

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Church Schools Report

Whitfield Church of England First Voluntary Aided Primary School

Whitfield,
Hexham,
Northumberland.
NE47 8JH

Newcastle Diocese

Northumberland LA

Date of S48 inspection: October 10th 2007

Date of last S23 inspection: May 2004

School's Unique reference number: 122303

Acting Headteacher: Ms Elizabeth Baker

National Society Inspector: Mary Pedley

National Society inspector's number: 361

School context

Whitfield C of E First Voluntary Aided School is a small rural school with a wide catchment area. Most children come from within this area with some parents from outside choosing the school by preference because it is a church school. All children speak English as their first language. The acting head teacher has been in this post for 5 terms. The school is one of five in the federation of local small church schools in the West Tyne area.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Whitfield Church of England First School are good.

The strong Christian ethos permeates all aspects of school life and brings positive values and attitudes to teaching and learning, leading and managing. The school's aims and values are given clear priority in ensuring that all in the school community respect and value each other. The impact on children is seen through the good quality of their development as valued and happy individuals and in the good standards they achieve.

Established strengths

- The outstanding Christian ethos impacts on the school community and is reflected in the way each person is nurtured and valued.
- The effective links with the local church, wider community and the local federation of church schools.
- The excellent school environment which enhances children's learning and personal development.
- The good variety of learning experiences children are given through RE lessons.

Focus for development

- To develop clear monitoring and evaluation systems for collective worship and for governors to be proactive in supporting these.
- To ensure effective monitoring and assessment procedures are established for both strands of RE.
- To clarify and support the role and management of the shared RE specialist, through consultation of the school's governors with the local federation of church schools.

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

The school's Christian vision is strongly promoted through clearly explained aims and values and in how these are achieved. Christian values permeate every aspect of school life where every child is valued and special. This is enhanced by all staff in the school having care and concern for children to ensure all are nurtured whatever their abilities or needs. Children's illustrated statements in the school porch welcome visitors and rightly say 'Whitfield School is a loving school' where 'everyone loves everyone'. Children enjoy their work and all aspects of their daily school experience. Gaining star awards in lessons and working towards being the 'Star of the Week' does much to strengthen each child's self esteem and self worth and they speak proudly of their achievements. The relationships between staff and children are excellent and there is a very clear and effective collaborative approach to decision making at all levels. All the children have a voice through the whole school council: minutes of meetings show that this is a democratic process which has had a definite impact on improving several areas of school life. The children speak with enthusiasm of their achievements through this channel. The school environment, both inside and out, gives very clear messages of the school's Christian character and does much to nourish, encourage and challenge children's learning, personal, spiritual, social, moral and cultural development.

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

Collective worship is an effective conclusion to the end of each day with the whole school and all staff sharing in this time. The impact of worship time is good. This is achieved through the good range of experiences which develop children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. This impact has also been enhanced through a greater variety of leaders, with the parish priest making a regular and valued contribution. Leaders respond well to children's contributions and interactions ensuring that all are valued. Worship is distinctively Christian and helps to increase children's understanding of the Anglican tradition through good use of prayers and through their high quality contributions to festival events in the two churches. A parent commented on the value of the 'spirituality starting point' the school provides for children and how services in church 'give them a sense of tradition, being part of the community and of something bigger.' A wider variety of styles, structure and content for collective worship time would provide children with a greater range of SMSC experiences. The weekly celebration assembly is well established and has a clear and valued effect on all children throughout the week in all aspects of their school life. Though governors are supportive, a more proactive approach to monitoring and evaluating collective worship would enhance its impact on the school community.

The effectiveness of religious education is good.

Though the overall effect of religious education is good, there are some outstanding elements. The variety and types of learning experiences the children are given through some outstanding teaching, provides them with challenges which develop their awareness and understanding of other faiths and cultures. This is a vital feature of learning for children in this small and very rural church school, where such opportunities are not easy to access. The children have positive attitudes to all their learning and achieve good standards. They gain much from the variety and style of RE lessons which have good cross curricular links. These lessons add greatly to their personal, spiritual, social, moral, and cultural knowledge and understanding. Children's work shows they are working at appropriate levels for their ages. More consistent use of planning, assessment and recording systems that reflect both RE attainment targets would ensure progression in learning for every child. Good support is given to the shared RE specialist by the local federation of church schools, which is an exciting and innovative development in making effective use of subject enthusiasm.

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

Though the overall effect of leadership and management of this school is good, there are some outstanding elements. The good provision of religious education through a shared RE specialist ensures excellent use of subject enthusiasm and valuable learning experiences for children. There are highly effective spiritual and pastoral links between the church community, the parish priest, parents and governors that support the school well in promoting its Christian vision. Parents speak highly of good communication between school and home, of good consultation and reporting systems for their children, and of the accessibility of staff when needed. All staff are supported well through good opportunities for professional development. Foundation governors are concerned and keen to support the school in all that it does to provide children with a high quality experience of church school education. There are monitoring and evaluation processes in place, but leaders and governors should ensure that effective use is made of these in evaluating the school as a church school, especially through religious education and collective worship. Consideration should be given by the local federation of church schools, and by governors, in how they define and manage responsibilities for the RE specialist's professional development and in how they manage her role across the five schools.

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