaviour
- The supportive relationships between pupils, staff, governors and the wider community
- The positive impact of collective worship on pupils

Focus for development

- Build the relationship between the newly appointed Vicar, the church and the school
- Enhance religious education by using more drama and church visits
- Monitor and evaluate the impact of the Values for Life scheme on pupils
- Link spiritual, moral, social and cultural development with religious education and the Personal Health and Social Education scheme

The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is outstanding in meeting the needs of all pupils

The headteacher, staff and governors see the school's Christian ethos as central to its life. Care and support for pupils and staff is outstanding, and demonstrates Christian values, reflected in the welcoming and inclusive atmosphere. Pupils say they feel valued and safe.

Behaviour is outstanding. A number of pupils having difficulties at other schools have transferred to Brancaster under the 'managed move' system because Brancaster has the expertise to enable them to overcome their problems. Pupils have a real say in making the rules through an effective School Council, so they feel the rules are fair.

Pupils get on exceptionally well with each other, and with staff, who provide excellent role models. Pupils respond well to the responsibilities they are given, for example planning and budgeting for an extension to their play area.

Pupils readily approach staff with any problems they have, knowing that the staff will help them. Excellent relationships also successfully support pupils in developing their self-confidence and independence. Pupils say they really enjoy school – one said, "I just love being here!"

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They have a clear understanding of right and wrong. A new vicar has been appointed, so pupils and staff are looking forward to his arrival. He plans to build good relationships with the school, and to help develop pupils' spiritual awareness.

Pupils' have a high awareness and concern for the needs of others, and they willingly help to raise money for charities, such as the Tsunami appeal.

The impact of collective worship is outstanding

The head, staff and pupils see worship as central to school life. It is soundly based on Christian values, and always includes prayer, singing and teaching. Prayers are said at lunchtime and at the day's end. The school's Christian identity is reflected in excellent displays around the school, and all rooms have crosses.

Pupils and staff see worship as the focal point of each day. Pupils say they enjoy and value it, especially when they take part through drama, saying their own prayers or reading from the Bible. They enjoy having a variety of leaders, such as staff, clergy or local ministers. One pupil said, "I really like assembly - it helps me learn about Jesus, and how I should behave."

Pupils have a very mature understanding of the styles and purposes of prayer, like saying thank or sorry, or asking for help, healing, or forgiveness. One pupil said, "I like having time for prayer when I feel stressed," and another said, "Prayer gives me a chance to deal with things that worry me."

A candle provides a visual focus for worship, marking it as a special part of the day. Worship is well planned around themes reflecting Christian values and Church festivals, such as Christmas, Easter, Harvest and Mothering Sunday. These are held in the church, and many parents and members of the community attend.

Worship is recorded and monitored, and the school is exploring ways to use the Values for Life resources to enhance worship, and to evaluate its impact on pupils.

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The effectiveness of religious education is good

Religious education is seen as a very important area of learning by teachers, parents and pupils. It is well planned to cover Christianity and other faiths, and is based on the Norfolk Agreed Syllabus. It is also linked with collective worship themes when appropriate.

Pupils enjoy religious education, and make good progress in it, comparable with progress across the curriculum. They are able to relate what they learn about Christianity and other faiths to their own lives. Their understanding of different faiths is developed through the stories, rituals and traditions of different faiths. They are encouraged to deepen their understanding by asking questions of themselves as well as asking their teachers.

Lessons are planned with clear learning objectives. A wide range of activities is used to stimulate learning, such as drama, discussion, individual and group work. This helps to keep pupils interested in their lessons, and gives them opportunities to work in different ways. A good balance is maintained between 'Learning from' and 'learning about' religion, which helps pupils to understand both aspects of religious education.

Standards of teaching and learning in religious education are good. For example a lesson on the parable of the Prodigal Son helped pupils express a wide range of responses to the son's actions, and to understand the lessons of the parable, such as God's willingness to forgive the repentant son.

The religious education curriculum is well resourced with suitable artefacts from a range of faiths, and pupils enjoy learning from them. Sufficient time is allocated to religious education.

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

The headteacher gives outstanding leadership to the school, and is exceptionally well supported by the staff and governors. Between them they promote a distinctive and active Christian vision for the school, with Christian values underpinning its life and work. For example religious education is classed as a core subject, acknowledging the importance of its place in the curriculum.

The school's commitment to accepting pupils with difficulties from other schools, and the excellent results which follow, is a shining example of strong Christian influence evident in all aspects of the school's life.

The staff feel highly valued and involved in the school's development. They all work well together, and enjoy the support given by the governors. This contributes greatly to the happy and supportive atmosphere among staff.

The partnership between school, parents, church and wider community is excellent. Links with the Church are particularly close, and have been maintained through the recent interregnum. Foundation governors promote the school within the PCC to ensure effective communication between both, and support the school through prayer.

Parents' surveys express approval of the school – one said, "The school has a real family feeling, and always put the children first." Parents and members of the wider community hold the school in very high regard. They acknowledge that the school's successful and purposeful family atmosphere is generated through its caring Christian relationships. Parents and the wider community feel well informed about the school's activities, and enjoy being able to get involved in its life in many ways.

Recommendations of the previous inspection were to make a folio of pupils' RE work for assessments, and embed and evaluate the Norfolk syllabus. This has been implemented.

