



*National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report*

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

Branscombe  
Seaton  
Devon  
EX12 3DA

**Diocese:** Exeter

Local authority: Devon

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

Date of last inspection: 19<sup>th</sup> October 2005

School's unique reference number: 113348

Acting Headteacher: Mr Neil Swait

Inspector's name and number: Mr Paul Woodhouse 603

**School context**

Branscombe is a small rural primary school set in a coastal area of outstanding natural beauty. The 32 children are of white British heritage. Many of them come from outside the village itself. The proportion of children with learning difficulties or disabilities is below the national average. The headteacher is currently on maternity leave. The acting headteacher took up his post in June.

**The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Branscombe Primary School as a Church of England school are satisfactory.**

Branscombe provides a happy, lively and secure learning environment in which children are valued as individuals. They are encouraged to develop respect for each other and for the environment. Although Christian values underpin much of school life, they are not fully articulated and celebrated.

***Established strengths***

- The school has good links with the local church.
- The school promotes positive attitudes to learning and behaviour.
- The school provides an exciting curriculum for the children, with particular emphasis on personal development, creativity and ecological awareness.

***Focus for development***

- Review and define more clearly the school's Christian distinctiveness.
- Establish a system to monitor and evaluate the quality and impact of Collective Worship.
- Governors to establish an effective means of monitoring, evaluating and reporting on the effectiveness of the school as a Church of England school.

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

Christian values support the school ethos and are implicit in all aspects of its work, but the school has recognised that it needs to develop a greater awareness of its Christian character. The children love their school and speak proudly of it. They achieve well and develop positive attitudes which lead to caring relationships. There is a strong family spirit which enables children of all ages to work and play happily together and to support those facing difficulties compassionately. They are confident that the adults will support them when they need help. The school plans to review its RE curriculum in the light of new Local Authority guidance and to seek advice on how to ensure that the needs of all children are met. Children are aware of the main features of the Christian faith and of some other religions. They know that Easter is important to Christians and that the cross is particularly significant. The older children are encouraged to reflect on what the parable of the Prodigal Son might mean to them. They enjoy the opportunities they have to give a personal artistic response to aspects of their RE. There are no children of other faiths presently attending the school. It is aware that it needs to broaden the children's direct experience and understanding of other faiths, denominations and cultures. The children are aware that their school is linked with St Winifred's church and that their badge includes references to the church, the Bible and to their school code of behaviour. They worship in the parish church each month and their knowledge about the main features of the building is demonstrated in an attractive display. There is visual evidence of the school's Christian character in several areas of the school, such as the cross in the entrance foyer and the displays of children's work. A beautiful collection of natural objects found by the younger children, is enlivened by their prayers of thanks to God. However there are few other opportunities for personal reflection offered to children around the school. An effective programme of induction into the school is helped by useful links with the on-site pre-school and the contributions of a Foundation Governor. The school is justly proud of its external environment, making very effective use of a restricted site. The school's Eco club, attended by all the children, is underpinned by implicitly Christian attitudes and values, especially those relating to stewardship. However, the school has yet to offer a clear Christian, spiritual motivation for caring for nature.

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

Worship is an established, regular and important part of school life. All teachers play a regular part in leading services. The vicar leads worship once each week and works with the headteacher in planning the programme. A classroom is used for daily worship in school, while once each month the school worships in church. The children's awareness of the particular importance of the major Christian festivals is increased when they take part in special services, which their parents support in good numbers. At its best, worship is highly effective, such as the worship led by the vicar during the inspection. The children gathered in a respectful way and were welcomed warmly. A lighted candle, calming music and a colourful display of children's paintings of "The Lord is my Shepherd" set an appropriate mood for worship. The children were captivated by the vicar's talk, which was effectively illustrated by his photographs of Celtic rope patterns and St Ninian's cross. Their responses to his questions about the theme, God's support for us all in our life's journey, demonstrated their enjoyment and understanding. They have a very good relationship with the vicar, based on mutual respect and love. Times of stillness and opportunities for reflection are provided and used by the children respectfully. Child participation in the writing and reading of prayers is limited to special services. Recent questionnaires have started to collect the children's thoughts about how worship is organised and how it could be improved. However the Christian distinctiveness of the school as a worshipping community would benefit from a more consistent approach to planning and from the development of a means to evaluate the quality of worship and its impact on the children. The children have positive attitudes towards

worship and several parents say that their children now say prayers at home since joining the school.

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

The Governing Body appreciates that it needs to review the school's definition of its mission, ethos and Christian distinctiveness and to involve the school community in the process. It values the support of the Diocese of Exeter and hopes to work with its advisers on this matter. It has identified that it needs to make its distinctiveness more explicit in visual form, in its documentation and in its teaching in lessons. The acting headteacher is quickly becoming respected for his concern for each individual child and for his insistence on high standards of behaviour and personal achievement. He ensures that there are good systems of communications and information for parents. Many of the governors are new to their roles. However they are all keen to take up opportunities for training. They are enthusiastic and committed to supporting and challenging the school to develop as a church school. Several initiatives have been introduced recently. The Governors have started a programme of walks through the school, lesson observations and discussions with groups of children. These promise to be useful elements of a new system which will help them monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the school. The Foundation Governors provide a useful link with the parish church and provide strong pastoral support for the school. Parents are supportive of the school, appreciating its family atmosphere. They are not currently invited to give their views about the school's Christian character, however the school plans to do so in the near future. The vicar provides a highly effective link between the church and school, through leading worship in school and in church, providing pastoral support to children and staff and through his work on the Governing Body. Good mutual support exists, as prayers are said for the school in church and the school advertises church services and events through its newsletters. Children's work is displayed prominently in church. A particularly striking example is the weaving done by the children as part of one of their church services. The school is valued within the village as an important part of its heritage and the Church community is especially keen to see it thrive.