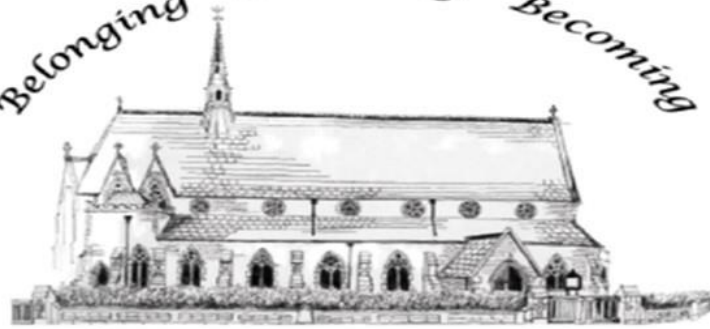




St. Nicholas Church, Blundellsands

Belonging Believing Becoming



All are welcome, everyone belongs!



St Nicholas CE Primary School
Blundellsands

Annual Report of the Parochial Church Council
and of the Governors
for the year ended
31st December 2023

Reference and Administrative Information:

The Parochial Church Council of the Ecclesiastical Parish of St Nicholas Blundellsands is a registered charity, Registration Number 1158819.

St Nicholas' Church is situated in Bridge Road, Blundellsands, Liverpool and is part of the Diocese of Liverpool within the Church of England. The official correspondence address is:

St Nicholas' Vicarage,
Nicholas Road,
Liverpool,
L23 6TS.

Safeguarding Statement:

St Nicholas' Church Blundellsands takes its duty and obligation to protect all extremely seriously. We have adopted the Church of England's robust procedures and national guidelines.

These can be found at: <http://churchofengland.org/safeguarding>

If you have any safeguarding concerns or issues on a safeguarding matter, useful information can be obtained at: <http://www.liverpool.anglican.org/safeguarding>

PCC Membership:

For the period 1st January 2023 until the date of the approval of this report, the following people served as members of the Parochial Church Council:

Ex-officio members:

Chair	Revd E Anderson
Lay Chair	Prof P Batey
Assistant Priest (until May 2023)	Revd K Thornborough
Churchwarden	Mrs L Utley
Churchwarden (from April 2023)	Miss A Dobie
Deanery Synod Representative	Prof P Batey
Deanery Synod Representative	Mr S Green
Deanery Synod Representative	Mr D Phillips

Co-opted members:

Hon Treasurer	Mrs E Sinker
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Elected Members:

Mrs G Enstone (PCC Secretary)

Miss A Dobie (until April 2023)

Mrs G Cain

Mrs M Bird (until April 2023)

Mr P Warren

Ms A Blundell (from April 2023)

Mrs R Doyle

Mr D Parkinson

Mrs H Pennington

Mrs J Batey (from April 2023)

The Revd E Anderson was appointed Incumbent by the Bishop of Liverpool (Patron of St Nicholas' and Diocesan Bishop) and is an ex-officio member of the PCC.

The Liverpool Diocesan Board of Finance acted as Custodian Trustee for the inalienable property of the church.

Bankers - Church:
Santander UK plc
Bootle
Merseyside
GIR OAA

Bankers - Governors:
Barclays Bank plc
337-339 Stanley Road
New Strand
Bootle
Merseyside
L20 3EB

Independent Examiner:

L Marr
9 Fewston Close
Bolton BL1 7BJ

Structure, Management and Governance:

St Nicholas' Blundellsands PCC is a body corporate and operates under the Parochial Church Powers 1956 and the Church Representation Rules.

The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules. All church members are encouraged to register on the Electoral Roll and stand for election to the PCC.

Related Trusts:

St Nicholas' CE Primary School Blundellsands: Foundation Governors are Mr J Howell (Chair until August 2023), Mrs G Cain (Vice chair), Revd E Anderson, Mrs G Enstone, Mrs N Wilson, Mr P Bonnett (Chair from September 2023). Mrs L Godfrey (from November 2023)

The PCC and its sub-committees:

During 2023 the PCC met 6 times, with an average attendance of 12.

