

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Elwick Hall Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

North Lane,
Elwick,
Hartlepool.
TS27 3EG

Diocese: Durham

Local authority: Hartlepool

Dates of inspection: 4th & 6th July 2007

Date of last inspection: 6th, 11th, 14th & 15th October 2002

School's unique reference number: 111670

Headteacher: Mr Steve McDonnell

Inspector's name and number: Karen Pemberton No: 287

School context

Elwick Hall is a smaller than average village primary school. It serves an advantaged area and only a very small number of pupils is entitled to free school meals. The school has a lower than average number of pupils with learning difficulties and a small number of pupils of ethnic minority backgrounds. The school changed to voluntary aided status in 2003. The current Headteacher was appointed in January of 2007 and he is also Headteacher of a second village school some five minutes drive from Elwick Hall.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Elwick Hall Primary School as a Church of England school are, at this point in time, inadequate.

Affirming and positive relationships are a feature of Elwick Hall's warm and caring learning environment. Relatively little of this positive climate, however, is as a result of a distinctive Christian ethos. That said, expectations of pupils and staff are increasing and relatively new leadership shows great determination to develop the school's Christian ethos. Plans for improvement are sound, but must be put into action quickly if they are to have the desired impact.

Established strengths

- The warm and caring learning environment, demonstrated by good relationships based on mutual respect.
- The determination of the new Head to work to improve in the future the school's Christian ethos and practice.
- The capacity for improvement demonstrated by the developing ethos of higher expectation. Plans for improvement are sound.

Focus for development

- That all stakeholders are involved in agreeing a vision statement, rooted in Christian values, which declares a clear intention to move forward as a Christian community.
- That the school draws up a clear action plan for improvement in all areas (distinctiveness, collective worship, religious education and leadership and management of a church school) with key actions and dates and the facility for the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of those actions.

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

The climate for learning in the school is clearly one based on care for each child as an individual. Christian values are evident in many aspects of school life, particularly in the quality of relationships between all stakeholders. These values, however, are expressed in secular language both in conversation and in documentation. Displays in classrooms and

corridors celebrate the achievements of pupils. The recently established focus area in the Hall is designed to help pupils focus upon their spiritual side. Focus areas in classrooms are less distinct and variable in accessibility and impact. Celebration assemblies on a Friday recognise the achievements of pupils of all abilities, such as music workshops undertaken by Year 3/4, and are appreciated by staff and pupils. It is clear from talking to pupils that their views are taken into account in school improvement planning. The atmosphere in school is positive and welcoming. Staff relationships are warm and mutually supportive and staff are good role models for the pupils. Parents are now more positive about the school and feel that the appointment of the new Head has set the school on the road to improvement. The children are polite and respectful to visitors, and supportive of each other saying that "this is a kind school". When asked, however, pupils are unable to make the link between the caring ethos of the school and its church status. This is a common feature. An example is the behaviour policy which states that "Every day pupils have a choice to start again and do better." This statement is not rooted in the concept of forgiveness or otherwise linked to Christian values.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is satisfactory.

Collective worship has been re-established as an important part of school life and the involvement of the local vicar is regular. Collective worship has a strong Christian focus and the major Christian festivals are celebrated, sometimes in church. Pupils report that staff other than the Head are involved in the delivery of collective worship and they particularly enjoy the input of a visiting preacher. There is a regular family service at the local church and an encouraging number of pupils attend with their families and as part of the choir. Daily collective worship includes some aspects of Anglican practice, although how much of this is understood by the children is not immediately evident. Pupils participate dutifully, sing well and are well behaved and respectful. There is, however, an emphasis on the story being told rather than the message behind it, and opportunities for spontaneous pupil participation are limited. Other than during collective worship, pupils have no other opportunities for prayer or reflection during the school day. Collective worship, and its impact upon pupils' spiritual development, is not yet evaluated. A Governors' Christian Ethos committee has very recently been set up to look at this and other issues.

The effectiveness of religious education is inadequate.

There are some examples of effective teaching in RE and the provision for on-line homework is good and well-used by pupils. The time allocated to RE is good and faiths other than Christianity are studied as appropriate. Standards in RE are for many pupils not as high as in literacy. This is due in some cases to an emphasis on teaching the facts/stories rather than the exploration of the underlying messages and "big questions", and in some cases to a lack of effective differentiation. For example, in one class the learning objective was to look at the meaning of a bible story, but the activity for the SEN group was to sequence the story, which did not move on their learning or allow them to explore the meaning. Generally pupils respond well to RE lessons, although where teaching is less well organised pupils' interest wanes. Interviews with pupils indicate that RE does not contribute significantly to the spiritual development of learners, nor does it contribute to a distinctive Christian character for the school. This is because it is taught more as a factual subject than one which allows children to explore ideas of faith. There is little evidence of the threads of RE running through other subjects and there are few cross-curricular links (eg. there is little art work with a Christian or other faith theme on display). Although considered a core subject, assessment in RE is not rigorous, particularly in KS2, and children do not have targets for improvement.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is, at this point in time, inadequate.

An aims statement is displayed around school, but the Christian nature of the school is not included in this statement. (One of the aims is "Have an excellent ethos and positive relationships." without any clarification of why this is an aim). Other documentation, including parts of the SEF, also fails to acknowledge the faith status of the school. Without a clearly defined vision for Elwick Hall as a church school it is not possible for school leaders to

encourage, monitor and challenge the school community about its distinctiveness and effectiveness. The Chair and Vice-Chair of Governors both acknowledge that this is an area of school life which has lapsed in recent years, but have not yet begun to address this on a regular basis. Evaluation of the effectiveness of Elwick Hall as a church school is not a feature of school self-evaluation. Most telling of all is the fact that pupils are unable to say what it is about Elwick Hall that makes it a church school. The new Head has clear and ambitious plans for moving Elwick Hall forward as a church school and new policies exist in draft form. Staff, parents and governors are all sure that the school will indeed move forward under his leadership. Given the positive climate which has been established, leadership is now in a good position to develop the school's effectiveness as a distinctive Christian learning environment. This work must, however, begin with a minimum of delay.

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