

Elizabeth Chambers with (left to right) Coco Sotiropulo, Eviee Lester, Teddy Lewis-Marlton and Arlo Halsey at Bembridge C of E Primary School



Teaching in a church school is a vocation

Teachers explain how they felt called to join the profession - and why they enjoy the values and ethos of our church schools

ELIZABETH Chambers remembers her mum, who was a teacher, telling her not to enter the profession. But now that she's a headteacher, she'd have no hesitation in recommending teaching to her own daughters.

She has been in charge of Bembridge C of E Primary School on the Isle of Wight since September 2021 and really loves the job. It's her first time working in a Church of England school, and she worried that her lack of Christian commitment might count against her.

In fact, in common with many teachers in our church schools, she's discovered that the ethos and values of the school are a positive benefit. Many of our teachers would say they felt called to enter the teaching profession, to help make a difference in people's lives - regardless of their own personal faith. And many Christian teachers

would say that it is God who has called them.

"In a primary school, it's just pure joy," said Elizabeth. "I'm just overwhelmed by how kind everyone is, and I've never been as happy in any job as here."

'There's nothing like seeing the penny drop and a connection made'

Elizabeth's mother and grandmother were both teachers, so she understood the commitment involved. Her mum's warning about not becoming a teacher was more to do with the workload than anything else. Sadly, she died when Elizabeth was 11, so never got to see her daughter follow in her footsteps.

"I was a ski instructor in Italy for

three years and one of the weeks involved teaching primary-age children to ski," she said. "They said I should be a teacher, but I could still remember what my mum had said. So I talked to my dad, and he said that actually she would have been very proud of me."

After taking a PGCE at Leeds University, her first job was in a junior school in West Yorkshire, where she ultimately became maths lead. She and her husband Ryan had two daughters, Amelia and Matilda, and when the oldest was just about to start school, Ryan's sister married someone from the Isle of Wight. They visited a few times and decided to move.

Elizabeth became a Year 6 teacher and maths lead at Gurnard Primary School, and then deputy head at Broadlea Primary in Sandown for five years. Just as she left, the school completed its transformation to a school ranked as 'good' by

'I love seeing the progress they make'

TAMARA Goddard thinks the best thing about teaching Year 6 children is seeing the real progress they've made in their primary school journey.

The Year 6 teacher enjoys working with 10 and 11-year-olds at Cornerstone C of E Primary School in Whiteley, because they're mature enough to enjoy genuine discussion.

"The best thing is to see the journey they've made at primary school, and to see the progress they've made, especially in Year 2 to 6," she said. "I also enjoy their enthusiasm - you can have real relationships with them, and some banter."

Tamara was a dancer growing up, and originally wanted to be a dance teacher. She took an English degree and became an ambassador for her university in Southampton, which meant supporting school groups that visited. At one event where she was lecturing A-level students, the teacher leading that group suggested she should think about teaching as a career.

She did some work experience in Sarisbury C of E Junior School, then took her postgraduate teaching qualification in Winchester. That involved a placement at Cornerstone C of E Primary - which was then in a temporary building in Whiteley - which led onto a permanent job. She now leads on maths and on Years 5 and 6 in the



Tamara Goddard at Cornerstone C of E Primary School in Whiteley

school, which has moved to a new, purpose-built building in Bluebell Way.

"I think I've always been quite natural at teaching through my dancing," she said. "My mum was a dance teacher. One of the things I enjoy is Dance Live, where we rehearse and then perform a creative piece in a competition with other schools."

"I like the community feel of being at a church school, especially here, where most pupils live nearby and many families have moved here fairly recently. It has a unique family feeling, and I still see former pupils around regularly."

"It's also good to have the church in the building, and the Christian values do permeate

Ofsted. She was encouraged to apply for the top job at Bembridge C of E Primary, despite never having worked in a church school before.

"One of the things I was involved with at Broadlea was to develop the vision and values of the school, and that had a real impact there," she said. "Then when I came here, I discovered that the Christian values of a church school are already in place."

"What really attracted me here was that sense of feeling part of a community. Everything was done with a purpose, with kindness and generosity. It's also a high-achieving school and I was keen to find out why that is."

"I did wonder if my lack of understanding of faith and Christian practices might offend people, but I was reassured by the diocesan education team

everything we do. Philippa, the vicar, and Amy, the pioneer, have led worship each Thursday."

For anyone considering a career in teaching, Tamara suggests taking every opportunity that you can to engage with children and test how easy you find it to build relationships with them.

"See how they work, and what their favourite things are, and then turn that into learning," she said. "There's nothing better than a group of kids getting something for the first time. You see something 'ping' in their heads. I love it."

"If you're worried, just remember that you only need to stay one step ahead of them - you can research the next lesson after you've taught this one."

and governors that it was OK. And because the Rev Steve Daughtery arrived at Holy Trinity Church at a similar time to me, we've been able to develop those links together. His collective worship and the services he leads really show the children the awe and wonder about the Christian faith.

"My own daughter Tilly was in Holy Trinity for the Christmas service. She hadn't been in a church for