

# Flourish projects are launched in schools

AS the bell sounds for the end of the school day, children and parents pour into the hall and flock around art and craft tables. They'll be painting hearts, creating mirrors and re-enacting the Bible story as they explore the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

Meanwhile, volunteers have carried piles of food into the school kitchen to prepare a full-scale meal for later, including roast chicken, macaroni cheese and sticky toffee pudding. This is Messy Church at The Bay C of E School's primary site in Sandown – just part of the 'Flourish' initiative there.

Our diocese is piloting Flourish, which is a new way to link church and school together to form voluntary worshipping communities meeting midweek. Of the 40 such projects across the Church of England, four are in our diocese – at The Bay C of E School's primary and secondary sites, Bembridge C of E Primary School and Horndean C of E Junior School.

Four 'Flourish' workers were employed to lead this work in the four venues from September 2024. And it is Chloe Wells and Neil Denley who lead this work in The Bay C of E School – working collaboratively with school leaders across primary and secondary sites. As well as Messy Church, they help to lead collective worship, and offer art and craft sessions for a 'nurture' group.

"It is a real privilege to be part of Flourish and to be able to talk about faith," said Chloe. "I enjoy art and craft, and it's good to use my skills in those kind of activities. I also



**Above: Messy Church in full swing at The Bay C of E School's primary site; right: Flourish worker Neil Denley with the Christian Union at The Bay C of E School's secondary site; far right: Flourish worker Chloe Wells at Messy Church**

use storytelling with children who have special educational needs, and my experience means I can offer one-to-one therapeutic play and trauma-informed counselling. At lunchtime, I lead craft activities in a yurt in the playground, and there are queues of children outside."

Georgia Upson, whose daughter Mia, aged 10, goes to Messy Church, said: "We're both Christians, so it's nice to support the school when they put on these things. We also like craft, so it's great to have the chance to do it together."

And Rosmy Joseph, whose daughter Ivania Rose, aged 5, also attends, said: "She knows the Bible stories and I want her to understand them, as the Bible gives her morals. It is also good not having to cook a meal!"

Chloe and Neil's work on the secondary site began by creating an early-morning prayer group. In January, they launched a daily Breakfast Club offering cereal and toast – with bacon and sausage rolls on a Friday. More than 100 students come to the canteen each day, giving them a chance to build relationships and eat breakfast.

They've now started a voluntary Christian Union at lunchtime each week, where students and staff can read the Bible, pray and worship together. The group is already planning a school performance of the Mark Drama, which re-enacts the entire gospel.

Other initiatives planned include using a worship band to enhance learning about music, using memory techniques to enhance

## Lunchtime club sparks interest

IT'S a Tuesday lunchtime and Nick Taylor opens a door leading from a classroom into the playground. Already there are pupils queuing up for his session.

Any pupil can come in and take part. In this case, it involves writing prayers and turning them into paper aeroplanes that can be symbolically thrown through hoops. On another day it could be writing letters to people in care homes to show they are valued.

Nick is the Flourish worker at Horndean C of E Junior School, and the Tuesday lunchtime drop-in session allows pupils to engage



Nick Taylor with pupils writing prayers at Horndean C of E Junior School

with an aspect of prayer and spirituality.

He also leads a weekly group for those taking the Archbishops' Youth Leaders Award, and held all-age events in school over half-term for children and their parents.

As he discovers those who are keenest on the Christian faith, he'll invite them to be part of a regular voluntary worshipping community after Easter.

"We've also set up a station in a gazebo near the school entrance on a Tuesday where we can pray for staff, parents and children, if they would like us to," he said.

"Ultimately when we form a worshipping community, it will be up to the pupils to decide how they'd like to worship. I'm excited about the project, not just about reaching the children but also reaching their parents."



parents by running a Young Disciples group at Christ Church on a Monday night."

The other island school with a Flourish worker is Bembridge C of E Primary, where Heather Grey-Newton has now taken over from Sally Holt.

Among the core principles for Flourish projects is the idea that young people's voices are always at the centre of decisions made, and that all activities are agreed strategically between the school and the church. The pilot projects will last for two years before lessons are shared with others in the Church of England.

For more details, see: [www.portsmouth.anglican.org/flourish](http://www.portsmouth.anglican.org/flourish)

academic achievement, and inspiring students to embrace environmental initiatives to care for God's creation. They've already worked alongside Christ Church to provide a Christmas Day meal for local families, as the start of their involvement in improving community life at an important time of year.

"We want to continue to empower the voice of students, so we've been using surveys and questionnaires to find out what else they would like,"

said Neil. "The Breakfast Club was an obvious thing to provide, as so many students skip breakfast at home. Without eating properly, it's hard to concentrate in lessons.

"As far as the Christian Union is concerned, we would like the students themselves to lead it. They should drive what they study and what they pray for. They would like to run a Youth Alpha Course in the near future.

"We also hope to reach students'