The PCC operates 10 sub-committees (teams), which meet regularly and report back to the PCC: Standing Committee, which acts for the PCC when urgent matters arise and need decision or action between PCC meetings, (subject to subsequent ratification by the PCC), and also prepares for PCC meetings; Worship and Mission; Finance; Under-18 Ministry with Safeguarding; Building and Plant with Health and Safety; Social; Heritage; Restoration, Eco and Communications. The Revd Beth Anderson is an ex-officio member of all committees. Other membership comprises:

Standing Committee: Incumbent, PCC Lay Chair, 2 Churchwardens, Treasurer and PCC Secretary.

Worship and Mission: Mrs G Cain, Mrs G Enstone, Mr D Parkinson, Mrs J Batey. Co-opted members: Mrs J Parkinson, Mrs M Bird

Finance: Mrs E Sinker, Prof P Batey, Miss A Dobie, Mrs R Doyle, Co-opted member: Mr J Rankin

Under-18 Ministry with Safeguarding: Mrs L Utley, Mrs E Sinker (Parish Safeguarding Officer), Mr P Warren,(DBS Verifier). Co-opted members: Mrs L Martin, Mrs J Honess, Mrs C Creed.

Building and Plant with Health and Safety: Mr S Green, Miss A Dobie, Mrs R Doyle. Co-opted members: Mr P Levick, Mr C Rooney

Social: Mr D Parkinson, Mrs H Pennington, Mr D Phillips, Co-opted member: Mrs L Jones

Heritage: Prof P Batey, Mrs G Cain, Mr S Green, Mrs L Utley, Mrs G Enstone, Mrs J Batey, Mrs L Godfrey. Co-opted member: Mrs M Bird

Restoration: Mr S Green, Prof P Batey, Mrs G Enstone, Mr D Parkinson. Co-opted member: Mr T Johnston,

Eco: Mr P Warren, Miss A Dobie, Mr S Green

Communications: Mrs J Batey, Mrs G Cain, Mrs G Enstone.

PCC members, both individually and collectively, receive training as and when deemed appropriate by the PCC. This has included: trustee responsibility, safeguarding, domestic abuse awareness, first aid, Parish Giving Scheme. Members who are also Foundation Governors of St Nicholas' School regularly complete local authority governor training courses.

Risk Assessments and Policies:

The PCC has undertaken a programme of risk assessments to identify major risks.

Procedures have been put in place to manage those risks and minimise their impact on the life of the church. Areas of risk covered have included: finance, first aid provision, PAT testing, food hygiene, safeguarding and disclosure and barring. The Church's Health and Safety Policy is reviewed and updated by PCC annually, with Health and

Safety checks carried out monthly. PCC also reviews the Safeguarding and Volunteer Policies yearly.

For fuller information regarding the financial risk assessment policy and trustee and patron payment, please see:

St Nicholas' Church Blundellsands and St Nicholas' School Blundellsands: Annual Report and Financial Statements of the Parochial Church Council and of the Governors for the year ended 31st December 2023, published separately and available on St Nicholas' Church website <http://www.stnicholasblundellsands.org> Currently one patron, the office assistant, and one trustee, the hall bookings secretary, receive payment for their work for the church.

A safeguarding update is available below as part of the report of the Under 18 Ministry with Safeguarding team.

Electoral Roll Report April 2024:

The number of people on the Electoral Roll in 2023 was 185.

At the start of our 2024 recruitment, we had lost 10 through non-attendance, relocation, moving to other churches and having died, sadly, taking us to 175.(3 deceased, 1 moved out of the area, 4 non-attenders, 2 moved to other churches)

However, we have 14 additional people as of April 2024 and the number on the Electoral Roll now totals 189. These additional people join Sunday morning services, Picnic Praise and Church@School.

In the current climate this is a very positive outcome and demonstrates that church life is growing as we continue to welcome people new to St. Nicholas'.

So, if you do notice a new face in church, don't be shy about introducing yourself and making them feel welcome each time they come into church. It makes all the difference.

Objectives and Activities 2023:

The general functions of the PCC are stated within Section 2 of the Parochial Church Councils (Powers) measure 1956. St Nicholas' PCC has the responsibility of jointly operating with the Incumbent in the ecclesiastical parish, the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical. It also has maintenance responsibilities for the church, a Grade 2 listed building, and for St Nicholas' School.

