

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Mary's Church of England Middle School

Diocese: Newcastle

Local authority: Northumberland

Dates of inspection: 30th March 2010

Date of last inspection: 6th July 2007

School's unique reference number: 131222

Headteacher: Mrs Lynne Brookes

Inspector's name and number: Mrs Jane Ackroyd 221

School context

St Mary's Church of England Aided Middle School is a small rural setting with 83 children, aged between 9 and 13, serving Belford and the local area. The vast majority of children are of white British origin with an average socio-economic background. There are an above average number of children with special needs. The Headteacher has been in post for six months.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Mary's Church of England Middle School as a Church of England school is satisfactory.

The school, with its new leadership team, is working exceptionally hard to lift the school's distinctiveness as a Church of England school. The Headteacher and governors are united in their vision for the school as a Christian educational establishment at the heart of the local community. Learners speak enthusiastically about their school. Expectations are high for all children. Since September the school has made enormous strides in developing the Christian character of the school. This now needs to become embedded.

Established strengths

- An environment where the strengths of each individual are nurtured and valued.
- Governors and staff are strongly supportive of the Christian ethos.
- The relationship with the local village and parish community

Focus for development

- To develop the involvement of children in the planning and delivery of worship.
- To revisit the school ethos statement and ensure that it makes explicit the Christian values upon which the school is based.
- To develop the environment in a way that enhances the spiritual life of the school, including developing spaces for reflection.

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

The school makes excellent provision for those with special needs and actively encourages equality of opportunity. Pupils understand that Christian values underpin the work of the school. The pen-pal link with children in Bradford is enabling Y5 to develop a deeper understanding of our multi-faith society. Children raise money for a range of charities and are working towards an eco-school award. Links with the local church and the involvement of the vicar and congregation assists understanding of the relevance of Christian values. There are some opportunities for reflection provided through display, but these need enhancing and a greater emphasis placing on opportunities for reflection and spiritual development. The Christian character of the school needs to be made more explicit in documentation then lived out day-by-day across the school community. The School Council is a confident and active group, delighted with the changes they have been empowered to effect. Children show an understanding of stewardship and are enthusiastic about their Fair Trade coffee morning; however they failed to make the link when developing the tuck shop, that Fair Trade items should be sold. One child, not a member of School Council, said she loved the fact that "everyone listens to your opinion just like you listen to theirs."

The impact of collective worship on the school community is satisfactory.

A daily act of worship is held, with good attendance by staff and some attendance by local volunteers and parents. Children are generally respectful and responsive; they enjoy singing, reading and acting. Worship is planned by the Headteacher with some collaboration with other staff and governors and is evaluated informally and formally. Children have no input to the long-term planning but enjoy preparing their class "assemblies" - these are acts of worship which they enjoy presenting, and are appreciated by their audience. In the school brochure (and by children), the act of worship is still referred to as 'assembly', although the children know that there is always prayer and at least one hymn. Impact had been felt by learners from recent worship on parables: "It makes you think how lucky you are". Annual Christian Festivals are celebrated in church; an increasing number of parents attend these services and feedback is supportive. A range of plans are afoot for measures to enhance the Christian message including a stained glass window and a mural. At present, the worship area lacks atmosphere. Resourcing has improved since the previous inspection but more work is needed. Children, governors and staff are appreciative of the improvements made to worship since September. There are already elements of good practice in the worship life of the school. Once this becomes embedded I am confident this element will become a central strand in the life and work of the school.

The effectiveness of the religious education is satisfactory

Pupils enjoy RE which is led by an experienced specialist. Work is planned using the Diocesan syllabus, in order to learn about and from the subject. Children make satisfactory progress in relation to attainment in core subjects. Recently, a system where children are able to assess their own learning and know what they need to do in order to improve, has been put in place. This will link into the new school tracking system. Resources are of good quality. However, the learning environment lacks vibrancy. There were no artefacts in evidence apart from The Lord's Prayer in one classroom and some excellent prayers, written by the children, in another. There was little in other classrooms to show that RE is an integral part of the school. The link with the Bradford school is positive and children spoke confidently about other faiths. RE teaching is assisting in community cohesion and the leadership of both school and subject are aware of the need for further development.

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

The school places a high emphasis on care for the individual and aims to work closely with families and the community to support this. The musical life of the school is thriving: this is mutually beneficial within the local community. Much to the delight of all stakeholders, extra curricular activities have blossomed in the last two terms. For example, the art group, led by a local parishioner, has just developed the design for the stained glass window. The school has an annual pilgrimage to St Cuthbert's Cave, enabling everyone involved in the school to make this spiritual journey together. The vicar is an integral part of the school, offering positive and influential support to staff and children. The measures taken by the school to build community involvement are bearing fruit, with increasing cross-fertilisation. Global links are still in their infancy. While setting down the roots of the newly developed Leadership of the school, there is an awareness of the need to plan and train future leaders; this is made explicit in their development plan. Leadership and management have a clear vision of where they need to develop as a Church school, and must be congratulated on the strides which they have made in under a year. All stakeholders are confidently working together towards becoming a truly Christian school.