

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Ebchester CE VC Primary School	Shaw Lane, Ebchester, Co. Durham. DH8 0QB
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese/Methodist District	Diocese of Durham
Previous SIAMS inspection grade:	Outstanding
Local authority	Durham
Date of inspection	October 5 2016
Date of last inspection	December 8 2011
School's unique reference number	114214
Headteacher	Dorothy Parry
Inspector's name and number	Mary Pedley NS361

School context

This small semi-rural school has 84 pupils and serves a village community and neighbouring villages close to the Durham-Northumberland border. Fewer than half of the pupils live in Ebchester. The proportion of children from ethnic minority backgrounds is small, but this has grown over recent years. All pupils speak English as their first language and some are bilingual. The proportion of pupils claiming free school meals is low (15%), but Pupil Premium numbers are higher (25%). The Headteacher is on phased retirement, working three days each week. The Assistant Headteacher is Acting Headteacher for the other two days.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Ebchester Voluntary Controlled Primary School as a Church of England school are good

- The Christian ethos is an integral part of daily life and is underpinned by strong Christian values embedded across the whole school community. As a result, relationships are strong at every level.
- A good and effective shared leadership model impacts positively on staff and pupils and leads to improvement over time.
- Good quality Worship and Religious Education (RE) teaching enables pupils to make gains in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their understanding of Christianity and other world faiths.
- A positive, caring and nurturing relationship between all in the school community, including parents, creates a clear and inclusive sense of the school as a 'family'.

Areas to improve

- Further expand the role of governors through monitoring of Christian character and collective worship, to ensure greater impact on self-evaluation and development planning (a focus for development in the last inspection in 2011).
- Ensure pupils' achievement in RE is raised by creating opportunities for the co-ordinator to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning regularly and to contribute towards school development planning.
- Allow pupils more responsibility in planning and leading whole-school worship and use the evaluation of its effectiveness to inform improvement planning.

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

The Christian character is strong and Christian values are seen in every aspect of school life with pupils fully able to explain and practise these. There are good and happy relationships where care for each other is evident throughout all Key Stages and seen in several ways, e.g. individual 'buddies' for each child new to school and to different year groups, playground 'buddies', and Young Leaders who organise play-time games. Pupils, whatever their age, respond well to and are proud of their responsibilities and roles, taking these very seriously. Some pupils coming from other schools into older year groups are befriended and supported by a 'peer group pupil' responsible for their wellbeing while settling in, thus demonstrating Christian values in practice. This is also clearly seen through their achievement in helping others through projects run by The Archbishop of York's Trust Award and Durham Constabulary's Mini Police scheme.

Achievement across the school is at least good, with many pupils making very good progress from low starting points on entry. RE teaching and learning are good, with pupils' attainment being mostly equal to that of other subjects. Pupils in all Key Stages are given good opportunities to develop and explore their spirituality through worship and RE lessons; activities are designed to encourage thinking and reflection. Pupils realise the value of RE lessons especially where learning is 'fun'. Christianity and other world faiths are taught throughout the school, with valuable evidence seen in class portfolios and pupils' books, showing that they make good or better progress. Governors say that staff and pupils are 'absorbed into the Christian ethos of the school'. This is clearly evident and seen in the positive behaviour and relationships throughout the school which create a supportive environment where pupils feel safe. A child in Y2 said that her class was, 'one big family'.

The school environment, both inside and out, enhances the curriculum and reflects a distinctively Christian character, e.g. displays of children's work, award achievement, and involvement in church, local, national and global communities. Pupils spoke thoughtfully of others who had less than they did, thus demonstrating their clear awareness and knowledge in caring for the environment and the Earth's resources. They are proud of produce grown in the polytunnel, cooked and eaten in school.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective Worship is given a clear profile and is central to the school's daily life. The parish priest and all staff share in leading worship following planned themes each week. These are based on the school's recent focus on Christian values, the Church's Christian calendar, other faiths' festivals and current events e.g. responding to suffering in Syria. Staff review worship termly to discuss points for improvement and pupils can 'offer comments', though little is recorded formally. Pupils value worship time where 'we can learn and think about God', and 'for quiet time to reflect on the things we have and have not done.' The weekly celebration assembly not only recognises pupils' achievements through 'Star of the week' but also through the 'head teacher's award' which celebrates those who have been seen to practise Christian values through 'good deeds'. Staff guide pupils in sharing the leading of class worship, though older pupils expressed the wish to be more involved in planning as well as leading class worship.

