

**Wark Church of England Aided First School**

Wark  
Hexham  
Northumberland  
NE48 3LS

<b>Diocese:</b>	<b>Newcastle</b>
Local authority:	Northumberland
Dates of inspection:	6 <sup>th</sup> October 2010
Date of last inspection:	28 <sup>th</sup> March 2007
School's unique reference number:	122300
Headteacher:	Mrs Amanda Lewis
Inspector's name and number:	Sheila Bamber 621

**School context**

Wark is a very small first school with a large rural catchment area. The school shares a head teacher with Greenhaugh School, which is not a church school. Wark is part of the informal group of West Tyne Church Schools, currently sharing staff and other resources to support RE. There have been two changes of head teacher since the last inspection and the current head teacher has been in post since September 2010.

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

The Christian character of Wark School is evident from the moment of entry to the building. The pupils are proud of their school and its values, and anxious to show its many features to visitors, both in the environment and through their behaviour and care. Partnership working ensures a breadth and depth of experience of the wider world and the school is a valued part of the local community.

**Established strengths**

- The distinctive Christian character of the school is explicit and implicit in the way in which everyone and everything is cared for and valued.
- RE is a visible part of the curriculum, and underpins the social, moral, spiritual and cultural experience of pupils.
- Effective engagement with a range of partners enriches the experience of all stakeholders.

**Focus for development**

- Further develop a cycle for planning and evaluation of Collective Worship, and support pupils in using this regularly to inform their leadership of worship.
- Work with partners to review RE schemes of work to better support transition to middle schools
- Monitor the impact of partnership working, and in particular review the support available to shared staff.
- Ensure the new head teacher receives appropriate induction as the leader of a Church of England School.

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

When asked why Class 1 had made the cross inside the door from material gathered during a recent walk in the local woods, the immediate response from pupils was 'we're a church school and the cross reminds us about Jesus and what he said, and that he died and rose again'. Pupils and parents feel that the school is a safe, healthy and happy place where everyone is encouraged to be themselves and to build good relationships with those around them. They can identify little to change because 'things are in hand'. The new head

teacher noted that pupils feel themselves to be part of a distinctive community centred around 'another identity that links them' and informs their response to the values of love, respect, forgiveness, perseverance and reconciliation underpinning every area of community life. Pupils are proud of their healthy school and eco flag awards, and speak confidently of their role in developing and monitoring these.

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

The main act of collective worship has recently been moved , to give a more focused and gathered ending to the day, although the impact of this has yet to be fully evaluated. Pupils from Class 2 led a well prepared act of worship on the theme of harvest, drawing on work on the Jewish Sukkot done by Class 1 in RE, and linking this to a concern for the fair distribution of resources and thanksgiving. Other children joined in the singing enthusiastically, and were able to confidently pray the Lord's Prayer. There were few opportunities for reflection, either using times of silence or by inviting responses from the other pupils. Effective use was made by pupils of a 'prayer cube' incorporating their own prayers to lead prayers before lunch. The school prayer is prominently displayed in the entrance, and a prayer was used as part of class dismissal at the end of the day. The Vicar is working with the staff to develop a greater Anglican distinctiveness in worship. The church year underpins the worship plan, which also reflects the SEAL themes and is flexible enough to respond to local priorities. Planning and evaluation of collective worship are not consistent, and pupils' input to this is not systematically recorded.

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

The appointment of a well qualified and experienced RE co-ordinator through West Tyne Church Schools has transformed RE, which has a secure and distinct place within the curriculum. Lively and interactive displays in all areas of the school support the integration of RE into other areas of school life. The current topic of 'Heroes' in Class 2 had led to discussions in circle time as children had been invited to identify people who were heroes in their lives, as well as exploring the lives of exemplars such as Desmond Tutu (which itself raised a broader discussion about relationships). A wide range of strategies for individual spiritual development and reflection have been successfully introduced, and staff have noticed the impact of Godly Play 'wondering questions' in encouraging more open questioning and exploration in other areas.

Assessment systems for RE have been established alongside those for other core subjects, and the need for additional resources to ensure these are securely embedded is being addressed. Children do not move on to Church of England Schools and the end of year 4, and while support for transition is well developed within local partnerships, this does not currently include RE.

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

Embarking on their second shared headship, governors have noted that they would 'do it differently this time', and have established a joint governors monitoring group. Governors have not yet established an induction programme for the new head teacher, who, whilst an experienced leader, has little experience of Church Schools. Partnership working is well established through the local cluster systems and West Tyne Church Schools and these contribute significantly to the breadth of experience available to children through shared visits and theme days and the appointment of specialist teachers. There is scope for further development of leadership opportunities and succession planning within the newly forming link with Greenhaugh School, which is geographically close enough to facilitate this. Governors know the school well, and are engaged in many areas of school life. The pattern of meetings and monitoring visits is currently under review.

The whole School Council has led the development of the eco-strategy and is currently engaged in the development of the playground area, following the successful introduction of the school allotment, which is well supported by the local community, sharing plants and encouraging involvement in the local Leek Show. Links with the local church, businesses and individuals are well developed, and the leadership of the school is very responsive to the opportunities that are offered.