

Ambleside CE Primary School

Vicarage Road
Ambleside
Cumbria
LA22 9DH



**Diocese of
Carlisle**

Board of Education

"Every Child Matters To God."

Diocese: Carlisle

Local authority: Cumbria
Dates of inspection: 01 / 02 / 08
Date of last inspection: 2-3 / 12 / 03
School's unique reference number: 112374
Headteacher: Nigel Tansley
Inspector's name and number: Bert Thomas 666

School context

This is a small Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School of 160 pupils in the small town of Ambleside in Cumbria. The children are predominantly of white ethnicity and from mixed socio-economic backgrounds. There are a few children (1%) for whom English is not the first language. Many parents are employed in the tourist industry. The headteacher took up his post before the previous inspection in December 2003.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Ambleside CE Primary School as a Church of England school are good

Children, parents, governors and staff have a strong sense and appreciation of the school as a church school. The Christian character of the school has a positive impact on the attitudes, understanding and behaviour of learners and adults.

Established strengths

- Children are valued, well motivated and happy
- Spiritual and moral development is very good
- Explicit Christian values are evident in all aspects of school
- Strong two way support between the school and the church and local community

Focus for development

- Enrich the children's contribution to leadership in the school including participation in worship and in the evaluation of the school.
- Establish formal systems for governors to contribute actively to self evaluation processes
- Establish and improve systems to enhance the quality of collective worship and religious education

The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is outstanding at meeting the needs of all learners

Children are confident, secure and well motivated. They know that they are special and they respect and respond well to teachers and other staff. Their behaviour is excellent and they show support and consideration for each other. The distinctive Christian character is clearly expressed in the values and relationships throughout the school. Children benefit from many opportunities to reflect upon these and can explain what they have learned. They particularly appreciate what they have learned about prayer. Links with the Church are very good. Anglican clergy and lay people contribute in a rich variety of ways and the Methodist minister contributes to collective worship. Links with the local community are very good. The school benefits in a variety of ways from input from local trusts and groups. In turn the school supports the local church and community very well. The school has identified the need to engage with the world wide church and other faith communities.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Children enjoy collective worship. They spoke about what they have learned from it and how it affects their ideas, attitudes and values. It was good, during the inspection, to share in an act of collective worship where children laughed on several occasions and clearly enjoyed themselves. However, opportunities were missed for involving the children in practical activity and eliciting richer responses through appropriate questions. Children particularly mentioned with appreciation the head, the chair of governors and local clergy who each lead worship weekly. Class worship is “good because it makes us think”. They like to take an active part in worship. Whilst class led assemblies give very occasional opportunity for input from the children they said that they would like more opportunities for involvement in everyday worship. They identified activities with which they are becoming familiar in lessons on literacy or Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) and said that these would be helpful in worship too. Older children feel that sometimes the content of worship is below them “It’s not really for us but I like seeing the young ones enjoying it”. Leaders of worship are committed to providing good quality acts of worship. However, there is no coordinated planning and no formal recording or evaluation. The previous inspection said that worship would be “enriched for the children by clearer planning”. Worship planning (long term and medium term) which coordinates the input of different leaders, and includes the improvements that the children have identified, is a focus for development. As is the provision of appropriate systems of evaluation by governors and staff which will include consulting the learners.

The effectiveness of the religious education (RE) is good

Children enjoy RE because, they say, it is interesting and helps them to understand other people and themselves. They like finding out about Christianity and other religions. By the time they leave school their learning about religion, and their learning from religion are in line with national and diocesan expectations. Older children were able to give examples of how their learning had influenced their own beliefs, attitudes and understanding of desirable behaviour. In the lessons observed, younger children also demonstrated interest, enjoyment, knowledge and values gained from RE. The subject contributes well to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

“I didn’t like Buddhism.” said one child, “I used to laugh at the little statues that you see in shop windows . . .”

(“Me too” chipped in another).

“They have fat bellies and bald heads.”

(“and those long ears with holes in” said the echo)

“But now I understand what they believe in I think they’re really good. They are peaceful and they respect life . . .”

(“and they don’t harm animals”)

“I talked to my dad about it – his friend’s a Buddhist so I thought he’d know - but he didn’t. I had to explain it all to him!”

Staff have worked hard since the last inspection to address the issues outlined then. Long and medium term plans are in place. These include references to both attainment targets, more varied teaching strategies and also to opportunities for assessment. Children say that lessons have become more enjoyable in the last year or two and identify more discussion and practical activities (especially “visualisations”). However, learners would value more opportunity for these, and for drama and role play and also more discussion / activities in small groups. They identified a number of teaching strategies used in literacy hour and SEAL which, they say, would work effectively in RE too. Planning and lessons observed suggest that staff do not have a sufficiently focussed understanding of Attainment Target 2 – Learning From Religion. Often this aspect is taught didactically by the teacher rather than providing opportunities for the children to reflect on the religious knowledge and to develop their own responses to it. Monitoring of teaching has been introduced occasionally but this occurs on a fixed cycle that is not related to the needs of the subject or the professional development of staff. The monitoring of lessons does not clearly identify for teachers how to improve. Monitoring of planning is not used to support staff in these areas. Clergy and governors contribute to RE lessons but do not participate actively in self evaluation processes. The development of appropriate systems to provide for these is a focus for development.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is good

Governors and the headteacher have a distinctive Christian vision for the school that is understood and shared by all staff. Staff feel valued by the governors and senior management and they are well motivated. Governors are actively involved with children in school in a variety of ways, especially in the classroom and children and staff appreciate this. However, they are not involved actively in self evaluation of the school, development planning or monitoring. The subject leader reports on RE but these reports are not detailed enough to allow governors to fulfil their role as critical friend. Some governors lack an understanding of their role and structures do not exist for them to fulfil it. This means that whilst they offer practical support and encouragement they do not monitor or provide appropriate direction and challenge. Provision of appropriate systems to enable the governors to fulfil these duties is a focus for development.

Parents are consulted about some aspects of school life and children contribute through a school council. However during the inspection the children demonstrated excellent ability to evaluate provision in RE and collective worship and to suggest appropriate ways to improve them. The school has not so far made effective use of their insight and enthusiasm in these areas or other aspects of school life.

SIAS report

2008-02-01

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