



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Whitfield CE VA Primary School

Whitfield
Hexham
NE47 8JH

Previous SIAMS grade: Outstanding

Current inspection grade: Inadequate

Diocese: Newcastle

Local authority: Northumberland
Dates of inspection: 23 June 2016
Date of last inspection: 26 January 2011
School's unique reference number: 122303
Headteacher: Erica Carter
Inspector's name and number: Mary Cook 811

School context

Whitfield CE VA Primary is a small school with 40 pupils on roll serving a large rural area. In both 2014 and 2016 the school was deemed to require special measures in section 5 inspections. There has been a continual turnover of teaching staff in the last two years: an Acting Headteacher has been in place since June 2015. Parallel consultations are being undertaken regarding the possible closure of the school, in addition to seeking an academy sponsor to safeguard the future of Whitfield. The school is planning to de-federate from the West Tyne Federation of Church Schools: the Governing Body will be re-constituted. In 2014 the school changed from first to primary designation, extending provision to educate Year 5 and 6 pupils. The school community is being supported by the Rector of Whitfield.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Whitfield CE VA Primary as a Church of England school are inadequate

- Supportive relationships between all members of the school community generate resilience during periods of change and uncertainty.
- The involvement and ministry of the parish priest delivers wider pastoral provision for the school community.

Areas to improve

- Develop governance and leadership by using the SIAMS evaluation framework as a tool for self-evaluation so that there is a firm foundation and understanding of Christian distinctiveness to strategically drive forward school improvement.
- Provide training and guidance for all staff in Religious Education (RE) and collective worship so that they are equipped to promote high quality, engaging provision.
- Systematically review the RE syllabus and related planning to cater for the needs of Year 5/6 pupils, extending their understanding of Christianity and major world faiths.
- Involve pupils in the planning, delivery and self-evaluation of collective worship to

develop their reverence and spirituality.

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

Whitfield is experiencing a time of uncertainty but has garnered tremendous support from parents and members of the wider community who regard the school as the main focal point in the area. They speak highly of the staff and appreciate the quality of the relationships, in some cases established in quite a short period of time given the staff turnover. Many travel long distances to attend the school because of its family atmosphere and the care and concern shown for their children, attributed to the Bible teaching 'Love thy neighbour.' The school priority to raise attainment is having some success in that results for all year groups are now more in line with national age-related expectations in English and mathematics; however there remains a pressing need for more accelerated progress in Year 5/6. Attendance is above the national average, as the children mostly enjoy coming to school even though they may have concerns about provision in the future. The community is proving to be exceptionally resilient and this is reflected in the Acting Headteacher who is new to leadership in a church school, but is much respected in terms of determination to succeed. Governance is in a continual period of change as the consultations on de-federating and school closure take place: Christian distinctiveness is currently regarded as an extra responsibility and not placed at the heart of strategic planning and review. This is having a detrimental effect on Religious Education (RE) as the curriculum does not fully extend the learning of the oldest children in school. Moreover, the children do not possess the rich vocabulary to explain core values and spirituality. Pupils are exceptionally articulate and fully engage in discussing subject areas that interest them, but have difficulty in identifying key values that are upheld in school, and do not attribute life skills, for example, sharing, to Christian values such as love or koinonia. The school is extending the children's social and cultural knowledge of the wider world with the Make Shift Project relating to refugees and the Save the Children Den Day, resulting in charitable endeavour. Assembly themes reflect the cyclical nature of the liturgical year and provide opportunity for moral education and some spiritual development. Shared services in church are well attended and the Rector's pastoral ministry is much appreciated by members of the school community during this period of constant change.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is satisfactory

The pupils show attentive behaviour in worship, listening carefully and engaging with the leader. The worship rota is mostly based on major Christian festivals and Bible stories; there is also flexibility to reflect local and global needs. Worship is of a broadly Christian nature with the inclusion of some Anglican practice such as readings from the Bible and traditional prayers. This provides the children with a good understanding of the major Church festivals, but less so the Holy Trinity which should be further developed. There is insufficient consideration of Christian values during worship, for example, discussions around making good choices tend to reflect a moral compass rather than a theological basis. The pupils have opportunities to write their own prayers which are displayed throughout the school. However, many associate prayer with set occasions, such as taking part in school assembly, services in church or completing an activity in class. As a result, prayer is under-valued on a personal level which limits the spiritual development of some pupils. There are few opportunities for the children to lead worship which would help them more readily identify with Christian values and to overcome any inhibitions when talking about their own spirituality. All staff contribute to the delivery of worship, but due to other school priorities none have had any training to assist their own understanding of the essential components, therefore, this has made them reliant on published materials which varies in quality and Christian content. The school is well supported by the Rector of Whitfield, who is a regular visitor delivering collective worship and establishing a chaplaincy role for the whole school community. The parents regard the worship held at church or in the wider community such as the Candlemas service to be thought-provoking and enriching. The children take part in the Diocesan Leavers Service held at Newcastle Cathedral, which introduces them to a broader church family. There is some informal monitoring of

