

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

### **Branscombe Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School**

Seaton,  
EX12 3DA

**Diocese: Exeter**

Local Authority: Devon

Date of inspection: 18<sup>th</sup> October 2012

Date of last inspection: 8<sup>th</sup> July 2009

School's URN: 113348

Name of executive headteacher: Katie Gray

Inspector: Margaret James (NS number 698)

#### **Context**

Branscombe VC Primary School is set within the picturesque coastal village of Branscombe. It has 37 pupils on roll, who are educated in two classes. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is lower than that expected nationally as is the percentage of pupils known to be eligible to receive free school meals. The school is within walking distance of the parish church, which is visited frequently by both classes. Branscombe VC is in its first term of federation with another small voluntary controlled primary school in the Diocese of Exeter.

#### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Branscombe VC Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding**

The Christian foundation of Branscombe VC Primary School is very important to all stakeholders. It underpins decisions and relationships and everyone is aware of the difference that being a church school makes on a daily basis. Pupils, staff, parents and governors all articulate this distinctiveness as it relates to their role within the school community. The effectiveness of this church school is clearly seen in learning, relationships, worship and attitudes.

#### **Established strengths**

- The strong and focused Christian leadership of the headteacher
- Cohesive team of staff and governors
- Independent, responsible, articulate and reflective pupils who have a noticeable depth of spirituality
- Excellent relationships with the wider community and the understanding of other people that these bring to the children

#### **Focus for development**

- Establish a clear role for the Ethos Committee in maintaining and reviewing the school's distinctive identity
- Introduce meaningful systems for monitoring the spiritual development of pupils during their time at the school
- Work with the whole school community to develop a school Eucharist service

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

At Branscombe VC Primary School, Christian values are thoroughly embedded in all policy and practice. This is achieved through school-wide knowledge, understanding and application of the Christian vision and the Branscombe Waves, a version of the vision written by pupils in child-friendly language. The Waves are known by pupils of all ages and are referred to naturally when speaking about their learning, relationships and attitudes towards others. They are a significant driving force in the school which results in all pupils automatically putting the needs of others before their own. This was seen on the day of the inspection in the way in which pupils gave away both Rolo chocolates which were given to them as a part of a study of the Christian value of generosity in collective worship. Pupils were encouraged to give away one Rolo but explained that they could give away both because they knew that others would do the same and they would definitely be given a chocolate. The same approach is evident in pupils' attitudes to the wider community. When asked why pupils had elected to spend part of the Community Fund, which they control, on sponsoring a child in Ghana, they made explicit links with the Christian value of compassion, saying, 'Why wouldn't we? Her parents died so someone had to care for her'. Pupils have also used this money to buy flowers and gifts for members of the school and village communities who have been ill or bereaved. The influence of the school's Christian character is seen across the curriculum, for example in the use of the church building in the study of 'materials' in Science and the focus on stained glass windows in both art and religious education (RE). Pupils regard this as quite normal in school and view 'our church' as a learning resource as well as a place of worship. The Christian values and attitudes embodied by the Branscombe Waves permeate teaching and learning in all subjects. Pupils are consistently encouraged to reflect on their choices and decisions as well as on their learning in terms of how the school's strong Christian values make an impact. RE teaching in both classes is of a very high standard and pupils' attitude to the subject is positive. Behaviour in the school is excellent and pupils attribute this to the Branscombe Waves, saying, 'they show how children want to behave'. Pupils are proud of their school buildings and grounds and make good use of the opportunities for play, learning and reflection which they afford. Pupils explain that displays of their Christian values in action show visitors that 'they are not just words in our school, they are real'. They are aware of their good fortune in having a spectacular view from the playground and a beautiful walk to school through the fields. When talking about these, pupils show considerable spiritual maturity, saying 'they are a constant reminder of how much we have to thank God for'.

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

Collective worship at Branscombe VC Primary School is rooted in both Christian values and biblical teaching. It is coordinated by the headteacher who has a reflective approach to her leadership of worship. She is continually looking for ways of improving the quality of provision and, as a result, its impact on the whole school community. Her intention is that collective worship will make a difference to the real lives of all those involved and that they will grow in their knowledge and understanding of Bible stories and teaching. This is seen clearly in the pupils who are fully engaged in worship and link its messages to their own lives. Leadership of acts of worship is shared on a weekly basis between the teaching staff, headteacher, pupils and vicar and representatives of other faiths lead worship when appropriate. Pupils in Key Stage 2, who lead worship every Friday, describe how they have increased in confidence and in their understanding of what worship means. The impact of worship is also evident in pupils' attitudes to each other, to the wider community and in their ability to relate Christian values and explicit Bible teaching to everyday situations and decisions. Pupils reflect on acts of worship by writing comments in the Reflection Book and by talking to their teachers. The decision to focus specifically on Bible stories as well as Christian values in acts of worship was taken as a result of feedback from pupils. A recent innovation to hold school worship in the parish church once a month has had a significant impact on the whole school community. It has increased pupils' familiarity and ease with the church as well as

allowing families and church members to join the school for worship, which they are unable to do in the small school buildings. Members of the wider community also join the school when worship takes place on the school field or on the beach thereby bringing together the whole community in worship and spiritual reflection. The headteacher and vicar agree that the introduction of a school Eucharist will be a meaningful next step in the worship life of the school and are beginning to consult the wider school community.

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

The headteacher of Branscombe Primary is an inspirational leader who has a strong and clear vision for the school as a church school. Her understanding of the school's responsibility to be both distinctive and effective is excellent and she shares this with colleagues in a way which enables all to be fully involved. Governors share her vision and ensure that the strategic decisions they make on behalf of the whole school community are firmly rooted in Christian principles. This has been exemplified in the recent work undertaken for Branscombe's federation with another small voluntary controlled school. The full governing body's determination to preserve the school's Christian character led to careful consideration before any decisions were made. The governors are now in the process of setting up an Ethos Committee, comprising a range of stakeholders, to ensure that the school's full identity is maintained and its impact monitored. Governors have acted upon all previous inspection areas for development. They regularly review the vision and values and monitor the impact that these have on the life of the school. However, there are currently no systems in place to monitor and track pupils' spiritual development over the time they are at the school. Ways in which the school, parish church and village community work together to the benefit of all are striking. The communities are described as being 'woven together rather than merely linked' and the impact of this on pupils is excellent. The communities view their relationship as a means of sharing experience and expertise with the others in order to facilitate learning, progress and growth. As is seen in so many aspects of the life of the school, all parties put the needs of others before their own. The vicar is viewed as a member of the school team. She helps out in class, challenges school leaders where appropriate, leads worship and carries out a chaplaincy role with the wider school community. Her work with the headteacher is central to the school's effectiveness as an outstanding church school. Parents are fully aware and appreciative of the school's Christian character and the impact this has on them and on their children. They trust the school staff and leaders to consult them and to make the right decisions and they take part in the life of the school whenever possible.