



Diocese of St Edmundsbury  
and Ipswich

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

### **Sir Robert Hitcham Church of England VA Primary School**

School Corner  
Debenham  
Stowmarket Suffolk  
IP14 6PL

#### **Diocese: St Edmundsbury & Ipswich**

Local authority: Suffolk  
Dates of inspection: January 14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> 2008  
Date of last inspection: 2003  
School's unique reference number: 124774  
Headteacher: Mrs Barbara McElroy  
Inspector's name and number: Mrs Gill Hipwell 480

#### **School context**

The majority of the children come from the village of Debenham or other villages in the immediate area. The school is over-subscribed. All pupils speak English as their first language. Most children enter the Nursery with attainment above national expectations and both expectations and attainment remain high throughout the school. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is well below the national average. Links with the local church community are established but low-key.

#### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Sir Robert Hitcham Primary School as a Church of England school are satisfactory**

The school is comfortable in its identity as a Church school and acknowledges the importance of raising the awareness of its Anglican status in the community. Staff and governors show a commitment to developing the role of collective worship and Religious Education so that they have greater impact on the wider life of the school.

#### **Established strengths**

- Excellent relationships between all members of the school community.
- Good use of diocesan guidance in evaluating and developing distinctive practices.
- Strong leadership in collective worship and Religious Education.

#### **Focus for development**

- Use of the restructured collective worship programme to develop a strong understanding of Christian values which impacts across the curriculum and beyond.
- Implementation of a secure system of monitoring and evaluation for collective worship.
- Improvement of teachers' subject knowledge in Religious Education to enable greater confidence in delivery and appropriate assessment.
- The role of the Foundation Governors in promoting, monitoring and evaluating the Christian distinctiveness of the school.

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

Pupils enjoy being at the school and describe staff as 'strict but kind' and 'good listeners'. They described how they are respected and valued as individuals. Behaviour is good and positively managed, although older pupils feel that their efforts are less well rewarded than those of younger children. Pupils understand and respect the code of conduct, describing it as 'fair', and use it in the clubs that they run themselves. Year 5 and 6 pupils have a significant voice via the school council and take on a number of leadership roles; developing responsibility for oneself and towards others is a strong feature. Qualities of kindness, fairness and respect are valued, although pupils did not identify these as being Christian. Pupils embrace the concept of service and support charities with understanding. The school environment encourages reflection, with good Religious Education displays in classrooms and in the hall as well as a new quiet area for playtimes, well equipped with seating. Pupils understand, and use, the buddy bench.

**The impact of collective worship on the school community is satisfactory**

Collective worship is co-ordinated by the Headteacher and delivered by a number of people. At present the church is involved in the delivery of school worship but not in its planning. The church building is regularly used as a worship venue. Recent training from the Diocesan Schools Advisor has led to the restructuring of worship; a good programme has been drawn up focusing on Christian values but it is too early to assess the impact of this. Thought has been given to creating an environment in the hall which encourages reflection and considerable resources dedicated to achieving it. There are large Christian banners, made by pupils, on the wall. Younger pupils enjoy worship, especially the stories and the singing. Some older pupils feel that it is repetitive, although they acknowledge the importance of the subjects covered. All pupils participate enthusiastically in the singing and in prayer and all liked the opportunities offered for active participation. Older pupils expressed a wish to play a bigger role in planning and delivery. Some feedback is sought from pupils via the school council but not on a regular basis. Currently the Foundation Governors are not involved in any aspects of its management but a system of monitoring and evaluation is on the brink of being implemented.

**The effectiveness of the Religious Education is satisfactory**

The subject leader has been well-resourced to move the subject forward. Using the new Suffolk Agreed Syllabus she has produced a good and well-balanced curriculum. Teachers feel well supported by the material that she has prepared but identified the need for opportunities to develop greater subject knowledge. Teachers prepare lessons with care, seeking to engage the pupils in learning about and from religion. Stimulating material is delivered with enthusiasm and obvious enjoyment and pupils are clearly involved in learning; however, in the lessons observed there was an over-reliance on worksheets as a method of assessment and a disproportionate amount of time spent on writing in Key Stage 1. The written tasks lacked opportunities for differentiation. Discussion is encouraged and enjoyed by the pupils who participate confidently. As yet the cross-curricular links with other subjects are under-developed, but the subject co-ordinator has identified how this can be achieved. Much progress has been made in just over a term and teachers' attitudes are very positive.

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

The Headteacher has clear plans for developing the school's distinctiveness as a church of England school, particularly through the overt embedding of Christian values in collective worship and across the curriculum and a higher profile for Religious Education. She is well supported by the staff. Documentation, such as the school brochure, states clearly that the school has an Anglican foundation but signage around the building, letterheads and the school badge do not; the governors are aware of the need to review this in order to ensure that the significance of the school's Church of England status is communicated clearly to the wider community. The role of the Foundation Governors is not clearly established, although the strong leadership of the Chair of Governors is encouraging more active participation and plans are in place to take more responsibility for the monitoring of collective worship. Links with the parish are good but low-key; the incumbent and Headteacher have identified areas that can be developed further, previously unexplored due to long-term illness.