

*Whittingham C.of E.Controlled First  
School,  
Whittingham,  
ALNWICK,  
Northumberland,  
NE66 4UP.*



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**28<sup>th</sup> March 2014**

Dear Parents/Carers

Please find attached a copy of the report from our recent Siams Church Inspection. We are again amazingly proud of another excellent inspection report.

We would like to thank all the Staff, Children, Parents and Governors for their commitment to our wonderful school, and to ensuring that we continue to work as a team to help our children achieve the best of their ability.

Enjoy reading the attached report.

Kind regards

John Rutherford  
Chair of Governors

Belinda Athey  
Headteacher



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

### Whittingham Church of England Voluntary Controlled School

Alnwick  
Northumberland  
NE66 4UP

#### Diocese: Newcastle

Local authority: Northumberland  
Date of inspection: March 14<sup>th</sup> 2014  
Date of last inspection: April 28th 2009  
School's unique reference number: 122279  
Headteacher: Belinda Athey  
Inspector's name and number: Mike Falcus (no. 694)

#### School context

Whittingham Church of England First School is a small rural school serving a wide area. There are 58 pupils on roll and nine in the nursery class; all are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is below average; no pupil has a statement of special educational need and the number supported by the pupil premium is low. The school has seen significant staffing changes since the last inspection. The headteacher took up post in 2011 and the two other teachers in 2013.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Whittingham as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The central, shared Christian vision and values understood and articulated by all stakeholders
- The inspirational leadership and deep Christian conviction of the headteacher and her unrelenting pursuit of excellence
- The shared leadership of high quality, imaginative worship which permeates all areas of school life and leads to outstanding relationships across the school
- The outstanding links between school, church, clergy and the local community

#### Areas to improve

- Explore opportunities to increase children's understanding of other faiths and the Anglican church world-wide
- Ensure pupils are given more frequent opportunities to evaluate worship across the school to enhance further its quality and relevance

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

This truly Christian, values-laden school makes a huge impact on children's personal and academic development. Stakeholders are able to articulate the school's central message, "Jesus is at the heart of our school". They acknowledge the way it permeates through the school community: "the fruits of this are honesty, respect, truth and courtesy" (foundation governor); "the Christian ethos is the heart of the school" (parent); "all of us, children and adults, are important to God" (adviser). Children and adults recognise the importance and meaning of the Christian values which underpin its ethos and are displayed throughout school and on all documentation. For example, one child stated "wisdom shows us how to make the right decisions". "Love" said another "teaches us we have to be kind to one another and teachers". Core values impact on the academic performance of pupils: most children enter school at expected levels but all make good progress whatever their starting points. The most able are well challenged and special needs and free school meals pupils succeed as well as their peers. By year four all are well prepared for their next stage in learning. Children recognise that being a Christian school "helps us to work better, because Jesus is right beside you to help". The consistent emphasis on forgiveness and a fresh start helps all children to succeed. One governor described it as "the confidence to fail".

Christian values seen in RE, worship and across the curriculum nourish and strengthen children's social, moral, spiritual and cultural development (SMSC). The children are wonderfully behaved, considerate to one another and respectful to adults. This is the result of the love and devotion of all staff who work hard to provide an outstanding curriculum full of memorable learning opportunities. Children are consequently happy and eager to learn. Pupils' spiritual development is supported by displays and symbols present in all parts of the school. Reflective areas in each class and the use of age appropriate worship resources in early years allow children opportunities to reflect and pray. For example, after playing with artefacts from the story of Noah a four year old reflected "the rainbow is God's promise not to send a flood again". The atmosphere of loving, mutual support results in excellent relationships across the school community. "Relations between everyone are fantastic" (parent); "morale is excellent, we respect and value one another" (teacher); "Christian values are felt in the air as soon as you come through the door" (support assistant).

