

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Whalton Church of England Primary School

Whalton, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 3XH	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Newcastle
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Northumberland
Date of inspection	23 March 2018
Date of last inspection	8 March 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary 122302
Executive Headteacher	Nichola Brannen
Inspector's name and number	The Revd Canon Steven Harvey 891

School context

Whalton Church of England Primary School is a small rural school with 51 pupils on roll. The school serves the village of Whalton and the surrounding area. Pupils enter Reception with standards which are broadly typical of national standards. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs, or who are disadvantaged, is below the national average. The school is part of a federation with Longhorsley Church of England First School. Since the last SIAS inspection a new executive headteacher has been appointed. In September 2017 the school admitted pupils into Year 5 and became a primary school, having previously been a first school.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Whalton Church of England Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- A distinctively Christian vision and set of core values underpin all aspects of the school's life and work.
- Collective worship both reflects and reinforces the school's Christian character and has a powerful impact on the life of the whole community.
- Religious education (RE) makes a very significant contribution to the school's Christian character.
- Leaders articulate and promote, with confidence and conviction, a compelling vision for the school which is rooted in Christian belief and teachings. They articulate equally clearly the impact this vision has on all aspects of the school's life and work, including pupils' academic standards, their personal relationships, their behaviour, and their attitudes both to their learning and to their engagement with others.

Areas to improve

- Embed the new model of leadership of RE to ensure that monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are even more effective in determining strategies which drive improvement.
- Extend pupils' knowledge and understanding of different Christian traditions to be found in the UK, so that their understanding of difference within Christianity is related to national as well as global diversity.

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

A distinctively Christian vision and set of core values are explicitly stated and deeply embedded in the school's daily life and work. These core values are displayed imaginatively throughout the school. For example, a display with an apple at its centre has an invitation to 'take a bite of our values.' Biblical quotations, prayers, Christian symbols and engaging material relating to the current season of the church's year are very prominent. This has the effect of keeping the foundation of the school's Christian character at the forefront of its daily life.

All members of the community, and not least the pupils, articulate with conviction the school's values and their impact. This impact is seen in the exceptionally high standards of relationships and behaviour and in the concern shown for others both within and beyond the school community. It is also seen in pupils' academic work and progress. Pupils know that they are loved and cared for, and that, in the words of the school motto, the school 'wants me to be the best I can be.' This love and care result in 'behaviour for learning' which impacts strongly on pupils' academic development. Standards of progress and attainment are consistently high. For example, in 2017, all pupils reached the expected standard in phonics, and this placed the school among the highest performing schools in the country. Progress from the end of Reception to the end of Key Stage 1 is excellent, and attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 is considerably above the national average. Disadvantaged pupils do well across the school.

Pupils consistently link the school's values to Christian belief and teaching. 'Our core values help us grow stronger together in the love of Jesus.' They speak of the hand upon which the core values are displayed as illustrating how they 'hold each other's hands and are held in God's hand.' The biblical quotations in each classroom are aspirational in character and pupils speak eloquently of their meaning. 'Don't say, 'I can't do that'; say, 'I can't do that yet, but I will be able to do it with the help of God.' Pupils report that there is no bullying in the school, and that 'if there were, it would be dealt with quickly and well.'

The school's Christian character has a very significant impact on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils have a high degree of social and emotional intelligence. The spiritual and reflective atmosphere which pervades the school gives pupils a deep sense of themselves as spiritual beings. They greatly value the many opportunities they are given for reflection and recognise the impact these have. Reflection 'leads to prayer' and 'helps us to be kind.' It also enriches their knowledge and understanding of, and respect for, diversity; 'we should always respect other's views.' Pupils are excited and challenged by RE. They recognise the significant contribution the subject makes to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and to the school's Christian character.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

The daily act of collective worship has a high profile in the life of the school. It both reflects and reinforces the school's distinctively Christian character. It has a powerful impact on the life of the whole community, and this is readily and confidently articulated by both pupils and adults.

Pupils engage enthusiastically with collective worship. They speak of it as being 'fun and interactive' and of enjoying their learning of Bible stories. Their answers to questions in worship reveal a good knowledge and understanding of biblical material. Pupils articulate very clearly the positive impact which worship has on their behaviour, their relationships and their attitudes. For example, their charitable activities are extensive, supporting a range of local, national and international charities. The observation that 'we are a church school, and we need to be like Jesus' is a typical example of how pupils relate their charitable activities to Christian teaching and to the school's core values. Parents speak of pupils 'talking about what they have learnt in collective worship' and of how they reflect this learning in their daily lives. Collective worship is distinctively Christian. The lighting of three candles at the beginning of worship is related to Christian teaching about God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is followed by a Christian greeting, in which the whole community participates with thoughtful enthusiasm. Worship is also inclusive, in that pupils are invited to encounter and to explore Christianity without any sense of having the Christian faith imposed upon them.