When planning our activities for the year, the PCC has given consideration to the **Charity Commission Guidance on Public Benefit, in particular the specific guidance related to the advancement of religion.**

- **Regular public worship, open to all:**

In planning our public worship, our aim is to develop the diversity of what we offer so that we can extend a warm welcome to the widest possible range of worshippers from within both our regular congregation and the wider community. We continue to hold two weekly Sunday morning services, at 8.30am (using the BCP once a month) and at 10.30 am (live streamed where possible). Both include Communion, apart from the monthly All Age 10.30 am service, aimed to appeal to a wide age range of children and young people. Regular Wednesday morning Communion also continues to take place, but in a more informal, cafe-style setting, in either one of the smaller church halls or the community space at the back of church. This allows greater emphasis on Bible study and discussion and can perhaps appeal to those less familiar with a traditional church setting. In addition, Picnic Praise, twice a month on Sunday afternoons, caters for families with nursery and primary age children and includes games, crafts, music and Bible stories, while Church@School extends our school / church and family links in a different setting.

In addition to the celebration of the major yearly Christian festivals, special services are held which reach out directly to those suffering from illness, bereavement or other forms of distress.

Inclusivity has also been an important consideration when planning worship and is under constant review. Care has been taken to make our premises and services as accessible as possible for the elderly, disabled and those with dementia or learning difficulties, while babies and very young children are made welcome at all services with a dedicated children's corner and breast-feeding space. Equality of access for all is represented through the incorporation of the Pride Progress flag into our logo.

- **The provision of sacred space for personal prayer and contemplation:**

Meetings and courses provide structured opportunities for prayer outside normal services and visitors to the church are encouraged to take advantage of the opportunity for private prayer and contemplation whenever the church building is open for any purpose.

Since the end of pandemic restrictions we have worked to increase the number of such occasions, holding events such as welcome days, heritage open days and a prayer festival. A prayer tree is placed centrally for those who wish to request support for themselves or a loved one and this is widely used, by both regular church members and visitors.

- **Pastoral work, including visiting the sick, the elderly and the bereaved:**

Clergy and members of the congregation regularly visit those who are sick, bereaved or housebound. Considerable efforts are also made through live streaming of services and distribution of the weekly church newsletter, electronically or by hand, to ensure that all who are unable to attend church in person are able to feel part of the church family.

- **Teaching of Christianity through sermons, courses and small groups:**
Regular weekly Bible study and prayer meetings take place and attendance at a variety of courses is also encouraged.
- **Taking of religious assemblies in local schools:**
Our Vicar has developed a close relationship with our church school, regularly taking both whole school and class assemblies. School church links are supported through the work of a team of seven Foundation Governors drawn from the congregation and through joint eco ventures.
- **Provision of a youth club with a Christian ethos:**
The Bridge youth group has been successfully re-established for children from Year Six and above, supporting their transition from primary school to a variety of local secondary schools, exploring faith and offering confirmation.
- **Promoting the whole mission of the church through provision of activities for senior citizens, parents and toddlers and other special need groups:**
Earlybirds, providing tea and toast for parents and younger toddlers after the morning school run, and Picnic Praise, mentioned above, provide regular opportunities to support parents and young children. Also weekly, Soupa Thursday is open for morning coffee or a soup lunch for members of our community in need of companionship, a meal or a 'warm space'. Activities such as board games, crafts and a book swap are also available and the numbers attending have grown steadily over the eighteen month period since its establishment. Although this event is largely staffed by volunteers from the church, Sefton CVS is also on hand to provide links with local support services for those with specific special needs.
- **Supporting other charities, at home and overseas:**
We have continued to support our church mission partner, Stephen Hatch, teaching in Tanzania for CMS and, since his retirement, are awaiting the appointment of a new partner. We also support the Children's Society, Christian Aid, the local food bank, the Red Cross and the Salvation Army. The Finance Team reviews our giving annually.
- **Promoting links with our ecumenical partners in Churches Together:**
Recent years have seen many changes for the churches of both the L23 Partnership and Churches Together in Crosby and Blundellsands, making partnership working within and across both groupings all the more vital, an aim which St Nicholas' Church is keen to pursue in all aspects of our mission and ministry. L23 clergy meet every week and are looking to do more together across the churches.

- **Reaching out to our local community in ways which make a positive difference to the lives of our neighbours:**

A common theme across most of the activities outlined above is that of community outreach, providing practical, emotional and spiritual support, food, warmth and companionship to our neighbours in a variety of ways. We also see the role of the church as providing an important hub to promote community cohesion and a sense of local identity. Many Heritage activities provide opportunities for discussion and reminiscence, often focusing on the two chapels of remembrance, evoking memories of family members and a shared past. Our Social Team also welcomes members of the community to a wide range of events such as quizzes, litter picks and treasure hunts.

