



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Wark Church of England Aided First School

Wark
Hexham
NE48 3LS

Previous SIAMS grade: Good

Current inspection grade: Good

Diocese: Newcastle

Local authority: Northumberland
Dates of inspection: 21st January 2016
Date of last inspection: 6th October 2010
School's unique reference number: 122300
Headteacher: Amanda Lewis
Inspector's name and number: Mary Cook 811

School context

Wark Church of England First School is very small. It serves the village of Wark, a large rural area, and currently has 31 children on roll many of whom are provided with home/ school transport to facilitate their attendance. The Headteacher also leads Greenhaugh School. Recently a full-time teacher with leadership responsibility has been employed to strengthen the team. There is currently a vacancy in the ecclesiastical parish and the school is being supported by the neighbouring Chollerton Benefice.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Wark CE VA First School as a Church of England school are good

- A well-established relationship between the church, community and school contributes significantly to values and practice.
- An able and committed team of adults support the children in their mission of stewardship and sustainability, rearing animals and growing food together.
- An inspirational Religious Education (RE) subject leader delivering the subject in creative and thought-provoking ways fully engages the children in their learning and development.
- Well-planned and inclusive worship helps to structure the week and contributes to the spiritual development of all involved.

Areas to improve

- Further develop the ways in which pupils can evaluate, reflect and give a personal response to the worship themes to help them make connections and confidently articulate the Christian values which underpin the life of the school.
- Consider ways to support the staff when the current worship and RE subject leader retires in April, developing their capacity to teach RE and to maintain and further improve the distinctive Christian ethos.
- Ensure that the significance of the school's Anglican foundation, ecumenical vision and community engagement is fully understood and acted upon by all stake-holders in the process of appointing a new priest for the parish so that the school continues to be well supported.

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

Wark CE First School's strong commitment to Christian values is clearly seen in the life of the school, notably through collective worship and RE. The Headteacher models the commitment made in the school ethos statement to provide 'a respectful caring environment where all children are helped to develop and learn to the best of their abilities.' Given the small number of children on roll, there is a highly-personalised and tailored curriculum to meet the needs of those in mixed-aged classes. Attainment of the pupils as shown in the end of Key Stage 1 results suggests a decline in standards. However the children have made expected progress from their starting point in reading and mathematics. Writing has been recognised as an area for development by the school and this is being addressed with an action plan. There are some excellent relationships within school which contribute to the ethos; this is shown in the exemplary attitudes and behaviour of the children. There is a mutually-supportive relationship between the Clergy and the local congregations who help arrange activities that the children and their families can contribute to, such as Messy Church. Worship and a sense of belonging to a wider community is enhanced in the partnership with other Church of England schools in the area who work together to arrange joint workshops and celebrations in locations such as Hexham Abbey. The school has responded to previous development points: the children enthusiastically talk about initiatives such as child-led worship, which involves them in planning for worship on a given theme, an area identified in the previous SIAS inspection. Parents are very supportive of the school and positive about the impact of the distinctive Christian ethos: one parent commented; 'It is different to other schools; it is family orientated, it is as though the school is reaching out to us.' Pupils feel safe and find all staff approachable and fair in their responses, whatever the context. They are still developing their vocabulary in order to describe the values they show each and every day. The RE subject leader has been assisted in organising CREativity, an after school club that gives the children an opportunity to respond to key stories from the Bible and to explore Christian concepts through drama and art. This enthuses the children who assist in making artefacts such as the worship table cloth depicting the seasons of the church year. The teaching of RE deepens the pupils' awareness of other religions and cultures and makes a positive contribution to the overall ethos of the school.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Worship has a significant impact on the life of the school: this is notable in the wholesome relationships established between the children and staff and the values espoused, especially when discussing the meaning of Bible stories in greater depth. The children show respect during worship, through excellent behaviour, readily contributing their own thoughts when asked to, and are keen to take on additional responsibilities. The children have become more involved in the planning of worship, as recommended in the last inspection, leading the school on a theme, based on the Christian values. Those who attend, including parents, believe this is a positive step as the children work closely together in planning and delivery and gain an insight about the values. However, there is scope to further develop the participation of the pupils in worship led by staff and visitors, such as leaving a significant question or task for the children to consider so that there is a broader impact of worship on the school community. Worship is of a broadly Christian nature, based on the church year, with the inclusion of Anglican practice such as greetings used in church, readings from the Bible and traditional prayers. The children have an understanding of God as Father and Son, however are less secure on the concept of the Holy Spirit and the Trinity. Pupils enjoy singing and learn both modern and the more conventional hymns commonly sung in the local churches so that they can actively join in the shared worship with other schools and congregations in the area. They enthusiastically sing hymns in public at events such as the Hexham music festival, taking strength from one another and showing an appreciation of the collective talent. The school is well-supported by the incumbent of the Chollerton Benefice, who is a governor and regular visitor to the school delivering collective worship, as agreed with teaching staff, and establishing a chaplaincy role for the whole school community. The parents regard the worship held at church or in the wider community

