

Longhorsley St.Helen's Church of England Aided First School

Drummonds Close,
Longhorsely,
Morpeth,
NE65 8UT.

Diocese of Newcastle

Local authority: Northumberland

Dates of inspection: 29th May 2012

Date of last inspection: 7th December 2006

School's unique reference number: 122279

Headteacher: Mrs Susan Hall

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

School context

The school is a small community based First School, serving the village of Longhorsley and its environs, but also drawing pupils from the wider area. Since the last inspection it has entered a hard federation with Whalton First School, another Church of England aided school, twelve miles away, with whom it shares a Governing Body and headteacher. All pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or with special educational needs is much lower than average.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Longhorsley St.Helen's Church of England Aided First School as a Church of England school are outstanding

Now part of an exciting Federation, but maintaining its own distinct identity and commitment to its community, this is a school in which happy children delight to learn and grow, in which Christian principles can be seen in generous action and in which worship enriches life.

Established strengths

- The school's consistent living out of Christian values and practice over many years has resulted in an ethos that is positive, welcoming, respectful to all and that invites children and adults alike to explore faith, ideas and the world of which we are part.
- Child-led worship, skilfully introduced in response to the last SIAS inspection, contributes strongly to the outstanding opportunities that the school offers to children and adults.
- Since the last SIAS inspection the introduction of a robust assessment system, together with clear planning, has ensured that religious education in the school is purposeful and enjoyable and that children progress well.
- Highly skilled leadership by successive headteachers, together with a capable and engaged Governing Body, has strengthened the school as a creative environment for learning and forged a powerful bond with the federation partner, Whalton First School.

Focus for development

- Affirm and encourage staff members in their own practice and further consolidate the staff as a team by using the federation to flow skills even more through the two schools.

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

This is a warm, loving, generously Christian school, of which the children are proud and in which they delight to learn. When asked what makes the school special, they comment not only about worship and specifically faith-related aspects but also that: 'you get a good education here', 'there is no bullying at this school', and 'if you get something wrong [they help you] to try and work it out'. Adults are equally positive, noting especially the value and significance of the fact that although a clearly Anglican school, St.Helen's has excellent relationships with the other churches in Longhorsley. The school is perceived to serve its community outstandingly well, and to have benefitted from its links with Whalton while not having diminished its contribution to the life of its own community. Behaviour is outstanding, as is the quality of relationships between the children and between children and adults. The contribution of the parish priest is particularly effective: as role model, counsellor, leader of

worship and friend to staff and pupils. Equally outstanding is the impact of the 'Church Mice' team of listeners and befrienders, who provide discrete pastoral care and help to locate the life of the school in the community. In display, reflection areas and outdoor facilities, the school buildings and grounds express some core aspects of its ethos, thereby helping to establish them in the children: commitment to partners across the world; respect for those who are different from ourselves; the importance of prayer and reflection and the need to value and care for the natural world. The word 'invite' which I heard many times during the inspection sums up what makes Longhorsley special. The school never compels, it invites: enquiry, faith, fun, care, responsibility and achievement.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Already a strength of the school when last inspected, collective worship is now exemplary, especially in respect to the way that children contribute to its leading and shaping. The worship is organised according to a well-planned cycle and always helpfully evaluated. When child-led it is prepared in supportive groups (an older and younger sibling, for example), and structured using a simple guidance sheet. In conversation, the children emphasised to me their enthusiasm for leading worship, the fact that they enjoy doing any necessary research, and the fact that worship is one of the things that makes their school special when compared with others. Importantly, when talking about worship they said 'we don't just learn randomly', meaning that they see and value a shape to the day, the week and the year, and that they can discern how worship both contributes to this shape and helps to establish it through its different themes. The quality of the worship that was observed (on the difficult subject of the Holy Trinity), in planning, delivery and ideas, was outstanding. Collective worship gathers the whole school, provides an excellent opportunity for reflection, celebration and learning, and flows out into the community through the welcome presence and contribution of many friends and visitors.

The effectiveness of religious education is good

The school evaluates religious education as good. I concur with this evaluation, and believe that the framework is in place for future outstanding achievement in this subject. This is because the diocesan syllabus is now firmly embedded; a clear, usable and effective assessment system is in place; the subject is benefitting from the staff's regular professional development; teachers are sharing their enthusiasm, skills and knowledge across the Federation and new staff appointments have been made with an awareness of the importance to the school of outstanding teaching in RE. Attitudes to learning in RE are extremely positive. Teaching is warm, enthusiastic, always very capable and on occasion outstanding. I was impressed by the children's knowledge and ability to handle concepts and ideas. It is significant that in a school with such a powerful Christian ethos, the children commented to me about how they enjoy learning about other religions: 'it doesn't really matter what religion you are'; a comment which itself expresses the maturity of attitude that the school engenders.

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

A key achievement of the last six years has been the establishment of a hard federation with Whalton First School. This process, which has been carefully and creatively managed, is now bearing fruit: a single, effectively structured Governing Body; joint policies; flexible staff deployment; the enriching of each school community with some of the strengths of the other; now eagerly anticipated occasional federation worship. The current headteacher, building on the work of her predecessor, is hugely skilful in balancing the different identities of each school and community, and in nurturing the goodwill and generosity that is necessary for the federation's success. The schools are creatively walking the line of reaping the benefits of a stable core staff while also being able to profit from the contribution of colleagues from the other school. The Governing Body has a vision for both schools, is articulate in its expression and forensic in its assessment and evaluation of progress. I was particularly impressed by the careful way that the Governing Body monitors the school's ethos and is very attentive to the views of parents. As the school is exemplary in worship, I judge that the issues faced by this Governing Body and staff, together with the way that they handle them, might be a considerable resource of expertise and experience for other schools. This inspection was of Longhorsley alone, and it is six years since the previous inspection. It is difficult to do justice to what has been achieved within these inspection constraints.