Achievements and Performance 2023. Reports from the Teams:

Worship and Mission 2023 by Glenda Cain:

Several meetings were held throughout 2023, focusing on our main priorities – forward planning of special services and events and communicating these to our wider community.

During the year, the parish boundaries were extended by an additional twenty five streets and a welcome leaflet was delivered to every house/flat. We are grateful to all the helpers who carried out this mammoth task.

In January, all services moved back into Church as the new boiler was finally up and running.

The **8.30am service** moved back into St Barnabas' Chapel and the Wednesday service moved to the back of church, becoming more like a café service and often welcoming worshippers new to St Nicholas'

The **10.30am** service is continuing to be live streamed.

Picnic Praise has continued successfully throughout the year on the first and third Sunday of the month.

St Nicholas' has continued to place a high priority on mission giving. Harvest Festival donations went to the local foodbank and donations have also been sent to CMS, Christian Aid and the Salvation Army.

'**Soupa Thursday**', an important mission priority, has continued throughout the year, offering a 'warm space' to the community every week between 9am and 2pm. It provides unlimited supplies of tea and toast, coffee and cake, soup and cheese and ham toasties and in December we provided a full Christmas Lunch for our growing number of regulars.

We continue to welcome the school to several of our services, particularly on Education Sunday, and this year, the school choir joined in the celebrations for the Carol Service.

Discussions are taking place to celebrate the church's 150th anniversary in 2024.

Under 18 Ministry And Safeguarding by Lesley Utley:

In 2023/24 the position for the Under 18 Ministry with Safeguarding Team is one of continuing development for the children, young people and vulnerable adults of St Nicholas' Church.

The team has met three times and business has included scrutiny of the remit of the Team and the practical application of the recommendations.

From a safeguarding perspective, no incidents relating to children and young people have been reported to Liz Sinker, our Parish Safeguarding Officer. As a PCC we are most grateful to her for carrying out this important role on our behalf.

Mandatory training in safeguarding has taken place online and in person at St. Luke's Church Crosby with all PCC members now having certificates at Basic and Foundation levels, with additional training in Domestic Abuse.

Checks on leaders and volunteers through the Disclosure and Barring Service have been updated as required by Pete Warren, our verifier. All members of PCC have DBS clearance and thanks are due again to Pete for his diligence.

Pete has accessed further training in Safer Recruitment through Liverpool Diocese. He found it very useful and informative. Subsequently a working party has met to address the way forward beginning with comprehensive Role Descriptions.

Groups for our young people have developed throughout the year as follows –

□ Church@School – Since Keith moved to his new parish in May last year the team has planned services for the year with advice from Beth. We continue to be welcomed and supported by St Nicholas' School.

Three parents have joined the team, including a pianist, and we welcome pre-school and school age children and their families to services.

□ Picnic Praise – Services have taken place twice each month and the menu of games, crafts, singing, Bible stories and prayer proves very popular with families. Beth plans and leads the sessions with assistance from two parents.

In September, we marked the group's 1st Anniversary with a party. There was a great turnout –19 adults and 22 children! Another special and joyous occasion was the baptism of siblings Sophie and Isaac, accompanied by godparents, the wider family and friends and welcomed by the Picnic Praise families.

□ The Bridge - Sadly the former leader of this group has moved on to further his studies, and Beth now organises the sessions assisted by Pat from All Saints with St Frideswyde Church.

The original group of young people from Y6 at St Nicholas' moved into Y7 at a range of local high schools and continued to meet in the Autumn term. They were joined in January by current Y6 students and have fun with activities, games and discussion.

In February, the students were invited to a very successful Eco event in Formby organised by a party of young people from a church in Mullingar, Ireland.

□ The Children's Corner is available at every service and event, offering books, puzzles, simple crafts etc. Families make use of it during services and it is always lovely to hear a little buzz of activity.

Building and Plant with Health and Safety & Restoration by Stephen Green:

The hall heating system, the roof alarm and fire extinguishers were serviced.

The replacement church heating system has been installed and is operating efficiently with two A rated boilers working in tandem with each other.

