



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Cockerton Voluntary Aided Primary School

Newton Lane
Darlington
DL3 9EX

Previous SIAMS grade: Outstanding

Current inspection grade: Outstanding

Diocese: Durham

Local authority: Darlington

Dates of inspection: 9 July 2015

Date of last inspection: 2 July 2010

School's unique reference number: 114212

Headteacher: Wendy Aitken

Inspector's name and number: Canon Brian Hedley NS619

School context

Cockerton is a slightly smaller than average-sized primary school. The number of those known to be eligible for pupil premium is above national average; the proportion of pupils receiving special educational needs support is similar to the national average. There have been significant changes to the senior leadership team over the last two years. The current headteacher took up post in April 2015; this is a shared headship arrangement with High Coniscliffe – an outstanding Church of England primary school.

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

- The headteacher, senior team and governors provide strong leadership and ensure that the Christian ethos pervades and shapes decision-making and drives action
- High-quality relationships at all levels result in outstanding pastoral support; pupils feel safe, valued and encouraged to rise to the learning challenge
- Worship is integral, relevant, engaging, and together with the work of the chaplain and vicar, sustains the pastoral and spiritual life of the school
- Religious Education (RE) contributes hugely towards the Christian character of the school and challenges pupils' thinking about diversity and difference within different faiths
- Mutually beneficial partnerships especially with the parish are serving the local community very well and promote a sense of belonging and joint responsibility

Areas to improve

- Ensure that all pupils respond to questions raised by teachers in RE marking
- Formalise the collection and analysis of evidence from pupils, parents, staff and visitors to evaluate more effectively the overall impact of the governors' Worship Policy
- Link the SIAMS Evaluation Schedule 2014 to overall performance data to ensure that the Christian character of the school is benchmarked more robustly

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

'Christian love in action' lies at the heart of life at Cockerton. Core values are embedded in the school's ethos, teaching and care; adults know children inside out. As a result everyone is inspired, driven, and well-supported in a calm, peaceful learning environment. The carefully planned, effectively delivered curriculum, sensitive learning intervention and the work of dedicated support staff enable all pupils to do well; they achieve at least in line with national expectations. Attendance and behaviour are good and frequently better; this has contributed towards a positive climate for learning. Modelling of Christian values by adults and their careful nurturing of pupils helps children to make the link between the teachings of Christ and the choices they make in relation to learning and behaviour. For example one parent explained that, 'our children are loved and cherished and are taught moral values equal to the ones we live at home', and a pupil explained that, 'Our values are really important because they help us to work hard and look after each other'. Another said, 'You're not allowed to be a lazy thinker in this school; they encourage us all the time to do well and to be responsible'. Parents confirm that the school forges strong, positive links with home and the wider community; the recently-appointed chaplain is recognised as a lead player in this. Parents are glowing in their praise for the whole staff team who, after a time of difficulty, work relentlessly to make sure that children are 'happy and want to come to school'. These partnerships result in joint responsibility for the care, well-being and learning of all. Religious Education follows the locally-agreed syllabus and lies at the heart of the curriculum. This includes opportunities for children to explore a range of religious traditions in their own community and further afield whilst looking at how these shape lives. Strong links with the parish and a range of charitable fundraising activities are helping pupils appreciate those with needs different to their own and are making a significant contribution to pupils' moral and social development.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

