

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Holy Island C of E Voluntary Aided First School

Lewins Lane,
Holy Island,
Northumberland,
TD15 2SQ.

Diocese of Newcastle

Local authority: Northumberland

Dates of inspection: 16th and 17th September 2010

Date of last inspection: 23rd January 2007

School's unique reference number: 122294

Headteacher: Mrs Christine Vanson

Inspector's name and number: The Revd Nicholas Chamberlain 508

School context

This extremely small school serves the community of Holy Island. It works in soft federation with Lowick Church of England First School. The children are taught at Lowick, tides permitting. At other times, the resident teacher on the island teaches the children in the newly-refurbished Island school building. All pupils are of White British heritage and no pupil has a statement of special educational need. Teaching is in a mixed-age group.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Holy Island Church of England Aided First School as a Church of England school are outstanding

Education has been at the heart of island life since Aidan established his school on Holy Island as part of the first monastic community there. In many ways, Holy Island First School now embodies a similarly distinctive Christian education, fitted for the twenty-first century. In the cradle of English Christianity a new generation of children is being offered outstanding education for life.

Established strengths

- The school's outstanding ethos establishes it as a Christian community that is distinctive, open, welcoming, affirming and with a clear awareness of its role in the life of the Island.
- Worship is deeply respectful to the spiritual and personal developmental needs of the worshippers and is both authentic and appropriately challenging.
- Outstanding team teaching, organisation and curriculum planning ensure that Religious Education is a high point in the children's week and lead to very high standards of achievement.
- A Governing Body that deploys outstanding knowledge of and commitment to the school, working with an outstanding head teacher and school team, ensures that this Christian foundation is purposeful, forward-looking and capable of outstanding growth.

Focus for development

- The school recognizes and values its partnership with the local church and sees this as a key feature in its future development.

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

As soon as you enter this school, you are aware that you are in an environment that has been lovingly formed to cater for the needs of each learner. Life on Holy Island is obviously shaped by the tides and this means that the Holy Island school community has a distinctiveness that draws on the relationships that exist between the children and their families in the tight-knit Island community. However, the connection of the island to the mainland, with all that this means in terms of pilgrims and visitors who bring resources into the community, also allows the children to participate in education in the different context of Lowick. One of the great strengths of the school is that it affirms the children's Island identity while also giving them a sense of identity in the wider community through their participation in and contribution to life at Lowick. From the earliest of ages, therefore, the children are growing in their understanding of the multiple layers of influences and opportunities that shape life in the world today. They know who they are, they know that they are learning in a

very special Christian environment, they know that they contribute to life in Lowick and they know that they are citizens of a nation and of the world. This, together with many other carefully structured activities such as the afternoon (or morning) greeting in which the children and adults share in helping each other to articulate their feelings, ensures that the school offers outstanding opportunities for spiritual, social, moral and cultural development. There is a level of mutual respect and care among the children of this school that I have rarely encountered anywhere. The teachers, and in particular the Island teacher with whom the children have the greatest contact, do more than just model the school's values; they live them. This helps to transform participation at Holy Island School into a whole-life experience. As one child said, when I asked about her favourite word from collective worship 'forgiveness, because it means say "sorry" and act like you really mean it'.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is jointly planned for both Holy Island and Lowick schools. However, it is delivered in ways that are appropriate to each school's context. The worship in which I shared on Holy Island involved further reflection on the theme of stewardship. This was building on the previous week's beach clean and also related to an on-going exploration of the importance of the environment. The invitation offered to the children to make sentences beginning with different letters was eagerly accepted and produced statements such as 'don't trash the world' and 'humility helps us all'. Very quickly, the children then realised that they had sentences whose first letters could be arranged to form the word 'Stewardship'. Having wondered at this, they went on to explore the question of whether it is God's world or 'our' world, and talked a little about Genesis 1, before ending with spontaneous and child-led prayer. I describe this worship because it combined reflection, wonder, Biblical awareness, formal prayer (the Lord's Prayer) and spontaneity, and because there was a real sense of community established between the children and the adults present that was respectful and appropriate. This was not a one-off occasion. It is absolutely typical of what happens in the school.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

The Religious Education is scrupulously planned, lovingly delivered and extremely effectively monitored. The school's investment of time in organising the whole team both to teach the subject and to discuss and reflect as a team on each child's attainment and progress leads to outstanding levels of achievement. The work of the subject co-ordinator is a model of its type. Religious Education is delivered at Lowick, so the children from Holy Island have in this subject the opportunity to engage with a wider range of opinion and ages than is always possible in their own small cohort. Conversely, the Lowick children are able to benefit from the contribution of the Holy Islanders, with their distinctive perspective on the world and sense of Christian heritage. The school ensures that Attainment targets 1 and 2 are both met by skilfully offering embodied learning: a variety of techniques is used including drama of different types, teachers participate while also enabling, all adults contribute seamlessly and the school works together to create a framework in which the children encounter and explore the subject 'from within'. Most importantly, the school is always committed to improving the experience and future developments will include visits to a synagogue and a mosque.

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

Excellent knowledge of the school itself and of the Island community is deployed by the committed, involved and engagingly frank governing body to work with the outstanding Headteacher and her staff in the leadership, management and development of the school. The small size of the school never entices the governors to short-cut their responsibilities. On the contrary, it actually enables the school's interested adults to be intimately involved. There is a passion in the adults of Holy Island School that is infectious. Staff development is as important as children's development, and it of course actually underpins the children's development. This is an excellent context in which to begin a teaching career, as the current Holy Island post holder is ably demonstrating. The partnership with the parish church is considered to be of the utmost importance; there is a real hope for mutual enrichment as part of the next stage of the school's development. This, together with fully implementing the possibilities of hosting other groups and schools in the recently redeveloped part of the school building, ensure that there is ample scope for even further developing the school as a centre of hospitable Christian learning.

