

End of Placement Report for the Greig Trust
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This year I have spent a considerable amount of time involved with two local primary schools: St. Aidan's C. of E. V.C., and Rokesly Junior School which, though not a Church school, has had a growing relationship with Holy Innocents' Church over the past few years due to geographical proximity and the initiative of the clergy in supporting the provision of religious education and opportunities for community service. To each school I have given one afternoon each week as a Reading Volunteer, working with a number of individuals in Year 2 (St. Aidan's) and Year 5 (Rokesly) to build confidence, competency and comprehension when reading aloud. I have given some assemblies on Christian themes to KS1 at St. Aidan's School, and at Rokesly School I have visited Year 4 RE lessons, led sessions for Year 3 in the Church, and spoken to Year 6 about the Winter Night Shelter and action on homelessness from a Christian perspective. As the Winter Night Shelter Coordinator I have involved Year 5 and Year 4 from both schools in afternoon sessions where the pupils set up the beds and tables and were able to discuss and ask questions about service to the homeless. It has also been a privilege to have worked with parents and staff from both schools who have volunteered at the Winter Night Shelter.

This work has benefitted me in two different ways. First, I have had innumerable opportunities to engage in children's ministry in a variety of forms. This has involved building safe and supportive one-one working relationships with children needing help with literacy; often these are children who do not speak English at home and whose confidence in speaking was at first quite low. Being able to discuss stories and work on word-recognition and phonics with the children has been an insightful way for me to build my own confidence in encouraging them in an instructive but fun way. I have been able to hone a balanced approach to giving a child flexible time to discuss, question and explore themes in their books; allowing the chance to happily make mistakes whilst being productively corrected; and crucially, giving individual encouragement for even the smallest steps of progress. I have found this deeply rewarding, and I think it will stand me in good stead for

small group work with children in the future. Even when some children's behavior or temporary reluctance to read has made me anxious about this work, I have always finished an afternoon having enjoyed the time with them. I have also learnt about ministering to larger groups of children, particularly in terms of speaking about the Christian faith at an age-appropriate level, finding questions and topics which are engaging enough but not too complex and using stories and drama to talk about God accessibly. I have been both delighted and challenged by children's responses to faith and religious practice and to the issue of local homelessness. This will be useful for any kind of church work that engages with children, and it has helped me to find the key parts of a theme which need to be clearly and concisely communicated.

Secondly, I have seen the enormous value of, and the challenges involved in, links between churches and their local schools. I have seen close-up the role that local clergy play, not only in the governance and spiritual provision of a C. of E. school, but also in the friendly community relations which hugely benefit both the church and a local non-church school. St. Aidan's School and Rokesly Junior School differ in their size, structure, ethos and provision of religious and spiritual education and guidance. But I have learnt much of the essential presence of a local church in strengthening community links, such as with the Winter Night Shelter where voluntary involvement from a school community is of obvious benefit to those in need. This Christian presence in school also brings a greater sense of unity to a local area, as well as commending the faith and the work of the Church to those who may have no other contact with Christianity. Opening the doors of the church to those who might one day enter requires initiative and risk, particularly in a diverse urban setting where the first steps are rarely taken by those outside of the church's walls. I have enjoyed and felt honoured to be the representative of the Church for pupils, parents and staff alike. Being recognized by pupils outside of the school environment has strengthened my own self-confidence as well as my conviction of the necessity of strong, friendly relationships between churches and schools; whether in a governing and critical or pastoral and teaching role in a Church school, or as a supportive and spiritual presence in a secular school.

My work at St. Aidan's and Rokesly Schools has been one of the most enjoyable parts of this year. I have found it eye-opening on a personal and a practical level, confidence-building and very joyful. It has encouraged me in my thoughts about the future, making school or university chaplaincy work a possibility, and has helped me to feel welcomed and settled amongst the local community. I have felt particularly well encouraged by the staff and parents of St. Aidan's School. It has been a wonderful thing to see individual children whom I have worked with develop and flourish personally and academically, some of them reaching milestones in their reading and some finding confidence and enjoyment in a former chore. I will remember them fondly.