Worship reflects the Anglican tradition. Pupils have a well developed knowledge and understanding of the church's year. Worship takes place in the parish church, both on major Christian festivals and on one Friday morning each month. The latter attracts a large number of parents and carers and nurtures their sense of being part of a worshipping community. The support which staff receive in their leadership of worship is mainly from Anglican clergy. Visitors from other denominations are less well represented, and this restricts pupils' experience of other Christian traditions.

Prayer and reflection have a central place in the life of the school. These are encouraged by the range of prayers, including the Lord's Prayer, displayed around the school. In addition to prayer in collective worship, prayers are said at other times during the day. For example, pupils take it in turns to lead a prayer at lunchtime, and all join in saying the Federation Prayer at the end of the day. In collective worship, pupils are invited to pray in response to the theme. Many volunteer to do so, and their contributions reveal both deep reflection and the significant impact which worship has on their spiritual understanding and development. Reflection areas in the hall and in each classroom are well-supplied with a range of Christian resources, and these areas are well used. For example, prayer books, in which pupils write their own prayers, reflect their understanding of prayer as including saying 'thank you' and 'sorry' as well as asking for things. They also reveal how much pupils seek out opportunities for prayer and reflection.

In addition to contributing to collective worship, pupils have regular opportunities to plan and lead worship. Monitoring and evaluation are very well developed. After each act of worship, one or two pupils are invited to complete an evaluation sheet. Their responses are used to informing planning. Evaluation from other stakeholders, including clergy and parents, is also used effectively.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

RE has a high profile in the school. Pupils speak very positively about the subject and about how they enjoy their work. They are clear that expectations of progress and attainment in RE are the same as for other subjects. They learn extremely well, with standards of attainment in RE being equal to, and often exceeding, those in other subjects. The majority of time is given to Christianity. This results in pupils' developing a very good knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith. Their knowledge of biblical stories is particularly strong. Other faiths are also studied, both in RE lessons and in RE days which have a multi-faith focus. This work enables pupils to explore links between different beliefs and practices. For example, a lesson about the Last Supper was linked effectively to Judaism and to the Jewish celebration of Passover. Pupils value their work on other faiths and speak of this work as developing their knowledge and understanding of, and their respect for, religious and cultural diversity.

Pupils' attention and engagement in lessons are excellent. They are very eager to respond to questions. Questioning is well differentiated to meet the needs of all learners, and its open nature encourages reflection and deeper thinking. Teaching enables pupils to develop and apply a wide range of higher level skills. For example, a lesson which looked at how Easter is celebrated throughout the world was particularly effective in promoting skills such as enquiry, analysis and interpretation. It was also an example of how teaching in RE develops pupils' spiritual, social and cultural development, and not least their understanding of Christianity as multi-cultural world faith. Links with the school's core values feature prominently in RE. This enables pupils to develop a full understanding of their roots in Christian belief and teaching, and makes a significant contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Assessment takes a variety of forms. The marking of pupils' books is effective in using extension questions to promote deeper thinking and further learning. Class journals reveal how well pupils reflect on their learning and on the larger questions and issues raised by their work.

Subject leadership has a high level of subject expertise. In RE, a new model of leadership is building on this expertise and is helping to ensure that monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are fully effective in determining strategies to drive improvement.

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

The school's executive headteacher provides inspirational leadership. She and the governing body are deeply committed to the school as a church school. They articulate, promote and live out a vision for the school which is rooted in Christian belief and teaching. They describe, with confidence and conviction, the profound impact which this vision has on the whole life of the school. Governors are very 'hands-on', and their regular and well-focussed visits ensure that they are effective in offering both support and challenge. Procedures for monitoring and evaluating the school's life and work are well established and involve all groups in the school community. These give senior leaders, including governors, a thorough understanding of the school's performance and distinctiveness, and they lead directly to strategies for improvement. For example, recent monitoring and evaluation have resulted in priority being given to the development of middle leaders. This is having a very positive effect on the strategic role and effectiveness of these members of staff. Staff speak of being encouraged and enabled to develop their skills, and they and governors respond well to training opportunities.

The school is an outward-looking community. For example, the link with an inner-city school contributes powerfully to the experience of both groups of pupils, and particularly to their understanding of local and national communities. The relationship with the local church is very strong and mutually beneficial. Church members speak of the school as 'breathing new life into the church' and 'helping the church to have a higher profile.' School staff contribute to the church's monthly family service, while the school benefits from the highly valued involvement, both in worship and more broadly, of the local priest and lay minister. Parents speak very positively of the school as 'a family' and of the responsiveness of the school to any issues or problems. They greatly value the opportunities they have to contribute to the school's life and work. For example, a group of parents volunteer their time each week to support pupils in their reading. Relationships with the diocese are strong. Being part of a federation with Longhorsley First School brings rich benefits to both communities, not least in the sharing of staff expertise.

Leaders have ensured that the area for development identified in the last SIAS inspection in 2013 has been addressed effectively, in, for example, celebrating the unique contribution of each member of staff. The priority which leaders give to collective worship and RE leads to high standards in both areas. Leaders also ensure that arrangements for collective worship and RE meet statutory requirements.