

Balloon release launches school's garden area

A CHURCH school in Gosport declared its new playground open with a balloon release – as the climax of an 11-year project.

Parents and friends of Leesland C of E Infant School gathered in the new garden area at the rear of the school, which features a seaside-themed spot, allotments, and a dinghy donated by St Mary's Junior Sailing Club.

The 240 pupils performed songs, poems and shared their views of the new garden. The ceremony included a blessing by the Rev Ted Goodyer, vicar of St Mary's Church, Alverstoke.

The oldest and youngest child in each class released a total of 54 helium-filled balloons in the school colours. Each balloon was tagged so pupils could discover how far they travelled.

The updated playground was built using funds raised through fairs, sponsorship from parents and help from Hampshire Garden Trust and Alverstoke Crescent Gardens. The school also held a sponsored bouncy castle bounce on the day of the opening.

Staff and governors first drew up plans to update their playgrounds,

railings and entrance 11 years ago, and the back playground was the finishing touch. Headteacher Jane McDowell hoped that the gardens would help pupils continue to learn outside.

"Learning is not just about being in the classroom," she said, "Some children come alive just by being outside, doing activities you wouldn't expect them to do outside, like reading and writing."

The school also aims to allow others from the local community to enjoy using the garden through the Friends of Leesland Infant School Garden.



Connor Lake, 5, (left) and Oliver Halliday, 5, prepare to release the balloons as part of the launch of the new playground

Ghana surprise for school head

ALICE Wood was expecting to open a new school – she didn't expect to be named Queen Mother!

The headteacher of St Alban's C of E School in West Leigh was opening a school with the same name in a remote Ghanaian village as part of the links between our diocese and West Africa.

The new St Alban's School, which was built with £2,000 raised by Alice's school and £4,000 from the Bishop's Waltham deanery, will give children in Takorase the chance to become pupils for the first time.

Alice made a speech and presented teachers with donated pens and pencils as she opened the school alongside Carol Bailey from St Andrew's, Hayling Island, who was already Queen Mother of nearby Ayiesu.

Alice said: "One thing I certainly wasn't expecting was my husband and I being taken off and re-dressed in local costume and crowned Nene – King – and Nana – Queen Mother – of the village. Everyone then danced in front of us to honour us!"

The ceremony was part of a trip to Ghana organised by worshippers from Hayling Island as part of our diocese's IDWAL (Inter-Diocesan West Africa



Headteacher Alice Wood (centre) opens the new St Alban's School in Takorase

Link) ties with the region.

It was also a chance to see improvements at St Andrew's Anglican School in Asesewa, the Ghanaian school linked to St Alban's in West Leigh. The group saw how donations from Hayling worshippers Vicky Macey and Sheila Tidd had funded a new toilet block and sports equipment.

Worshippers also checked on the progress of other projects they had helped to fund, including the new 'Hayling bridge' in Asesewa – the village linked with St Andrew's, Hayling Island. The Hayling community had previously paid for a foot bridge to be

built over the River Akrum – now it has been converted so it can also carry traffic.

Carol Bailey said: "We took two trombones with us and gave them to villagers the night before the road bridge was opened. Amazingly, they learnt to play them overnight, and started playing them during the ceremony!"

The group visited other projects they support, including a new Hayling Clinic to provide essential medical care for Asesewa and a house for visiting nurses. Worshippers at St Andrew's gave £600 towards this project.

And the Bishop of Kumasi,

the Rt Rev Daniel Sarfo, who visited Portsmouth for this year's IDWAL Festival, showed them the Anglican Babies Home in nearby Mampong. It provides homes for babies under four years old who have lost their mothers. They are cared for until their family is able to take them back, or until they can be adopted.

The home currently has 38 children under four. The home does need 20 staff to give 24-hour cover, and food, clothing, cot sheets and nappies are also needed. Anyone who can help can contact Carol Bailey on 023-9246 5264.

Church is among the UK's most inviting

A CHURCH in our diocese has been named as one of the most inviting in the UK.

St John the Baptist Church in Locks Heath was chosen as one of the 12 finalists in an Ecclesiastical Insurance competition to find the nation's most inviting churches.

It was praised for combining contemporary and informal worship with more traditional services, including the launch of a café-style evening service and a pledge to keep the building open seven days a week.

One judge, the Ven Peter Taylor, Archdeacon of Harlow, said: "St John the Baptist is a shining example of a congregation that has successfully changed to meet the needs of its community. The range of activities and variety of worship ensure that everyone's welcome. I do hope churches all over the country will follow their lead."

The church's experiments in worship followed feedback from church members and those in the wider community about what they'd like to see.

Other initiatives to attract new people to church include working with the local secondary school to create a new 'front garden' for the church, running a lunch club and two toddler groups for the community, and a manned reception at the church four mornings a week.

The top three churches will be unveiled on November 21 at York Minster. They will receive prizes of £1,500, £750 and £500.