

St Berteline's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Norton Lane
Windmill Hill
Runcorn
WA7 6QN

Diocese: Chester

Local authority: Halton
Date of inspection: 18 October 2012
Dates of last inspection: 6 – 8 March 2007
School's unique reference number: 111383
Headteacher: Mrs Julie Barron
Inspector's name and number: Ian Newton 273

School context

St Berteline's is a modern semi-open plan school situated on the outskirts of Runcorn. It has just celebrated its 30th anniversary. There are 293 pupils on roll and a pre-school setting, under separate management, operates from one of the classrooms. The school has about 12% of pupils who are entitled to free school meals and a similar percentage has special educational needs and disabilities. The population is predominantly white British.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Berteline's Voluntary Aided School as a Church of England school are outstanding

St Berteline's is a school where Christian values underpin every aspect of its life. These are manifested through outstanding relationships and well rounded children who have a strong moral and ethical code based on very strong religious teaching. The school benefits from outstanding leadership and strong parental support. The positive links with the local church enhance the work of the school and consequently the lives of the children.

Established strengths

- The understanding that all members of the school community have of the importance of Christian values in their lives and the wider life of the school.
- Excellent relationships based on respect, trust and care for one another at all levels of school life.
- The importance that the head teacher, governors and staff give to the spiritual development of all members of the school community.
- The imaginative approaches to teaching religious education which meet the needs of all learners.

Focus for development

- Develop a formal system for informing governors of developments in religious education.

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

Relationships at all levels of school life are outstanding. Children, as well as adults, treat each other with care, courtesy and respect. Everyone has a clear understanding, within their own stage of development, about the importance of Christian values and how these impact on individuals and the wider community. The school is held in extremely high regard by parents, with very strong support regarding what the school stands for. One parent said she felt that the school was committed to excellence in spiritual, moral and religious education which resulted in an outstanding environment for children's education and upbringing. It is a popular, oversubscribed school. Some parents chose it because they were practising members of either the Anglican Church or another mainstream Christian denomination,

others because it was the nearest school and the “family feel” it has to it. Another parent summed it up by saying, “Everything I want for my child is happening.” When asked what they liked about the school one child said that they could go to a teacher and they would listen to problems. Another said that if she had a worry she could write a note to the head teacher and she knew she would get support and a response. Someone else spoke of the skill of the teachers and how they inspire people. They would give up their free time to teach a child to a particular skill, in music, for example. This care, understanding and support was not restricted to children, but extended to helping parents who experienced difficulties. The school environment supports the school’s Christian distinctiveness exceptionally well. There are Christian signs and symbols around the school and Biblical quotations (particularly from the Book of Proverbs) which reflect the current emphasis that is being placed on values and morals. For all children prayer cards were available in classes for them to complete so prayers could be offered for those dear to them. Children are keen supporters of fund raising and other activities to support charities, such as raising money for a link school in Uganda where funds have paid for crops, an out-house and transport, collecting shoes for children in Romania, fundraising for the local hospice and singing carols at Christmas at the local hospital.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is central to the life of the school and children and staff participate with great enthusiasm. All teaching staff are involved in leading collective worship, with a range of people being involved each week. Children enjoy the opportunity to sing and pray together as well as coming together as the family of “St Bert’s.” Children felt it reinforced their belief and curiosity in God and gave opportunities to learn about the example Jesus has given us. Prayer is important in the life of the school and children welcomed the opportunities provided for personal reflection as well as engaging in collective prayers. For example, one child said, “When you struggle you can pray and it helps you feel better.” The act of collective worship that was observed was uplifting and engaging. Children were reminded of some Christian values and this was followed by the telling and practical demonstration of the parable of the house built on the rock and the one built on sand. The head teacher, who is also the collective worship co-ordinator, led the act of worship and drew from the children the links between the parable and the Christian values that we build our lives upon. The music and singing were excellent and children were familiar with prayers and responses. Planning is thorough with themes linked to work being done in religious education. Regular evaluations are undertaken which constructively informs future planning. Children are familiar with a range of Anglican traditions and practice. They know the Lord’s Prayer, some well known prayers and responses and the grace. The incumbent is a very regular leader of collective worship both in the school setting and in the school services held in the church each term and on major festivals and celebrations.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

The curriculum for Religious Education (RE) is very well planned. The school aims to make it a colourful subject, one that children enjoy and look forward to. It is taught discretely but linked to collective worship themes so that concepts can be consolidated. The scheme of work, based on the Chester Diocesan Guidelines, has recently been revised, with all teaching staff being involved in planning to ensure progression from Reception to Year 6. Children are taught a wide range of topics which are focussed on Christian teachings, festivals and sacraments. This term the strong emphasis on Christian values and moral teaching has reinforced what the school stands for. Approaches to teaching are varied to suit the differing learning styles of pupils. The lesson that was observed was outstanding and had a good pace to it. The children had had one lesson previously about the Old Testament prophet Jonah. They very competently performed a dance from the musical “Jonah Man Jazz,” which engaged them all. The teacher was confident and had very good subject knowledge. She very ably put forward some quite difficult concepts into language that the children could understand. In group work all pupils focussed well on the tasks which were well suited to their abilities. Some children needed to use Bibles for the group activity, some of which were in a dilapidated state and needed replacement. In discussion, children commented that RE was taught in a fun way. They could see how morals and Christian values learned from the story impacted on the way they live and behave. In addition to learning mainly about Christianity, children learn something about other major faiths including elements of Judaism, Islam and

Buddhism. This, together with the link they have with the school in Uganda and work connected with charities gives them insights into how people in other parts of the world face successes and challenges in their lives. Assessment is good with the school having developed a system of assessment portfolios of moderated work in RE. The school has fully met the issue from the last inspection relating to monitoring and evaluation of RE and linking it to school improvement. Monitoring is undertaken through scrutiny of children's work and teachers' planning, together with lesson observations and learning walks. A system of linking a governor with a curriculum area has also been introduced and the incumbent is undertaking this role. However, as yet, the governing body collectively is not well informed about developments in this area of school life.

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

There is a clear Christian vision led by the head teacher which all staff and governors are keen to implement to the point that it permeates all aspects of school life. The recently revised mission statement was devised following involvement of all staff and governors. When staff are applying for posts and when parents are considering St Bert's for their child's education, clear expectations regarding the school's Christian foundation are made explicit. As a consequence, parents and children have a very good understanding of the Christian values that drive the school forward. Governors know the school's many strengths well. They, and the senior management team, are constantly striving for further improvement and are fully involved in the school's self evaluation processes. Both staff and governors value the good quality of training provided by the Diocesan Board of Education. The very good partnership with the local church benefits both organisations. The incumbent is regularly in school leading collective worship, teaching aspects of the RE curriculum, in his role as a governor and leading the "café church," (a form of worship for the whole community held in the school after hours). The school is seen as key to the church's mission with a majority of the congregation having a current or past connection with the school. Staff are encouraged to take on responsibility and lead on issues and areas of school life as appropriate. The school is used as an exemplar by the diocese and local authority with courses and staff and governors from other schools being invited to experience what St Bert's offers. Parents are extremely supportive. There is also an active friends of the school association which organises social and fund raising events to benefit the school.

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