As part of the contract with the installers, Catalyst, we are due for a free service this Spring.

We should be able to assess the cost savings with the new boilers compared to the old, inefficient 1970's boiler now that it is one year since they were installed.

It is important that we endeavour to aim for as many cost savings as possible, especially with our energy use, to attempt to achieve the Church of England's zero carbon target by 2030.

The organ has been serviced twice this year, which had previously been impractical due to the church temperature issue.

Amongst a number of recognised storms this winter, as a result of Storm Elin on 9th December, considerable damage was impacted on the church roofs, with the South facing upper roof sustaining the worst of the damage. Damage was also caused to the stained glass window directly above the organ. Following a total roof survey, an insurance claim was made.

A loss adjuster was appointed to supervise the claim, which required the use of a MEWP (Mobile Elevated Work Platform). All the repairs were carried out in February with the total costings approved by our insurer for the sum of £6437. Our excess of £250 is to be taken from that sum.

We again entered the Naylor Trust Maintenance Awards competition and similarly to last year, we were shortlisted. Although we didn't become finalists this time, it is a credit to the working party's diligence and efforts that we were recognised for our contribution to the care and maintenance of our church buildings.

The damp issue on the North aisle has not yet been resolved. There is no point in applying breathable paint to the area until we can identify the reason for the damp and address the issue.

The H & S policy has been updated, approved by the PCC and duly signed by our vicar, Beth.

Our five year, quinquennial inspection is due this year and we will be appointing a new church architect as our existing architect, Robin Wolley, has opted not to be considered as he is approaching retirement. He has been a loyal friend and servant of St. Nicholas' church and has been duly thanked for his valued advice and contribution to three stages of restoration, the replacement lighting scheme and his input with several storm damage insurance claims.

The introduction of the new architect and the results of the quinquennial inspection will hopefully guide us as we apply for the fourth phase of restoration which is to address the repairs to the East side of the church.

The gardens are lovingly cared for by Ian and Pat who were formally recognised for their contribution by Sefton in Bloom.

We are still on the Heritage at Risk register.

Heritage by Peter Batey:

Peter Cousins' talk:

There was agreement that this had been a successful event. Attendance was upwards of 30 people from a variety of groups across the congregation, also from Soupa Thursday and outside church. A number stayed on to chat afterwards or went through for soup, so it felt like a genuine community event.

The talk itself, like last year's, was very good and we have asked Peter and Anne to return next year. A lecture on the Christmas truce has been suggested.

Other arrangements also worked well: the seating and use of the sound system were a big improvement on last year and our publicity seemed to work well.

Heritage Open Days 2023:

The following programme was organised:

Friday 15th - Guided tours and memory sharing tea party

Saturday 16th and Sunday 17th - Guided tours and talks on architectural heritage and social history

It was generally agreed that this year's HODs had gone well. Attendance numbers were good across the three days: Friday (half day) 19; Saturday (full day) 30 adults, 2 children and; Sunday (half day) 19 adults and 2 dogs. The Afternoon Tea on Friday was able to serve a good selection of homemade cakes, which clearly went down very well, and conversation around the tables was relaxed and cheerful, creating a welcoming atmosphere for the many visitors from outside the church.

Saturday and Sunday talks were well attended, the seating and sound arrangements worked well and a number of visitors received guided tours on all three days. Interest in and appreciation of St Nicholas' seemed high and we received a number of donations.

Future Opening:

It is clear we can no longer sustain our original pattern of twice weekly opening in addition to individual heritage events and there was some discussion about how our future programme might take shape:

Group visits by invitation

On demand visits by individuals or small groups

Archive visits Memory sharing teas with displays and exhibitions

An advertised programme of events to take place on a fixed day of each month

An annual programme of events, publicised as such, rather than a series of ad hoc events

Heritage Open Days 6th September 2024 - 15th September:

In 2022 and 2023 we elected to open for only one of the available weekends, but it was agreed that, as next year is our 150th anniversary, we should open for both, with different programmes for each.

150th Anniversary:

The primary decision to make is when to focus our main efforts during the year. Stephen will again contact Peter Cousins to finalise a date for his talk on the Christmas truce of 1914 and it seems like a good idea to organise other items around this, based on some themes which might arise from it.