In worship seen, every pupil was completely involved in working out the values enacted in a stimulating mini-play involving breakfast food. Pupils respond positively to worship through singing, acting and leading prayers which are thoughtfully written. They know and use features that are Anglican, e.g. their confident reply to 'The Lord be with you', at the start of each worship time. Worship encourages good spiritual growth where time is given for pupils' own prayer time through reflection and closing with The Lord's Prayer. They gain good spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding of how Old and New Testament stories and the life of Jesus are relevant to today's world and in their own lives. The outcome of this is seen in the value and importance pupils give to their involvement in local and national fundraising activities, with the School Council deciding which charities to support.

There is now a well-established and valued link with the parish church, St. Ebba's, and its priest, who celebrates a termly Eucharist and holds 'Messy Church' in school. Pupils enjoy some RE learning in church as well as celebrating Christian festivals there, e.g. they had just celebrated Harvest. Visitors, governors, parents, staff and pupils occasionally offer written 'reflections' about worship time, using a simple format. Though these are useful in encouraging a sense of spirituality, prayer and reflection, they are not evaluative. More formal and meaningful evaluation of worship by pupils and adults would enhance the impact of worship and ensure it maintains a clear profile in the daily life of the school.

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

The school has an effective shared leadership model that works well for all in this school. Because the head teacher is retiring later this school year, her role is being shared through the week with an assistant head teacher. This is valuable in developing a future church school leader for this or another school, as well as enabling both to add beneficially to many aspects of school management, provision and performance. Both leaders work well with governors to provide positive leadership and management, based on a distinctively Christian vision for taking the school forward and encouraging good collaboration in the school community. A focus for development (inspection 2011) identified the need to, 'ensure all pupils are confident in knowing and understanding the Christian origins of the school's values and are able to articulate them'. This is now fully achieved and is seen through a Christian vision clearly based on Christian values, shared and practised by all in school and impacting well on pupils' progress, achievement and well-being.

50% of the school's pupils are from outside the catchment area with parents and carers choosing this school because the Christian ethos and welcoming environment are important features for them. They know their children will flourish and benefit from an inclusive vision where staff ensure every pupil is able to reach their full potential. Parents greatly value the school, appreciating the Christian values and learning seen in their children. They speak very positively of how staff relate to them, with one parent recalling a difficult time when much needed sympathy and support was given, with the reassurance to, 'Trust us, we'll look after your child'.

Standards of achievement in RE match those of the core subjects, with these being in line with national data. The RE co-ordinator is part time and manages her role well in the available time, supporting class teachers in their RE knowledge and assessing achievement for every child. Leaders and managers could enhance standards and achievement in RE by creating opportunities for the co-ordinator to develop monitoring and evaluating systems for teaching and learning which lead to improving pupils' overall attainment.

A governor spoke of being 'very proud of the school, believing that children are 'rounded' and ready to be part of the bigger world by the time they leave'. Though governors are positive in their support for the leaders, they realise that a more pro-active contribution to some management aspects would enhance their involvement in school self-evaluation and improvement: in particular through developing their monitoring roles further to give them better understanding of the school as a church school. A focus for development in the last inspection (2011) identified the need for governors to review and evaluate collective worship; this still stands as an area for improvement.

The school has a lot to celebrate: a caring family atmosphere, the commitment of staff to provide the best education for every child in a Christian context, pupils who thrive and make good progress, and a high level of parental satisfaction.

SIAMS report. October 2016. Ebchester CE VC Primary School. DH8 0QB