

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

### **Whitley Chapel Church of England First School**

Leazes Lane,  
Steel,  
Whitley Chapel,  
Hexham,  
Northumberland,  
NE47 0HB.

#### **Diocese: Newcastle**

Local authority: Northumberland

Dates of inspection: 10<sup>th</sup> November 2009

Date of last inspection: 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2006

School's unique reference number: 122293

Headteacher: Ms Su Adkinson

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

#### **School context**

This small school serves Hexhamshire, a rural community with a very clear sense of its own identity. In recent years, the school has also drawn some pupils from Hexham itself, although as this cohort works through, pupil numbers are beginning to reduce. A below average proportion of pupils is entitled to free school meals and the number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. A new headteacher will take up post in January 2010. Teaching is undertaken in mixed-age classes.

#### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Whitley Chapel Church of England First School as a Church of England school is outstanding**

Recognising the key role that it has in the infrastructure of the community, Whitley Chapel First School provides an outstanding Christian environment in which to grow and learn. Respect for all and awareness of the needs of the local and of the importance of global issues to the local context are just two of the qualities that contribute to the school's ethos.

#### **Established strengths**

- Very happy, confident, mature and thoughtful children are testament to the outstandingly supportive and generous Christian ethos.
- Involving, participative, meaningful worship contributes to outstanding spiritual, cultural and personal development.
- Good, well-paced, very well-planned Religious Education teaching underpins outstanding learning in this subject.
- Wise, realistic and loving leadership by all adults involved in the school ensures that this is an outstanding Christian environment in which children can develop.

#### **Focus for development**

- The Governing Body, working with the new Headteacher, should review the school's understanding of itself as a Christian school, using the new National Society framework. This should be done as part of the induction process of the new Head, in partnership with all stakeholders, in the process ensuring that the school's mission statement, aims and policies fully articulate the school's self-evaluation.

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

This is a school in which every child really does matter. Children learn this from the adults connected with the school, all of whom provide outstanding Christian role models. When asked in an RE lesson to give an example of someone whose life is influenced by God, the children immediately identified their teacher. Yes, they recognised God to be at work in missionaries, monks and vicars, but they saw God first in the life of their teacher, and thus in their school. Importantly, however, this Christian ethos is one that is generously inclusive. Children learn to respect each other as human beings, all made in the image of God, learning that some will have a different understanding of faith from their own. The school has

outstanding links with other schools around the world and visitors from different cultures and faith perspectives are warmly welcomed. The result is a deeply respectful student body, in which real value is given by every child to the other children. The school models community cohesion, and does so in an unself-conscious, engaging way. The School Council provides an excellent forum for the exchange of ideas and for personal and social development. I was left by them with a clear idea of what matters to them about Whitley Chapel: 'this is a Christian school', 'we do hard and try our best', 'this is a really nice school'. There is nothing saccharine about the school, however: good things are celebrated and sad or more difficult things recognised and lovingly handled through pastoral support and through inclusion in prayer and worship.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding**

Collective worship is one of the areas in which the school's organic link with the parish church through the person of the vicar is most clearly appreciated. The Tuesday worship that he leads is a high point in the children's week. They commented very appreciatively about the way that he invites them to join in prayer and to identify subjects for prayer. They also value the effort that he makes to include them in worship in the parish church for festivals, special services and via confirmation classes. However, other opportunities to worship are fully grasped by the children and the range that is provided is a credit to the school's leadership. On the day that I visited, an ecumenical group from Hexham Churches Together led a worship that was enthusiastic, engaging and that drew excellent response from all the children. On occasion, there are visits from representatives of other faiths. These visits add depth and diversity to the children's diet. The physical environment for worship, the school hall, is enriched with colourful, engaging art, evidence of the cumulative impact of worship over time.

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding**

The Newcastle Diocesan Syllabus is now firmly embedded and provides the curriculum for Religious Education. Planning is detailed and secure. Highly competent, well-motivated teachers, ably supported by a higher level teaching assistant, deliver Religious Education that results in outstanding subject knowledge. The headteacher's confidence in her staff contributes to their confidence in the class-room. Good use is made throughout the school of information technology in Religious Education. The children are enthusiastic learners, pace is well-judged in lessons, and the challenges of mixed age-group classes are very well negotiated. Teaching methods range from whole class question and answer sessions and whole class opportunities to reflect, through improvised drama, to group activities and child-led 'choosing'. The result is a school full of children who enjoy Religious Education, who learn outstandingly well, and who support each other in their learning.

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

Wise leadership by the headteacher over the years, working with a stable staff team, and in close partnership with the vicar (who is the Chair of Governors), ensures a coherent, organic expression of the school's Christian foundation. The ethos is palpable and the level of attainment remarkable. The school manages to balance being a faith-based school with being one of the key whole-community resources for Hexhamshire. Huge effort and commitment by the adults results in a school in which the children flourish as individuals and have every opportunity to grow in faith. Since the last SIAS inspection a new national framework for self-evaluation has been introduced. Moreover, a new headteacher will take up post at Whitley Chapel in January 2010. These two events, together with the appointment of new foundation governors, provide a clear opportunity for the school to take stock of its achievements to date, and to plan for the future. The ethos that has been so ably held by the departing head, through documentation rewritten in response to the new framework, will then be fully owned by the new team.

SIAS report [November 2009] [Whitley Chapel Church of England First School] [NE47 0HB]