worship but there is a need for more robust self-evaluation to determine the impact of collective worship over time, with the involvement of pupils, parents and staff; this will provide the opportunity to review the provision on a more regular basis and to make further improvements.

The effectiveness of the religious education is satisfactory

The school assessment and tracking system indicates that achievement in RE for the majority of learners is consistent with national expectations, but this is yet to show progress from their starting points. In Early Years, the children are encouraged to develop their knowledge of the world through role play: they speak confidently about God and Jesus. The quality of teaching in observations is good; particularly the precision questioning about miracle stories and what they tell us about Jesus. The children are keen to articulate a response and show a wide range of vocabulary. In Year 2/3 there is a wealth of stimulus for the children to consider including food tasting and making boxes for special objects. However there is a tendency for a task to be set with a specific English objective, and marked accordingly, rather than developing a discrete RE concept. The school adopted the Blackburn Diocesan RE syllabus prior to becoming a primary school in 2014: the impact of the provision has not been evaluated, nor has the planning cycle been altered to cater specifically for the needs of Year 5/6 pupils. As a result the older children have a superficial understanding of key aspects of Christianity and its place as a multicultural world faith. The remoteness of the school and costly transport fees influence the choice of units of work, therefore visits to places of worship other than local churches do not take place which limits the children's knowledge of other major world faiths. The Make Shift Project with Newcastle University is partially addressing this; the children are meeting refugees and learning about their journey which has included references to religious intolerance and a strong faith commitment. The pupils are gaining a valuable insight and some are changing their views after reflecting on their visitors' story. Members of the local Bahá' í community attend the school, and their relatives visit to talk about their faith and the impact this has on their way of life. This too helps the pupils develop respect towards others. Staff and leaders identify RE as a subject in which they would welcome training and guidance in order to review the current syllabus to ensure greater depth and breadth of the children's knowledge. Governors accept that the development of RE has not been a priority in recent times and are keen to address this.

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

Although the school meets statutory obligations for religious education and the provision of a daily act of worship there is a decline in standards from the previous inspection due to the focus of the governing body on school re-organisation and the immediate requirement to address standards in the core subjects. Standards in English and mathematics are improving, however there is still a need for children in upper Key Stage 2 to make more accelerated progress: this is difficult to assess given historical gaps in assessment and record keeping. The development points previously set in the inspection of 2011 have not been addressed. Consequently, the children have yet to evaluate collective worship. The school is lacking a teacher suitably trained in teaching and leading RE. The teaching staff follow the suggested activities in the syllabus to the best of their ability, but would benefit from additional guidance to tailor the lessons to challenge the children further and to fully exploit the learning opportunities that arise. The Acting Headteacher has had little training on leading a church school but has great enthusiasm and is beginning to articulate a Christian vision: as this is in its infancy there is limited impact on the daily practice. In the melee of the changing staffing and educational landscape, the Governors are failing to use the Christian distinctiveness as a means to drive forward school improvement. Hence, action plans centre around the core subjects rather than considering how every child could flourish in their potential as a child of God. The lack of strategic planning and formal evaluation means that the RE syllabus has not been reviewed to cater explicitly for Year 5/6 pupils. This has a direct impact on their knowledge and understanding of Christianity and other world faiths. Informal evaluation of worship is not related to the SIAMS Framework and although valuable, does not reflect the children's voice, in particular their views about prayer. Some children are nervous about the prospect of further staff change and the future of

their school. The move to de-federate from local schools is being undertaken to provide an opportunity for the governing body to focus solely on Whitfield, so that they can invest sufficient energy and resources into school improvement and finding an academy partner. The school is well supported by the Diocese and this is appreciated by the governing body and the parents who are exceptionally loyal to Whitfield and praise the work undertaken by individuals seeking to secure the future of the school.

SIAMS report June 2016 Whitfield CE VA Primary School, Whitfield NE47 8JH