



Name and address of school St James CEVA Middle School Vinefields Bury St Edmunds Suffolk IP33 1YB Type of school Middle Status Voluntary Aided Diocese St Edmundsbury and Ipswich LEA Suffolk	Date of inspection 30 April 2007 Date of last inspection Not known School's unique reference number 124862 Name of Headteacher Mr Paul Elstone Name of Inspector Simon Windmill NS number 182
--	--

Context

St James Church of England VA school is a larger than average urban middle school. It has excellent links with the Burt St Edmunds cathedral. Almost all pupils come from white British backgrounds, with a few from minority ethnic backgrounds. The number of pupils with disabilities or learning difficulties is well above average and includes a few pupils for whom English is a second language.

Summary Judgement

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St James as a Church of England school are outstanding.

The school's Christian ethos and values are embedded in school life, having a strong positive influence on pupils' values and attitudes. Collective Worship and Religious Education also contribute greatly to pupils' spiritual and moral development.

Established strengths

- The Christian ethos and values, which underpin the life of the school
- The importance and impact of Collective Worship and Religious Education on pupils' development
- The school's excellent links with the Cathedral and the wider community

Focus for development

- Introduction of the new RE syllabus
- More opportunities for pupils to use their own prayers in Collective Worship
- Develop quiet areas for reflection

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

The school's Christian ethos is seen by the headteacher, staff and governors as a very important part of school life. Care and support for pupils and staff are outstanding, and reflect the Christian values on which the school is based. This is seen in the school's warm, welcoming, inclusive and friendly atmosphere, in which pupils feel valued as individuals. They get on very well with each other, and with the staff, who provide good role models for pupils which helps them develop self confidence and independence. Pupils like coming to school, and enjoy most of their lessons.

Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. This is because they are involved in setting the rules for their class, and therefore respect them, and understand the consequences if rules are broken. The very rare lapses in behaviour are always dealt with quickly and effectively – an example of this was seen during the inspection. However while most pupils felt behaviour generally was very good, a few of the older pupils felt that the rules were sometimes not applied consistently.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They have a clear understanding of right and wrong. The headteacher, staff and governors see spiritual and moral development as a vital part of pupils' learning, and encourage this by giving pupils some opportunities for reflection, in Collective Worship and the wider curriculum. Pupils' awareness and concern for the needs of others is encouraged, and as a result they treat each other with care and respect. They are also developing their knowledge and understanding of different faiths and cultures around the world.

The impact of Collective Worship on the school community is outstanding.

Collective Worship is seen as a very important part of the school day by the head and staff, and is securely based on the Christian gospel. It always includes excellent singing, teaching and time for prayer and reflection. Pupils enjoy worship, especially when they have a part to play in it, such as acting out a story or reading a poem. They would welcome more involvement in worship, for example by writing and reading their own prayers.

Worship is well planned around a theme for each term, and reflects the main festivals of the church year. In addition to the 'traditional' festivals, a full school Eucharist is held every term, at St Edmundstide, Ash Wednesday and Ascension day, and a Leavers' Eucharist at the end of each school year. Special services are often held in the Cathedral. The whole school attends most assemblies, with year group and class assemblies built into the pattern of worship, allowing more opportunities for pupils to contribute to worship. A wide range of leaders gives variety to the styles of worship, for example Cathedral staff, local clergy and the Bury Christian Youth and the Rock Solid group. Occasionally visitors from further afield lead worship, for example a visiting teacher from Tanzania led a very lively assembly, telling pupils about what school was like for her pupils. Pupils enjoy the variety of worship styles.

The school environment is used well to contribute to pupils' spiritual and moral development. For example, a cross and candle is displayed in some assemblies, and there are crosses or other Christian symbols in classrooms. There are lively and stimulating displays around the school, especially in the RE classroom, and displays reflecting the pupils' charitable activities.

Brief records of some acts of worship are kept, but worship is not systematically monitored and evaluated to assess its impact on pupils. Some pupils would welcome the chance to give feedback about their responses to Collective Worship.

The effectiveness of RE is outstanding.

Religious Education is regarded by staff, governors and pupils as a very important part of pupils' learning. It is well resourced, and every pupil has an hour of RE every week. The Suffolk RE syllabus is used very effectively, and the school is currently reviewing and updating its syllabus in accordance with the revised County scheme.

Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are differentiated so that pupils of differing abilities are well catered for. Lessons are well planned, with a variety of teaching styles used both to suit pupils' varying learning styles and abilities, and to keep up pupils' levels of interest in their work. For example, using interactive whiteboards for animated stories, discussions both with the teacher and in small groups of peers, role play, written work with illustrations, and worksheets - which, in response to the previous church school inspection, are now used less frequently. The pace of lessons is good, and although two lessons observed overran, pupils' were willing to carry on discussions after the lessons' finishing time.

Pupils enjoy lessons, which have an outstanding impact on their spiritual and moral development. They contribute readily to discussions, and their learning influences their daily lives. For example, in a discussion a pupil said that she liked RE because it helped her to understand how she should treat other people, and that she should help people who don't have enough to eat; another said he enjoyed learning about other religions because it helped him to understand and respect what other people believed. The RE displays and artefacts in classrooms and other areas of the school contribute to pupils' learning, and reflect the high quality of pupils work. RE lessons are linked with other subject areas across the curriculum. For example, a story used in RE was also used in a literacy lesson. RE teaching is soundly based on Christian principles, balanced with suitable teaching about other faiths. RE teaching is supported by close links with the Cathedral, the local church and the wider community.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is good, with some outstanding features.

The Headteacher gives outstanding leadership to the school, and is very well supported by his staff and governors. The headteacher and staff successfully promote a distinctive and active Christian vision for the school, with Christian values underpinning its life and work. This is reflected in the school's mission statement, in the school's prospectus, the excellent policy for Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development, the Collective Worship policy, and in recruitment procedures, all of which contribute to the strong Christian influence seen in all aspects of the life of the school. This was also highlighted in the recent Ofsted inspection, which said "All staff are dedicated to providing the best for all pupils", and that the school "Provides an education that meets the needs of each individual within a Christian framework...based on clear values and principles which influence every aspect of school life. Pupils feel safe, secure, valued and respected".

The partnership between the school, the church and the wider community is very effective and highly valued by all. Links with the Cathedral are particularly close and productive, and many parents and governors are from its congregation, and the school is often represented at a number of Cathedral services and events. The strong link with Bury Christian Youth is highly valued for its work with pupils. Questionnaires show that parents and members of the wider community speak very highly of the family atmosphere generated through the school's caring relationships, and are very happy with the school. They feel well informed about the school's activities, and enjoy the fact that they are positively encouraged to get involved in school life in a number of ways, such as contributing to fundraising for charities and the school.