

Places of hope

Kathy Griffiths is the Head Teacher of Bishop Justus Church of England Comprehensive School in Bromley

The success of Bishop Justus Church of England Comprehensive School in Bromley belies its controversial beginnings and the extraordinary woman who has led the school since its inception. Set in the heart of Bromley, this non-selective school welcomes pupils from all faiths and none into its distinctive Christian community.

Head Teacher Kathy Griffiths hails from the small Welsh mining town of Treharris, Merthyr Tydfil, and knows something about social deprivation. As a young woman, she yearned to go to London, and confounded her own teachers and family by striving to go to university at a time when most young woman from the village would either marry and start a family, or work in the local bank. The first person from her family to go to university, she has earned a Bachelor of Education first degree and a subsequent Master's degree in the Sociology of education. Kathy has combined an academic knowledge of Education with gritty practical experience. She said, "My first teaching school was in Brixton and I loved it. I also taught in Camberwell and Bermondsey, before teaching in the worst school in the country at the time, in Battersea. It was incredibly hard work. I managed Key Stage Four and

the first time I saw it, I was wearing wellies in the freezing rain! I really loved my job in Hayes and was very happy there; I just knew that I really wanted this new job at Bishop Justus. It was the dream job; it would give me the opportunity to create something in accord with everything I believed in. Education is transformational."

A decade later, it's hard to believe that Bishop Justus School is still the new kid on the block. The reception area is burgeoning with sporting trophies and there is an atmosphere of mutual respect which Kathy and her team work hard to maintain. She said, "No one can tell you what you can't do. You need fire in your belly to go out there and do good for others. It's about being in service for others. The young people who leave here need a 'can do' attitude.

"It's your duty to be the best you can be – to use your God-given talents to their best – to identify what your talent is and make a difference with it."

Kathy's earnest belief in making a difference permeates every part of life in school. She said, "Young people are amazing and they do amazing things every day. They don't get enough recognition for it. When I look at them, I think, 'yes, the future is safe in your hands.' I know what makes people tick and I care for and respect individuals. Every person is unique. This school values the individual – when parents see that, it's powerful. I wanted to create



I stayed there for six years and struggled with every social problem imaginable. With my own early gritty council estate background, I knew I had to just be me and that worked."

Humorous and determined, Kathy combines her own sincere belief that teachers can help pupils to become the best people they can be, whilst sharing her passion for learning with pupils, teaching staff and parents alike. She said, "My Grandfather was passionate about education.

opportunities for young people and we fought against a lot of prejudice in the early days. Now we offer music scholarships, for example. We are able to lend instruments to pupils to plug the gaps and give them the best possible start in life."

Keen to integrate with pupils, yet maintain the delicate balance of mutual respect, teachers and students sit and eat together at mealtimes. Kathy said, "This is all about community. I wanted to make the food here the best it could be. I was determined that pupils should learn to eat properly with a knife and fork because it is a skill they will need in later life. We have yearly Talent Awards with a formal sit-down dinner because I want pupils to look and feel the part, and be comfortable in social settings."

Sometimes misinterpreted, Kathy is keen to set the record straight about what being a Church of England school really means. She said, "Our ethos is about educating the whole person. It's that concept of service; no one is too grand to do the washing up. Everyone has a part to play and no one person is more important than any other. It's true that young people today need to be resilient, and we try to create the conditions where this can thrive and we role model it through our daily behaviour. We try to give of our best. Sometimes we get things wrong and we try to learn from that. There is a lot of hope here, and tomorrow is always another day. This is what courage is about.

He always said if you have a gift, it is your duty to use it for the benefit of other people."

By 2001, Kathy had earned her National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), started her own family and relocated to Kent, teaching in Hayes. In 2003, the role of Head Teacher for what would become the Bishop Justus School was advertised, and Kathy was keen to apply. She said, "There was something calling me to this job. It was still a brownfield site, and

"Church schools are places of hope. We don't care about where pupils come from or how they speak – we are here to do something much bigger than just educate."

Like every state school, Bishop Justus is subject to Government inspections. Kathy is keen that the school should ask itself 'what are we really good at?' She said, "Results are more than just raw scores. We have just had our first Oxbridge candidate and that's great – but we are also looking to create fully-formed young adults who will go on to take apprenticeships. You can have talent, but without the right environment this may come to nothing. We are about nurturing and creating an environment where pupils can develop their talents fully."

Kathy describes her role as a privilege. She said, "Parents entrust their children to us. I genuinely think we make a difference to people and their families. It's amazing. On a more personal level, I love that I am allowed to be me, and they are allowed to be themselves – whatever that means. We are a Church school and we are all about the God-given potential and respect of the individual. It's okay to be you. That's what God wants, and you won't get it wrong."

For more information about Bishop Justus School, please visit:
www.bishopjustus.bromley.sch.uk