

# Faith and education linked for new head

**FOR the man who will take over as head-teacher of Portsmouth's oldest school, faith and education are almost inseparable.**

It's faith in God that gives James Priory the sense that all of us can be redeemed. And it's that optimistic view of human nature that inspires his teaching.

If things had worked out differently, he might have become an Anglican priest. Instead, at just 34, he'll be given the chance to run Portsmouth Grammar School from next January.

He was a regular at St Peter's Church, Petersfield, until recently, but will switch to an Anglican church in the city after a summer move to Southsea.

"There's something about seeing humanity in a positive way that is linked with our relationship with God," he said. "A belief in the potential for growth and change is important when you're working with young people. My spiritual nourishment has come through church, but also through literature, the arts and the natural world."

James' own father became a vicar late in life after a career in industry as a company secretary. The family moved from the West Midlands to the West Country as James' dad switched clergy posts. But James enjoyed being part of a clergy family.

"There's an expectation for



**James Priory, who will take over as headteacher of Portsmouth Grammar School in January**

about going into the Church. The chaplain asked us to spend time reflecting on it.

"I remember going to see a lay chaplain about ordination and hearing that she had met DH Lawrence when she was a child in

at Portsmouth Grammar in 2000, and then Assistant Head with responsibility for the sixth form in 2005. He also took on the brief of organising media liaison on behalf of the school.

"I was lucky in that I was given early opportunities to be involved in whole school responsibilities at Bradford, and I really enjoyed that," he said. "I came to appreciate that how a school is run will directly influence the lives and experiences of individual pupils. Having responsibility for the sixth form more recently has been particularly revealing because they are at such an important stage in their lives.

"And I have found the media work enjoyable too. I'm a frustrated writer, so it can be exciting to see today's press release become tomorrow's story. It is a privilege to be able to champion the pupils' achievements in the local and national press."

He was appointed in February to be the new headteacher at Portsmouth Grammar, succeeding

Dr Tim Hands, who will become Master of Magdalen College School in Oxford.

"It is a significant change of role for me, but I'm delighted to be staying at the school and in the area," said James. "I'm going to carry on teaching English to the lower sixth formers, and hopefully, in time, some of the younger children as well.

"One of the real strengths of Portsmouth Grammar is its relationship with the community. There are strong and genuine partnerships with the cathedral, the university, the naval base and local businesses, all of which finds expression in the Portsmouth Festivities, as well as with other schools, including St Luke's. We actually have 'Portsmouth' on our curriculum as a subject to study, and there's a real sense of pride about the city, even though our catchment area stretches to Haslemere, Brighton and the Isle of Wight."

He hopes to find an Anglican church in the city where he, his wife Helen, and their three children will feel comfortable worshipping, after their summer move to Portsmouth. While he was at St Peter's Church, he helped to organise an ecumenical holiday club, alongside the then curate Toby Wright, and Simon Lewis, a fellow teacher who has subsequently been ordained.

"As a family, we always went to church, so I have never had a Damascus Road conversion," he said. "It has been more like gradual recognition on the Road to

Emmaus. I'm used to traditional worship, with a choir and Eucharist. But the experience of running a holiday club with different types of churches, and having to present my faith in an energetic way to children, helped me to think much more about what it is that I do actually believe.

"Moving to Southsea makes sense for the family, as Helen teaches English nearby, and the children will be coming to Portsmouth Grammar. It's also an expression of our commitment to the place. We have enjoyed our time in Petersfield and made many friends there, but this will be a new stage for us."

The school already has historic links with the cathedral. Many of the youngsters in the cathedral choir are from Portsmouth Grammar, and the cathedral also hosts services for pupils at the start and end of term, as well as on important dates in the church calendar. The school uses the John Pounds Church for assemblies, and James has helped to start a leavers' service at the Garrison Church which involved Sung Compline.

"Education is about the development of the whole person, and not just for the pupils – teachers also find that they have to be open to new ideas and possibilities," he said.

"It involves faith in people's ability to grow and fulfil their potential, and the value of sharing that as a community. It's an intrinsic belief in humanity which is nurtured through a belief in God."

## my faith

**James Priory grew up in a clergy family and thought about ordination himself. But he found his vocation in teaching, and belief in the power of education is a vital part of his faith**

you to have a public role," he said. "People enjoy seeing that you are committed to church as a family, although I rarely felt pressurised by this. A sense of humour was important. Often, as children, when there were meetings in the parsonage we'd try on the hats and coats that parishioners had left in our hallway!

"I went to Lincoln College, Oxford, and there were two or three of us who were thinking

South America. We started talking about him, and I realised that English literature and education did really matter to me. I decided I should pursue that instead."

James started teaching English at Bradford Grammar School, and soon found himself taking on extra responsibilities – directing school musicals and becoming head of Year 7. He helped to introduce the first girls to the school. After six years, he became Head of English

## Special service is planned

**THE school is planning an Evensong with an interfaith dimension to celebrate the visit of two artists.**

The cathedral service, on September 18 at 6pm, will be followed by a drinks reception at 7pm and a recital of Persian music at 7.30pm, featuring Jila Peacock, an artist born in Iraq, and Anoosh Jahanshahi, a renowned sitar-player from Tehran. The pair will also run workshops on Persian art, poetry and music throughout that week for pupils from the grammar school, Steep C of E Primary and Milton Park

**Junior Schools.**

The children will create artwork for an exhibition in our cathedral to mark the week of Remembrance. That week also features the Portsmouth Grammar School Chamber Choir and London Mozart Players premiering a specially-commissioned work by Scottish composer Sally Beamish, which offers a vision of peace by using poetic sources from eastern and western cultures.

Tickets for the recital on September 18 are free and are available on 023 9236 0036.