The school's arrangements for collective worship meet statutory requirements; the 'family' come together for worship every day. No-one is withdrawn because sensitive planning and delivery ensures that people of other faiths and of none are respected and included. This was illustrated by a pupil who explained that, 'I don't believe in God, but it's fun to learn about him – the things we do in worship help me to make the right choices'. The well-planned cycle of themes has a strong Christian focus, is based on the Church's year and reflects Anglican traditions. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of the Bible and Christian faith, including their awareness of the person of Jesus Christ and God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are explored sensitively. As a result pupils are confident when discussing such things and demonstrate a growing spiritual maturity. For example one pupil explained that in worship, 'we get to learn about God and Jesus and other great people and it helps us to live better lives'; another said, 'in worship we take it in, think about it, then make our decisions.' Strong links with St Mary's parish church and regular involvement of the vicar means that there are many varied worship opportunities, all of which contribute to spiritual development and well-being of individuals and the whole community. Pupils speak confidently about the elements of worship which are important to them and how they help shape their lives. They value gathering, celebrating, reflecting and learning together as a whole school and are particularly happy about the occasions when they lead worship themselves. The Lord's Prayer, school prayer, enthusiastic singing, liturgical responses and times of stillness are well-established practice. An excellent Agape service for younger learners witnessed on the day of inspection was an outstanding example of active, meaningful engagement by pupils, staff, family and church members. Older pupils are able to reflect in a mature and much deeper way; for example on the place of the Eucharist in school worship and the meaning behind the rituals of the different parts of the liturgy. Systems for evaluating the effectiveness of worship need to be formalised. The views of pupils, parents, clergy, staff, and the subsequent analysis and action planning from this information would form tighter, more tangible evidence of the effectiveness of the governors' Worship Policy.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Religious Education (RE) follows the diocesan Agreed Syllabus. The newly appointed co-ordinator is passionate about the subject and its place in human flourishing. She is well-supported by the senior team. Her sensible, informed decisions have enabled teachers to grow in confidence with regard to delivery of the new curriculum, to improve their own subject knowledge and to increase their ability to assess the quality of RE learning. Plans to revise and tighten up on pupil tracking and to moderate attainment both within Cockerton and its partner school are timely. Teachers rightly continue to make adjustments to planning in order to better meet the needs of learners. The quality of teaching is at least good with much of it outstanding, as observed on inspection day. Current data shows that learners make progress in line with national expectations with a growing number attaining higher. It is not yet possible to judge long-term progress because of the introduction of the new syllabus and associated assessment. Teachers invest a huge amount of time in the quality of personalised feedback to learners: marking moves pupils forward with regard to next steps for learning in RE; it nearly always challenges them to think more deeply or to justify their point of view. However there are occasions where pupils have not always answered the questions posed, so some opportunities are lost. Pupils' knowledge and understanding deepen over the course of their time in school because lessons build on what they have previously learned. Children talk freely about the enjoyment they experience in RE; they can relate learning to their own lives and decision-making. There are good examples of many pupils using higher-level skills such as enquiry, analysis, interpretation, evaluation and reflection as they develop their own convictions and beliefs. Continued strategic planning for further development of these elements will raise RE standards further. The school meets the statutory requirements for religious education.

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

Christian values lie at the heart of life at Cockerton and inform decision-making and action. The relationship with St Mary's church family is very strong. This is one of the reasons why representatives of the community have jointly decided to root the school even more closely in its Christian foundation and parish by re-branding as St Mary's from September 2015. Everyone spoke with excitement about the launch and appeared energised by the impending change. During a fairly unsettled time it was the school's Christian ethos which was the key factor in holding things together. This ensured that the care and personal development of every child and adult was never compromised. The headteacher, only in post since April, has quickly established a trusting and strong relationship with governors and the staff team. As a result, their shared conviction and drive for continuous improvement is providing firm direction for the school. Parents suggested that, 'the morale of staff has never been higher'. Governors take their work seriously and know their school well. They have not yet established a suitable format to record the school's effectiveness as a Church school following publication of the SIAMS Evaluation Schedule 2013. As a result, current performance data does not accurately capture the relationship between Christian ethos and the huge impact this has had on raising standards. A system of feeding this information into future overviews of the school's overall performance should be considered at the earliest opportunity. The newly created partnership between High Coniscliffe Primary School and Cockerton is already bearing good fruit: sharing of expertise and resources are some of the advantages. Both schools rightly retain their own identity and are a strong presence in their respective villages. Collective worship and RE are well-led and managed; as a result the school meets the expectations of the National Society's 'Statement of Entitlement'. Strong and successful leadership and management are ensuring that professional development is closely related to the priorities identified in the school improvement plan; this keeps everyone accountable.