

The Abbey Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

St James Street, Shaftesbury, Dorset SP7 8HQ

Diocese: Salisbury

Local authority: Dorset

Dates of inspection: 7th September 2012

Date of last inspection: June 10th 2009

School's unique reference number: 113850

Headteacher: Mr Peter Meacham

Inspector's name and number: Mrs Marcia Headon 761

School context

The Abbey School is a Church of England voluntary aided primary school. It has 185 pupils on roll. It serves the town of Shaftesbury, and some of the surrounding villages. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage and the proportion of pupils who are from other minority ethnic backgrounds or who speak English as an additional language is well below average. The percentage of pupils who have special educational needs is broadly average.

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

The strong Christian vision and leadership of the headteacher, coupled with the quality of relationships between staff and staff and pupils contribute to making The Abbey School an outstanding church school. Pupils flourish because the Christian values of care, love, forgiveness and a belief that all are unique and have God-given talents, permeate all aspects of the life and work of the school.

Established strengths

- The extremely well-developed links with the local church which impact very positively on school life
- The high quality collective worship which provides points for reflection for all
- The opportunities for spiritual reflection which are provided throughout the curriculum.

Focus for development

- To extend the opportunities for pupils to play a more active role in the evaluation of collective worship
- To routinely review the core values of the school with parents
- To develop assessment procedures and the quality of marking in Religious Education (RE).

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

The school has a strongly articulated set of Christian values which determine its actions and are very evident in all its work. The school mission statement 'to be the best we can – living and learning in tune with God' is reflected in the quality of the relationships which exist in the school and in its everyday work. Parents recognise and appreciate this and talk of nothing being too much trouble for the school and of a strong sense of community being fostered. Staff know the pupils very well and provide exceptionally high levels of support. The Christian values of care and forgiveness are in the forefront of pupils' minds and they show acts of kindness to one another such as showing reassurance when one pupil was distressed by a wasp in the playground or the older pupils helping the children in Reception on the monthly

collective acts of worship in the local church. Behaviour in the school is very good and the clever linking of golden time to the values of the school reinforces this. The pupils are well aware of the needs of others and have raised considerable sums of money for charities such as Children in Need and Jeans for Genes. They support the local community taking part in events such as 'Songs around the Campfire' and singing in homes for the elderly. The spiritual development of the pupils is very strong with many opportunities given for reflection throughout the curriculum. A range of signs and symbols throughout the school most effectively indicate the school's Christian foundation. The ceramic tree on which pupils have placed their own plaques and the stained glass window showing the importance of music and Christian values are focal points within the school. Each classroom has a quiet corner and the school is developing a quiet garden where pupils can go to reflect.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Distinctively Christian acts of worship are central to the life of the school. Pupils very evidently enjoy worship, listening attentively, joining in enthusiastically with singing and prayers. A worship table set with appropriate Christian symbols enhances the space for worship, very effectively creating a peaceful atmosphere with which pupils identify. In the act of worship on the day of the inspection the pupils responded enthusiastically to the Christian greeting given by the vicar, responded well to the questions asked and joined in with the Lord's prayer reverently and without hesitation. The pupils particularly enjoy the monthly visits to the local church for the collective act of worship and the weekly visit by the local clergy to lead their daily collective act of worship. The pupils understand the themes covered in collective worship and evidently relate them to their everyday lives. One pupil was able to recall very clearly an assembly about Moses which, as he said, made him think differently about this prophet. Pupils value prayer and in classrooms there are spaces for quiet reflection. Prayers are said before lunch and at the end of school. Pupils write the prayers said before lunch and can explain the school prayer very clearly. Staff feel affirmed by collective worship; one commented that there was frequently a 'nugget' in it upon which she reflected later in the day. The staff have established a prayer group which meets weekly. The planning of collective worship is very thorough and the school has addressed the issue from the last inspection about linking the resources used in collective worship more effectively. The governors frequently attend collective acts of worship in school and parents and the local community come to the monthly worship in the local church and school services held there at important Christian festivals. The school and governors evaluate the effectiveness of the collective acts of worship but to date pupils are not involved in this evaluation.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Standards in RE are good and broadly in line with other subjects. Pupils make good progress across both key stages. Pupils enjoy their RE lessons and are encouraged to think deeply and to reflect on how the work they are studying affects their lives. In a Key Stage 1 lesson pupils were considering the nature of God and his gifts to us. Their answers showed how they were using their own experiences and beliefs to inform their thinking. The creation story, as told in the Bible, was most imaginatively demonstrated by the teacher which enthralled the children. Similarly in a Key Stage 2 lesson the message of the parable of the Good Samaritan was drawn out by use of a 'conscience tunnel' where the priest and the Levite were given advice by the pupils as to their actions. Pupils also recalled modern day acts of being Good Samaritans. Pupils showed a good understanding of other faiths and one pupil recalled his visit to a mosque very clearly and could explain how ideas of charity were demonstrated there. Planning in RE is very detailed and has involved all staff. The RE coordinator has provided training for staff in the new Dorset Agreed syllabus and in the teaching of 'Godly play'. She monitors lessons and provides good feedback and support to teachers. Teaching is good. Methods are varied, lesson objectives are clearly set out and teachers display good subject knowledge. However, they do not always use questioning to draw out deeper meanings from children. Assessment in RE is developing with work being levelled against national 'can do' statements. It is used to inform planning and teaching but analysis of the data is less robust and marking does not guide pupils sufficiently as to how they could improve their work further.

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

The headteacher, staff and governors all share the vision of the school as a vibrant community which is fully inclusive and reflects the Christian message. The headteacher is an excellent role model and described by the governors as a true Christian servant: he provides outstanding leadership. He is highly respected by parents who feel very involved in the life of the school. Parental questionnaires always include a section on the nature of the school as a church school and these indicate very high levels of satisfaction. Parents have not yet been asked to contribute to any review of the values of the school. The foundation governors are highly supportive of the school, staff and its pupils and are very conscientious in their duties, evaluating the collective worship and the work in RE. There is a specific link governor for RE. One foundation governor has recently successfully sought funding for the quiet garden. The school development plan has a specific section about the church status of the school and governors robustly and accurately evaluate their own and the school's strengths and weaknesses. Staff appointments are very carefully considered and staff development is a high priority. Governors have also attended development courses. The school has addressed the issues from the previous inspection well. The school has exceptionally strong links with the local church. As well as regular visits to the church by the school and children's work being displayed there, members of the church hear children read, have prayer groups linked to each class, and are about to provide some RE books for the school. The foundation governors provide regular updates to the Parochial Church Council and events at the school appear in the church pewsheet. The school has good links with the Diocese and is working with it to enhance further its distinctiveness as a church school.

SIAS report September 2012, The Abbey CE VA Primary School, Shaftesbury SP7 8HQ