to be thought-provoking and enriching. Although there has been some monitoring of worship by governors, there is a need to include pupils in the self-evaluation to determine the impact of collective worship over time: 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 outstanding

The part-time RE subject leader has invested considerable time and energy into the implementation of the new Diocesan RE Syllabus drawing on her creative talent and providing memorable, outstanding lessons. The children exude enthusiasm for the subject, explaining RE is often fun and sometimes challenging. Standards by the end of Year 4 are higher than those in other core subjects. Teaching is personalised utilising drama, art and incisive questioning so all children readily access the curriculum. Pupils progress well in their learning about Christianity and are knowledgeable about Christians in the global community. The emphasis given to the teaching of Christianity is strengthened by the learning visits to church, and by involving the visiting priest in learning in school. This also offers good opportunities for the pupils' spiritual development. The children make connections between their learning and questions about God: when discussing prayer, one child asked 'How does God listen to everyone up there?' another answered in role; 'because I know you, and know your voice.' Care is taken to educate about other major world faiths including visits to non-Christian places of worship. Pupils have an understanding of the practices and beliefs of other faiths and cultures and have benefitted from people of other faiths sharing their beliefs and customs with them. The classroom and school environments reflect the importance of RE to the school with dedicated display space celebrating the children's thoughts and prayers. One display highlights the children's gratitude towards the contribution of others. The subject leader has ensured assessment systems are in place and has shared this information with the governing body.

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

The Headteacher, staff and governors place Christian values and ethos at the heart of this school: all are involved in planning at a strategic level to improve the opportunities for the children. Great importance is attached to the leadership of RE which is led with passion and a genuine commitment to excellence, consequently children progress well in the subject. The school, through the curriculum and educational visits engenders the pupils' greater global awareness and more of an understanding of multi-cultural Britain. Drawing on the experiences of the grandparents and members of the wider school community to offer advice on their various stewardship projects, the school has broadened the range of enrichment opportunities. This skilful weaving of talents and experience has helped to place the school at the centre of the community and has enhanced the already inclusive reputation. Furthermore, there is a significant impact on children's spiritual, moral social and cultural development shown in their responses to questions posed in RE. Self-evaluation of the school as a church school is shared by senior leaders who keep the governing body up to date; this has included sharing information about the standards in RE. The governors are very involved with the life of the school and have a good understanding of the distinctive ethos. The school meets the statutory requirements for both collective worship and RE. The school has excellent relationships with the local Anglican churches and schools: all work together in a spirit of partnership to enhance the Christian aspects of school life. There is a clear understanding of the need to develop future church school leaders, and the school has plans in place to support the future RE subject leader. Parents are supportive of and involved in, school life. They speak very positively of the care and support given to their children and value the Christian aspects of the school.

SIAMS report January 2016, Wark CE First School, Wark, Hexham NE48 3LS