Education Sunday takes place during the first HOD weekend, so we might be able to base something on this. It was also felt to be important that we try to reflect themes from local life and connections with local institutions. Relevant exhibitions, tours and teas would also play a part in the structure.

Social by Derek Parkinson:

This report covers the activities of the Social Team from 1st January to 31st December 2023. During the year the Team organised four social activities and catered for three others. The following events were organised and the number of adults and children attending shown:

March: Quiz Night with Bingo and Raffle in the church hall. 50 people

April: Litter Picking and afternoon tea with raffle. Litter picking equipment was kindly provided by the local Councillors who also stayed for the Afternoon Tea held in the Hospitality Area in church. 39 people

July: Walking Treasure Hunt and afternoon tea. 23 adults and 23 children attended. The forecasted weather was not optimistic but on the day the sun shone, the winds abated and there was no rain. Ten teams spent about 90 minutes on the trail of the answers to the clues around the local streets. All returned to church safely for afternoon tea of cakes and drinks in the Hospitality Area in church and a raffle was held.

October: A quiz and bingo night was held in the church hall and attended by 50 adults and children. There were many comments thanking the Team for organising and running the event which was greatly enjoyed. A raffle raised funds towards start up costs of future social events.

Events that the Social Team helped with catering:

May: Leaving lunch for Keith Thornborough in the large hall, held after 10.30 service. The menu was Cottage Pie, pickled red cabbage and beetroot followed by apple pie and ice cream. Tea, coffee and cordial. 54 people signed up in advance to attend the lunch but on the day approximately 80 people came for lunch. Extra meals were required and were requested from Sesay's restaurant and St Nicholas are very grateful to them for their help.

September: Heritage Open Weekend Three team members were there on the Friday, Saturday and Sunday afternoons to assist with the Afternoon Tea on the Friday and general teas, coffees and cakes for visitors on the Saturday and Sunday.

December: Our Carol Service was followed by mulled wine, cordial drinks, mince pies and biscuits. As the large hall was booked for an outside event, the refreshments were prepared and served in the Hospitality Area at the back of church.

The Team would like to thank all those who supported the events by their attendance and a particular thanks to those who came early or stayed late to help in the setting up and clearing away for all the events.

I would like to add my own thanks to the members of the Team for all their help in organising and running the events. They are Linda Jones, Helen Pennington, and Dave Phillips. Alison Blundell is joining the Team from January 2024 and we are always pleased to welcome new members so please speak to any of the Team members if you would like to know more about joining us.

Eco by Pete Warren:

The Church was very pleased to be presented with the ECO Silver Award in Spring 2023 for work achieved in the 5 sectors of appraisal: Worship & Teaching; Management of Church buildings; Management of Church land; Community & Global engagement; Lifestyle.

Among the many things that have gone towards achieving this are:- an increase in bio diversity around the gardens including the development of "bug hotels" and wild flower areas and the collection of rain water in a donated water butt. We have also worked with the pupils and staff of St Nicholas School in constructing and distributing a small supply of "bug hotels" for use at the school.

In addition we are seeing a reduction in energy used via the new A rated central heating boiler and the widespread installation of LED lighting. For the first time our energy usage figures for 22/23 have been analysed by Diocesan experts calculating where the church lies compared with others in the Diocese. On a scale of 0 to 100 where 0 is the best in the Diocese and 100 is the worst, before adjustment St Nicholas lies in the 70 - 80% band, but after adjusting for the large space it moves to the 30 - 40% band, and then after adjusting for numbers of people using the Church it moves to the 0 - 10% band.

There is still much to do to further improve energy reductions and we have committed to work towards achieving Net Zero Carbon by 2030. With this aim we are working in liaison with the Faiths4Change team who are supported by the Liverpool Diocese. This

team are able to independently assess where St Nicholas might make improvements, and advise on where funds might be available for any proposed building type changes.

There are currently plans to work closely with the staff and pupils of St Nicholas School on a number of projects leading up towards some of the national ECO days. For example EARTH DAY in April and ENVIRONMENT DAY and GREEN WEEK in June, the idea being to nurture closer practical contact between Church & School.

Communication by Joyce Batey

The start of the year saw work completed with the new design of 3 outside notice boards with vicar's name and installation by a local contact. A review of all outside notices around the church and halls was undertaken, and obsolete ones removed. The corner notice board needs work to renew header board and to make it watertight for posters. Joyce and Glenda share the responsibility to design large outside posters and other publicity.

