

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Longhoughton Church of England First School

Lacey Street
Longhoughton,
Alnwick,
Northumberland,
NE66 3AJ.

Diocese: Newcastle

Local authority: Northumberland
Dates of inspection: 17th June 2009
Date of last inspection: 13th June 2006
School's unique reference number: 122277
Headteacher: Mrs Tracey Critchlow
Inspector's name and number: The Revd Nicholas Chamberlain 508

School context

This rural first school serves a quite diverse community. Most pupils come from the village of Longhoughton or the RAF base at Boulmer, together with other rural communities. Some children come from long-standing local families, others have lived in various places across the world. Longhoughton itself has experienced considerable social change in recent years. The result is a school that is much less mono-chrome than initial impressions might suggest.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Longhoughton Church of England First School as a Church of England school is good

Outstandingly sensitive, energetic and organised leadership by the head teacher, her whole team and the governing body ensure that the Christian ethos of this school welcomes and supports children and adults alike. The result is a school that lives by the values that it advocates and that has huge facility to develop its ethos even further.

Established strengths

- Pervasive Christian values contribute to outstanding personal, moral, social and spiritual development.
- Lively, well-prepared and well-evaluated worship is enjoyed by the children and leads to spiritual growth.
- An exceptionally able leadership team and governing body ensure that the school consistently reviews its provision and plans for progress.

Focus for development

- Strengthen the children's ability to write prayers and articulate questions to do with faith and spiritual growth by developing the stations for reflection in each class-room.

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

This is a happy school in which the children flourish. They are proud of their school and keen to show it off to visitors. They point out achievements in which they themselves have had key roles: decorative stickers in the lavatories, the guinea pigs, the sensory gardens and other aspects of the thoughtfully designed and lovingly maintained grounds, for example. Care for the animals and for the local environment is a key concern and clearly contributes to outstanding personal, social, moral and spiritual development. The children accept responsibility – for making compost, for watering plants – as for each other as buddies. My observation is that nothing is forced, but that everything is supported. Disagreements and tensions do occur between the children, but they are sorted out – either by the children themselves or by appropriate intervention from adults. Relationships within the school are strikingly good. There is lots of laughter and a very supportive atmosphere indeed. Wall displays are good and class-rooms now have different spaces that provide opportunities for reflection. These take different forms according to the year groups involved: a fly-away worry tree for Foundation Stage or a 'feelings box' for Key Stage Two, for example. These

different spaces offer opportunity for further development as multi-sensory stations through which personal and spiritual development might be even more strongly resourced. They might usefully support the school's own aim of helping the children to write prayers of their own. For a school in a strongly rural setting, Longhoughton tries very hard to extend the children's awareness of cultural difference and to build respect and understanding. In doing this it has opportunities provided by links with the RAF base but in any case there is a positive commitment to inclusion and social cohesion in the school's planning for development, for example in the careful choice of class names to reflect different parts of the world with their different customs and faiths. The children are encouraged to participate in clubs and to raise funds for charities, and they clearly enjoy doing so. Their participation is sensitively monitored by the staff, thereby ensuring progressive development.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

The children enthusiastically participate in collective worship. Entry to the hall for worship is very well-managed and there is a palpable sense of atmosphere even before the candle is lit which signifies the beginning of worship itself. The children sing with style, power and sensitivity. Systems for evaluating the worship are well-established and effective. All the requirements of the last denominational inspection have been successfully implemented. The children commented very favourably about many aspects of worship, including the singing, the use of Bible stories, the opportunity to reflect and their sense of being affirmed in worship in which 'we celebrate what people have done'. They are keen to be involved in worship, enjoy class worship, and I think value opportunities to contribute, for example by reading aloud 'even though I get nervous'. It is good that a child feels confident to share his view that 'I want things to be more fun, more interesting and shorter'. This is evidence of personal confidence and also of a maturity of approach within the school itself because it can handle such observation. My sense is that the very respectful way in which worship is delivered is appreciated by the children and that this in itself encourages them to develop their own contribution and responses. For example, in the worship that I witnessed many of the children showed evidence of already having internalised the theme, which was about taking responsibility for one's own behaviour. For these children, the question is how the school helps them to take their reflection to a further level? It is possible that this might be achieved by giving them even more opportunities for articulating their own thoughts, prayers and feelings. A particular opportunity exists at the moment because a renewed partnership with the parish priest and church is developing and this is complementing the already excellent partnership that exists with the RAF padre. These close and developing parish and community links are already strengthening the impact of collective worship on the school community.

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

The appointment of a new head teacher has positively catalysed the already excellent governing body and school team. Rigorous self-evaluation processes are being employed in every aspect of the school's life, including its Christian ethos and worship. Sensitivity to the school's position as a community school with a Christian foundation is expressed in clear and appropriate policy documents and in the development plan. This is a vibrant and attractive Christian school which respects everyone, whatever their faith or personal circumstances. Discussions about values within the school body have encouraged a confidence in the school's distinctiveness that is allowing it to serve its whole community. This is a delicate task that is being achieved outstandingly well. This is a foundation school that is truly inclusive and that gives worth to everyone. The whole school team contributes to this achievement, but the leadership of the head teacher should be particularly noted. Parents and other stake-holders comment very favourably about the way that they feel informed and welcomed and their contributions affirmed. The word that is most often used to mark this development is 'approachable'. There is an energy, focus and joyfully Christian inclusiveness to the school at the moment that is exciting and that indicates outstanding capacity to continue to improve.