The status and teaching of Religious Education (RE) makes a significant contribution to the school's Christian ethos. It provides a platform for children to explore Christian values and prayer through units such as the "Teachings of Jesus" and "Why Do Christians Pray?". Quality teaching provides opportunities for children to think more deeply. For instance, in Year Three/Four the teacher effectively used scripture and paintings to evoke an emotional response from pupils to the story of Jesus in the desert. The use of the Diocesan resource "Chatterbox" in early years is particularly powerful and age appropriate. After interacting with artefacts and bibles about the story of Joseph a four year old boy mused "I was jealous when my friend took his train away". Work in RE books shows standards are high; they showcase the varied and imaginative cross-curricular activities on offer to pupils (such as the Lindisfarne Gospels project). Children recognise the part played by RE in helping them to understand and appreciate Christianity and other faiths: "We learn about Jesus and bible stories to live our lives better"; "we visit the mosque and synagogue so that we know what they believe in and what they pray about". However the RE/worship development plan acknowledges that there is still further work to do in this area to increase children's understanding of diverse communities.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding**

Collective worship is central to the life of the school and valued by all stakeholders. One parent



commented "everything they do is a sort of worship". It is explicitly Christian and is very well planned and organised using the Leicestershire Themes for Worship. It provides opportunities for children to explore both Christian values and the calendar of church festivals. Pupils are very comfortable with and enjoy worship. Comments included, "it makes me feel tingly...it helps me feel close to God". Pupils are fully engaged and respond well to quality acts of worship. It is highly interactive. Pupils were seen leading singing, presenting PowerPoint images and paintings, scribing, discussing and spontaneously composing prayers in family groups. Children stated they really appreciate the opportunities for participation and reflection but added they would like there to be more drama and dance. Prayer is embedded in the life of the school. Class prayers are said each day and reflective areas are used by children to compose their own thoughts for family and those in need. There are opportunities for prayer and reflection in every act of worship and in RE. For example in one lesson, children used scripture and painted images of Jesus in the Wilderness to reflect deeply on hopefulness. The resulting post-its included "Jesus never gives up" and "He follows the ways of God". Responding to an image of Jesus sheltering in a cave one child reflected "I never realised it rained in the desert. I love to watch the rainfall". The great strength of worship in the school is the involvement of so many stakeholders.

All teachers, visiting clergy, lay people, pupils and the head teacher are involved in its planning and delivery. One teacher commented "we enjoy it and it's important for children to see us modelling Christian values". The headteacher/co-ordinator ensures it is carefully monitored and evaluated. This is illustrated by the worship file which contains extensive plans, records and weekly teacher evaluations of worship. The vicar of St Bartholomew's works closely with the headteacher to plan and evaluate the quality of worship, which includes visits to lessons. Pupils are canvassed for their views termly but state they would appreciate being consulted more often.

The support from St Bartholomew's and other churches enables children to develop a rich understanding of Anglican practice. Moreover, parents recognise the value of church/school celebrations: "they pitch it perfectly...you can see by children's responses they know what they're doing is important".

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

Whittingham CE School has a clear understanding of its Christian character. The leadership of the headteacher is inspirational. At a time of significant change, she has been unrelenting in her pursuit of excellence but "with a Christian perspective" (adviser). This is illustrated by her sensitive counselling of a teacher who had recently suffered a family bereavement.

The governing body have a "shared understanding of the Christian beliefs of the school to drive improvement" (foundation governor). They are prepared to challenge underperformance. For example, members of the target-setting committee supported the head in introducing a new phonics programme following disappointing results in the 2013 test.

Governors understand their responsibility for sharing the school ethos with the community. The vicar of St Bartholomew's and headteacher, both appointed in 2011, acted as the catalyst for drawing up the new vision statement. This involved working with staff and children and disseminating the outcomes to other governors and parents. Its success may be seen in that every stakeholder is able to articulate that "Jesus is the heart of our school" (see section one).

The headteacher, staff and governors are effectively using the SIAMS Schedule to evaluate the school as a church school. Results feed into ongoing development plans for the coming year.

The school is well prepared for the future leadership of church schools. This is being achieved through the support of the head's Associate Adviser, Diocesan training and its role in the Alnwick partnership of church schools. The partnership between school, church and the local community is outstanding. The school adviser describes the relationship as "symbiotic".

Pupils, parents and villagers value the "open invitation" to join the services held in St Bartholomew's such as the recent celebration led by the Bishop of Newcastle. The vicar and other clergy regularly visit school to deliver worship and pastorally support staff.

Villagers speak with pride of their links with the school such as the weekly lunch club and village history project. Parents are extremely positive about "their school" as shown by the absence of any negative comments on the latest questionnaires.

The school recognises that it needs to develop further links with other faith communities and the Anglican church world-wide and has planned for this over the coming year. Nevertheless, there is pride in this special rural school as summed up by its associate adviser: "a Christian values led school in the heart of its community".

SIAMS report March 2014 Whittingham Church of England Primary Whittingham NE66 4UP