Inside notice boards in church, hall foyers and halls have been updated periodically to reflect changes in services and church activities. A 'Who's Who' photo gallery is in preparation.

Church's website, powered by WordPress, is updated and maintained by Joyce (admin) to reflect changing services, church life and social activities with new pages and information. The welcome page is maintained with weekly newsletters as well as upcoming special services and special events. Several church members manage the church FB page and posts are shared to other local FB pages to maximise publicity.

Finance:

For full financial reports, please see St Nicholas' Final Accounts for the year ending December 2023, available on the website.

St Nicholas' CE Primary School

Pupil Progress:

Academic progress and attainment throughout the school remain excellent, again putting our pupils significantly above national averages at every level.

What Mrs Woods has called 'the long tail of the pandemic', however, remains clearly visible among the year groups whose pre-school and earlier years in school were affected by the lockdowns and prolonged disruption of those years. School is working hard and with considerable success to rectify this situation, including by careful use of the 'catch up' funding provided by the government. Unfortunately, either through ignorance or lack of interest on the part of those who make these decisions, these funds are due to be withdrawn at the end of the year, although staff efforts to provide all the

additional support needed will continue, so that, as stated in last year's report, 'by the time each child leaves the school at the end of Year Six, they will have achieved a comparable level of progress to that which would have been expected pre-pandemic'.

St Nicholas' School adheres firmly to the principle that every child matters and has placed consistent emphasis on supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). School policy prioritises both inclusivity and flexibility, so that children receive as much of their tuition as possible within their own class but can also have personalised support in a separate hub when required. Happily, it has proved possible this year to enhance our provision significantly. Thanks to generous financial assistance from Liverpool Diocese, Sefton Local Authority and the West Lancashire Masons, the extended (and newly renamed) Rainbow Room was opened officially early in the Autumn Term, along with a specially equipped outdoor play area, funding for which was provided with typical generosity by FOSN. The sensory Rainbow Room is a really inspiring facility and Mrs Woods and her staff firmly believe that not only will this enhanced provision benefit children with complex educational needs but it will also be of value to the whole school community, by making it a more fully inclusive environment for generations of children to come. A recent inspection by the Sefton Inclusion Team, which reported that it could find no areas for improvement, would seem to suggest that the school's aspirations in this regard are being well met.

Pastoral support and curriculum enrichment:

As reported last year, and still on the subject of Covid's 'long tail', with the addition of a continuing cost of living crisis, children and their families receive wider pastoral support in every way possible from our school staff, especially our PSA, Mrs Rudd. The mental health and wellbeing of both staff and pupils is taken particularly seriously and monitored continuously. With this in mind, a senior member of staff has recently completed a First Aid for Mental Health certificate.

The value of an accessible and varied programme of extra-curricular activities for all children is well understood. The range of sporting activities available to St Nicholas' pupils has long been seen as one of the school's strengths and, after consultation with pupils, a number of more creative activities have been added. Care has also been taken to try to ensure that uptake of these activities among more disadvantaged pupils is also high. Overall, staff efforts in all walks of school life, from classroom teaching to school trips, extra curricular opportunities and pastoral support have resulted in high levels of pupil satisfaction expressed in our regular pupil surveys and, perhaps most tellingly of all, an excellent attendance rate, placing St Nicholas' in the lowest 20% nationally for persistent absence rates among schools of a similar level of deprivation.

A recent inspection report from our local authority Professional Partner provided similar confirmation that staff efforts to provide a happy and purposeful learning environment for every child are proving successful: 'The learning environment is calm and purposeful ...Your passion for inclusion shines through and your children were so polite. What a lovely school to visit'.

School / Church Life:

The partnership between school and church continues to thrive. Beth is a regular and welcome visitor in school, taking both whole school and class assemblies, while classes enjoy their curriculum based visits to church, as

well as opportunities to take part in worship and other church activities.

Highlights from 2023 included school participation in the regular Music Festival, a truly joyful and inclusive event, and their performance at Carols by Candlelight in December. Meanwhile, Church@School continues to go from strength to strength. A dedicated planning team have taken over the reins since the departure of Keith Thornborough and have continued to build successfully on his legacy. The next phase of our partnership now lies ahead as Beth and Becky start planning for the new Diocesan initiative to replace the original concept of School Church Partnership, Growing Faith Adventure.

