



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Acklington C of E Voluntary Controlled First School

The Village
Acklington
NE65 9BW

Previous SIAMS grade: Good

Current inspection grade: Good

Diocese: Newcastle

Local authority: Northumberland

Date of inspection: 13 October 2015

Date of last inspection: 22 November 2010

School's unique reference number: 122270

Head of School: Claire Cuthbert

Inspector's name and number: Canon Brian Hedley NS619

School context

This school of 15 pupils is set in the heart of a semi-rural village. All are White British and taught in two mixed-age classes. 40% of the children have special educational needs. The majority of learners come from outside the area. Since last inspection (2010) the school has had three Headteachers. In September 2015 it entered into a hard federation with James Calvert Spence College. A new Executive Headteacher takes up post in January. A Head of School and Governing Body are already in place.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Acklington Controlled First School as a Church of England school are good

- A deep Christian ethos inspires strong, trusting relationships, creates a sense of belonging and results in confident, secure, happy children
- Collective worship is widely valued, challenges learners to think for themselves and sustains the spiritual life of the school
- The strong partnership between school and church and the ministry of the clergy team greatly enhances the spiritual life of the school
- Governors are passionate about engaging the extended community in a Christian understanding of human flourishing

Areas to improve

- Involve learners in the planning and leading of 'pupil led' worship
- Ensure that the new governing body undertake training with regard to their responsibilities as Church school governors so that core Christian values are made explicit throughout school policies and a clear link made to raising achievement
- Embed the SIAMS Evaluation Schedule 2013 more fully into the school's action planning and performance data to ensure that the Christian character of the school is identified and benchmarked more robustly

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

This small school lies at the heart of the village. The majority of parents live outside its catchment but many have chosen to send their children here because of its family atmosphere and genuine Christian 'mission' for supporting and encouraging those who have special educational needs - this cohort now forms 40% of the tiny population.

Children and parents are proud of their school. They value its Christian character and the focused work it does to enable human flourishing at all levels. Teachers know their pupils inside out. Staff produce tailored learning plans for every child and this ensures success academically, personally and spiritually. Data confirms that almost all pupils make good progress towards their individual targets. Attendance is above national expectations. Parents say this is because of the care and support their children receive and the fact that they feel safe and valued. One parent wrote: 'My son's enjoyment of school makes the whole house happy'. Others said how excited their children were about coming to school and how confident they were becoming. Children wanted me to know that at their 'amazing, joyful school' everyone is welcome. This is confirmed in the strong quality of relationships enjoyed across the community. Children told me that loving and forgiving one another stems from the teachings of Jesus, and that whilst they learned about these values in Religious Education and Worship, in the end they had to come from deep within your heart to make a difference. During the day it was profoundly humbling to see this in action. Pupils were constantly reflecting on their attitudes and conduct. They were keen to explain that, 'there is always someone to pick you up when you fall down'. Evidence of this was tangible. Those secure in their learning and knowledge of core values support the vulnerable and those with profound needs to 'find their voice' and fully engage in activities without stifling them.

Children talked freely about knowing that there is 'something greater than us'. Others explained that, 'even if you don't believe in God you can still look after each other and the world'. A parent said, 'I think it is a good thing to teach children strong values of love, kindness and care of all mankind'. Religious education and worship contribute well towards learning because they challenge pupils' ideas about Christianity and other religions and provide a safe place to explore what it means to live in a diverse world.

As the hard federation with James Calvert Spence College develops, governors will need to extend a clear understanding of Christian ethos across the partnership so that its impact is sustained in this school and flows out into the wider community.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship is a genuine 'coming together' of the Acklington family every day and provides a strong framework to support school life. A range of worship leaders follow a carefully planned cycle of themes based on the Church's year and the school's chosen core values. This means that pupils celebrate the major festivals and develop their understanding of Christian beliefs and Anglican traditions. Many of the children spoke of these occasions as being a 'very special part of their day'. Even those of no faith said that it is a time for thinking, for quiet and to be still. Pupil, parent and staff surveys suggest that worship is meaningful, engaging and well-delivered. It helps people to explore their own feelings and beliefs about God because leaders make good use of questioning to tease out these ideas and draw upon learners' personal experiences. The school has implemented a recommendation from last inspection about increasing the involvement of children in the planning and delivery of worship – 'class worship' is now timetabled. However children say that at the moment adults plan and direct most of these occasions and they would really like to do even more themselves. Teachers could build up their confidence in giving children greater freedom by using the 'Worship Workshop' on the Church of England website which helps to plan everything in seven easy steps.

Opportunities for prayer and personal reflection run throughout the school day. This includes the use of liturgical responses as part of established practice. Supportive guidance for parents is included in the school's prospectus. 'Thoughts and Prayers' is a regular feature of newsletters.

The termly 'Worship Diary' which forms part of the school's website and information to parents is a tangible way of sharing worship experiences with a wider audience. Systems are in place to gather together information about the impact of the governors' worship policy. Whilst an overview of findings is currently scheduled to be tabled at the end of each academic year, it might be prudent to consider doing this more frequently - at least half-yearly - so that learners' and parents' views inform practice and shape responses promptly.

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

Throughout an unsettled period of eighteen months the school's Christian ethos has been a key factor in holding things together. As a result the education and care of children have been kept stable against a backdrop of uncertainty about the school's future. In the summer term 2015 the decision was taken to form a hard federation with James Calvert Spence College. Everyone is excited by this new arrangement and feels energised by the possibilities it offers. Partnerships between schools within the federation are already bearing fruit. Schools on three sites now provide an all-through education from early years to sixth form. An Executive Headteacher will take up post in January 2016. A new head of school and governing body have been in place for six weeks. The head of school has a teaching commitment at the middle school in addition to her work here, but she has already begun to influence strategic planning as she enthusiastically promotes Christian values, drives forward her predecessors' improvement-planning, and identifies new opportunities for further staff development. Six of the school's original governors remain in place. Together with parents, they were adamant that Church school status would not be compromised under this new arrangement and were assured by the promises made. As a result a whole-community project was launched to produce a much more specifically Christian logo; this has come to fruition and the design now proudly adorns the school.

Evaluation of the school's strengths and strategic plans for future improvement now transfer into the care of the newly appointed governing body. As they set about allocating roles and responsibilities and continue to embed the 'Church School Inspection Schedule 2013' into their routine business, I believe this work would be hugely enhanced if **all** governors within the hard federation were clear about the link between Church school and community life. The Christian foundation needs to be expressed in a specifically local context, and this should not be left in the hands of a few. Some work has been done, but there is still more to be achieved. For example as governors set about review of some of their policies, they should ensure that core values are made explicit throughout. The Behaviour Management Policy could include love, forgiveness, justice, tolerance and reconciliation as key elements. Such clarity would help everyone to recognise the impact that ethos has on achievement and on learners' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development.

Partnership with the parish is strong; this is a 'prayed for' school. Much is being done to strengthen the bonds even further. Joint working with the local church family develops an understanding of those with different needs, builds links, and makes a significant contribution to pupils' moral and social development.

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