

# Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Whitley Chapel Church of England First School			
Address	Leazes Lane, Whitley Chapel, Steel, Hexham, Northumberland NE7 0HB		
Date of inspection	14 November 2019	Status of school	Voluntary aided first
Diocese	Newcastle	URN	122293

<b>Overall Judgement</b>	How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Additional Judgements</b>	<b>The impact of collective worship</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
	<b>The effectiveness of religious education (RE)</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Good</b>

### School context

Whitley Chapel is a first school with 33 pupils on roll, including nursery pupils. The majority of pupils are of white British heritage. Few pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged are below national averages. Attendance is in line with national averages with no exclusions. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below national averages. There has been a period of turbulence as the school was earmarked for closure, but this united the community in its support. The local vicar is the chair of the governing body.

### The school's Christian vision

Our vision is to provide an education of the highest quality within the context of Christian belief and practice in a happy, considerate, safe environment, and to give our pupils space to learn and grow. The following biblical texts underpin the vision.

"Start children off in the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it." Proverbs 22:6

"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Matt 6:33

### Key findings

- The school is lynchpin in the local community, linking families, the church and the community hub.
- The curriculum meets the needs of all pupils, including the most vulnerable. It is founded on the Christian vision of the school.
- The whole community is fully supportive of the school and lends its help in many creative ways.
- Worship is a significant strength of the school. It links all aspects of the curriculum resulting in a spiritually fulfilling experience for all.
- Religious education (RE) has had a full evaluation and there have been marked and rapid improvements.

### Areas for development

- Moderate RE to strengthen assessment and support pupils in making progress and support the vision to provide education of the highest quality.
- Develop a policy document for the new relationships and sex education curriculum, to support the vision of creating a safe environment for pupils to flourish in.
- Enhance school evaluation to help support newer members of the governing body in developing the school's vision further.

How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?

### **Inspection findings**

Whitley Chapel First School is the lynchpin of the local community. Its sits geographically close to the community hub and St Helen's church, with whom there are very strong links. The headteacher leads a very small but highly effective staff group, who also live out the vision. They access training and support from local church schools and the diocese, which ensures they are not isolated despite their rural setting. There has been a period of turbulence as a result of changes in governors and the potential closure of rural schools. This united the community who relied heavily on the vision to seek the kingdom of God first and foremost, for support. Stakeholders know the school well as a result.

The curriculum is unique and effective for all pupils, including those who are vulnerable. It is underpinned by the vision, to start children off in the way they should go and has links to the wider community. The school works with the community Leek Club to create a curriculum that is engaging, but helps pupils understand local issues and the farming community in which they are situated. As a result, all pupils are known, supported and flourish. Standards are high in relation to national levels.

Pupils are engaged in a wide range of social action which they initiate. They recently felt that the Bahamas had been forgotten after the hurricane so decided to fund raise. They work tirelessly to enhance their understanding of global initiatives through links with Addis Ababa and India. Pupils have created keyhole gardens after learning about how to increase rural productivity in Lesotho, linking local experience with global knowledge. This is supported by the Bible quote 'Seek first the kingdom of God.' Pupils can articulate this and apply it.

Behaviour is exemplary and pupils know they are respected. They understand how to deal with conflict and show mature respect for others. Adults describe how pupils show compassion at times of extreme personal difficulty, including offering extemporaneous prayer. The very small number of staff have strong relationships. They understand how much they need each other to in order to ensure clarity in provision and to ensure workload is manageable in a very small school. Pupils who are vulnerable are very well known and their needs are met in this school. Its small size allows for individualised responses and provision, linked to its theological basis to seek first the kingdom of God and all things shall be given.

Leaders and governors are working on an action plan for relationships and sex education. They are doing so in a considered and deeply Christian way. This reflects the school vision to provide a happy safe environment but is considerate of everyone's views. Pupils have the opportunity to discuss and understand difference and staff recognises that the community has little diversity, so ensure pupils have opportunities to discuss and challenge. Pupils use Big Questions very well throughout the curriculum and generate their own. Their responses are mature and articulate. Leaders use the statement from the vision, so that they will know the way to go, to ensure all children are treated with dignity and respect. Linking theology and curriculum, foundations are well laid for spiritual development and mature recognition of difference. Governors monitor the life and work of the school well which leads to improvements in all areas. Teaching staff are open to constant improvement and respond to respectful suggestions.

Collective worship is a strength of the school. It is closely linked to the biblical vision statement to seek first the Kingdom of God, by ensuring all pupils understand the value of vibrant, responsive worship from the youngest age. Christian values are explicitly taught in worship with all ages at all levels. This is reflected in church and school where pupils are frequent active participants. As a result, pupils are comfortable with formal and informal worship often led and developed by pupils. Pupils have written a deeply moving school prayer which is relevant to them and stakeholders. It is in use every day along with Bible texts as an underpinning for curriculum work which then is related back in worship. This unique cycle ensures worship is holistic. Discussion about the life of Jesus is also linked to pupil's experience. A year one child linked the bale of hay that Jesus was lying on to his own experience of hay on his farm. Links between RE, worship and pupils' whole learning are seamless. The school adds a dimension to church life that is deeply appreciated. Pupils have created two stained glass windows for the church which serve as a lasting reminder of the value of the school to the church community. Church members are highly active in the life of the school and can talk about how worship is its heartbeat. They support

with the curriculum, including RE and worship and as a result pupils and community have deep Christian respect. The church feels a profound ownership of the school.

The headteacher ensure staff feel confident in leading exemplary worship. An act of worship led by the head teacher was inspiring as it helped children to ask, answer and generate big questions about faith and what it means to them. The impact of worship on adults is deeply moving. A member of staff described the impact of worship at school as a 'snap shot to belief that allows you to learn how to seek God in a spiritually challenging way.' Pupils lead prayer in a confident spontaneous manner. Staff work with the youngest children to help them learn how to lead worship, taking time to ensure they understand why they are making decisions. Older children value peace and time to think about God. The school has taken time to carefully introduce the Eucharist with young children. Pupils are invited to engage at their own level, in regular church services. Parents highly value this unique opportunity for such young pupils. There is a beautiful quiet prayer space in the centre of school, using art generated by pupils and the community. It supports pupils, leaders and stakeholders in taking time to reflect every day. Its centrality makes it much appreciated and part of the life of the whole community.

RE is ably led by the knowledgeable head teacher. It is planned to reflect the school's vision and values and follows the 'Understanding Christianity' resource. Assessment is effective and allows for planning for progression. It is in line with the school's overall assessment practice. Work on the creation story generated big questions about theology, so children's thinking is linked to experience. Children learn about world faiths through a range of media, so they are engaged. Leaders understand that there is little diversity in the community so work hard to develop respect for those who make different religious decisions to them.



**The effectiveness of RE is Good**

RE teaching is well planned and effective. It is evaluated by the headteacher and by governors. The head recognised that improvements were needed so has brought about changes in assessment resulting in improvement in the quality of pupils' work. Staff have accessed diocesan training. A theological basis for learning is highly evident in work in books and in displays.

Headteacher

Jenny Morgan

Inspector's name and number

Valerie Hall 859