Finally:

The only note on which it is possible to end this year's report is with an expression of our gratitude to our recently retired Chair of Governors, John Howell. A former parent, then Chair of FOSN, John succeeded Revd Roy Baker as our Chair twenty nine years ago and has contributed a vast range of professional skills and experience to the management of the life of our school. He has been a constant but unobtrusive source of strategic vision and calm wisdom to three headteachers and countless governors throughout this time and has made an incalculable difference to the fortunes of St Nicholas' School. We wish him a long and happy retirement and welcome his successor, Paul Bonnet, to his new role as our Chair.

Vicar's Report

We look back over 2023 with thanks to our faithful and gracious God who has been with us throughout this year of endings and new beginnings. The year started with us still meeting for Sunday services in the hall while the church heating was upgraded. It was a time of pulling together and perseverance and it is encouraging to remind ourselves that the new boilers were provided through the generosity of past legacies insightfully given to the church for future blessings.

The gratitude continued as we said our fond farewells to Mike Foy, our organist, and Keith Thornborough, our associate priest, with much thanks for their time, gifts and ministry here.

New things began and we started the Bridge youth group with help from Ethan, the L23 youth leader, and later, Pat Howard. Some of St Nicholas School year 6 and their friends enjoyed the activities, games and Bible studies saying, "I like Bridge because it is a safe place to express your feelings and have an open conversation. It is a great time to reflect and learn about God. We also eat biscuits and share our news."

Our services evolved with a shared ecumenical Maundy Thursday gathering, a beautifully reflective 'Hour at the Cross' on Good Friday led by Rev Chris Jones and an L23 sermon series on the Diocesan Rule of Life with the L23 clergy travelling around the different churches. St Nicholas School joined us for a joyous Christmas carol service. Jennifer Levick retired as Lay Reader to become our Reader Emeritus and Linda Jones was licensed to St Nicholas as our latest Lay Reader. We continue to be blessed by Rev

Bill Matthews and Rev Alan Brooks helping out with leading and preaching and we are so grateful for their generosity.

We have further developed our links with Crosby Royal Naval Association who, after attending Sea Sunday and having their former standard laid up and a new standard dedicated, gave me the huge honour of the invitation to be their chaplain.

We have seen God's abundant provision in the growth of different areas of church life. Picnic Praise has settled into a regular worshipping community, welcoming and baptising new family members. The Church@School team have developed a new way of working and leading their monthly gatherings in the school hall. Soupa Thursday outgrew its original purpose as a winter 'warm space' provision and, through the dedication of the team and helpers, continued throughout the summer and into the following winter as a caring community providing a safe place, a nice lunch and friendship and support to all who come, rounding off the year with a marvellous Christmas lunch. We received Diocesan confirmation of the extension of our parish boundaries and delivered welcome cards to all homes in our new streets up to Harbord Road.

Anne Dobie stepped into the role of church warden alongside Lesley Utley and all the PCC teams continued to develop their roles with the heritage and social teams able to stretch their wings again after Covid, organising exciting events and a new Eco team achieving our Eco Church Silver award and doing wonderful work with the school. A huge thanks to our PCC members and teams (Worship and Mission; Communications; Buildings and Plant and Health and Safety; Finance; Restoration; Under 18's and Safeguarding) who all enable the flourishing of St Nicholas Church due to their enthusiasm, commitment and many, many hours of hard work behind the scenes.

As God's family in this place, we both grieve and celebrate together. We were deeply saddened by death of our Scout Group leader, Andy Davidson, and the subsequent closure of our Scouting groups. We continue to cherish our Guiding groups and their dedicated leaders. As we say goodbye to some, we also welcome new faces. Hugely grateful to Kirsty Kenny for playing piano and leading our worship through the summer, we were also delighted to welcome John Brace as our new organist and Kate Greaves, joining us from Emmanuel Theological College as a second year ordinand on a 2 year placement.

With our experiences of God's unending faithfulness, we stepped out boldly to start planning the events and celebrations of St Nicholas Church's 150th anniversary year in 2024. We have a God who leads us, challenges, equips and guides us and we look forward to what His future holds for us.

The Church of St Nicholas Blundellsands
St Nicholas' CE Primary School Blundellsands
Belonging Believing Becoming