

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Longhorsley St Helen's Church of England First School

Longhorsley, Morpeth, Northumberland. NE65 8UT	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Newcastle
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Northumberland
Name of federation	Longhorsley and Whalton First Schools
Date/s of inspection	22 May 2017
Date of last inspection	29 May 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided I22283
Headteacher	Nichola Brannen
Inspector's name and number	Alan Baker 903

School context

This small, community-based first school, with 99 children on roll (currently 19 in the part-time Nursery), has been federated with Whalton Church of England First school since 2006. The schools share a governing body and an executive headteacher who was appointed in 2015. Serving the local community of Longhorsley, it has grown in size recently. More than half of the pupils come from outside of the catchment area. The assistant head was recently appointed and a significant proportion of staff are new to the school. Pupils predominantly have English as a first language and proportions known to be eligible for free school meals are much lower than average nationally.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St. Helen's as a Church of England school are good

- Leaders of the school consistently model Christian values creating positive relationships and support for the community they serve.
- Many beneficial partnerships exist with several local Churches and the diocese adding opportunities for the community to develop Christian values and spirituality.
- The Christian character of the school supports an inclusive, respectful environment where children can fulfil their potential.
- Relevant and specifically chosen Christian values are beginning to allow pupils to reflect on how Christianity influences their day-to-day lives.
- A range of teaching staff are involved in the planning and delivery of worship which includes themes which raise the aspirations of pupils.
- Many pupils participate in the delivery of worship and confidently offer spontaneous prayers which reflect their involvement and enjoyment of the distinctively Christian services.

Areas to improve

- Develop accurate and effective tracking of pupils' attainment and progress in Religious Education (RE) so that teachers are more consistent in supporting pupils' learning in the subject.
- Use a range of inspirational resources and teaching strategies to develop pupils' enquiry and creativity in RE lessons.
- Continue to develop the many new strategies which are having a positive impact on pupils' spirituality.
- Help pupils become more aware of the positive impact of the Bible stories and teaching of Jesus Christ which they hear about, on their own actions and relationships.

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

The recent revision of selected Christian values by the whole school community has had significant impact on the Christian character of the school. Pupils demonstrate friendship, forgiveness, trust, hope, honesty and love for each other in abundance and are aware of the impact this has on their relationships. Data shows pupils' attainment to be above that expected nationally and pupils display strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding in their work and interactions. The behaviour of pupils is excellent and they enjoy coming to school ensuring that attendance figures are well above national average. Pupils display a great love, enjoyment and pride in their school.

A range of very recent initiatives, such as selecting RE ambassadors and having designated reflective areas across school, are beginning to give pupils even greater ownership of the chosen Christian values. Ambassadors enthuse about the opportunities to spot values in actions and share this with the community. Reflective areas have begun to develop pupil understanding and awareness of their own spirituality allowing them to demonstrate strategies to cope with changing emotions. These opportunities are now giving the very youngest pupils an impressive ability to recognise the impact that the Christian character of the school has on their feelings and actions. One reception pupil enthused that her favourite value was love because it helped her have lots of friends. Older pupils are less confident articulating this link but are equally enthusiastic in demonstrating their positive actions towards others.

Work in RE stimulates a great respect in pupils for other religions and the diversity of the wider world community. Some opportunities, such as visits from leaders of other faiths, are available to develop this understanding which pupils are interested and excited by. Similarities and differences between Christianity and other faiths are investigated via RE and this strengthens pupils understanding of the world as a multi-faith society. They are less able to identify how these teachings can affect their actions in a real life context.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Strength and flexibility of worship leadership during challenging times has led to a community approach to planning and delivery. Being without the school vicar for several years has led to the use of the Leicester diocese collective worship scheme. This is delivered by all staff via week long themes and has led to great enthusiasm and ownership throughout school. Through offering delivery support, modelling and guidance to staff, worship has a distinctively Christian approach in the various styles delivered each week. The development of strong links with the local Anglican Church gives the school community many opportunities to participate in the important Anglican festivals and celebrations of the Christian calendar. Other links with local, non-Anglican Churches ensures pupils grow in their knowledge of other denominational styles of worship. These links, and the new clergy support now available to the school, brings a strong sense of tradition and Anglican customs to all worship.

Regular pupil participation in the leadership of worship stimulates enjoyment and deepens impact and understanding for participants and observers. Leaders link the values of the school well with themes and this creates positive outcomes in the actions of pupils. The Trinity has a strong focus in school and even younger pupils articulate their understanding of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit clearly. Worship themes are beginning to allow pupils to draw upon the teachings of Jesus and the Bible stories they hear as positive ways to live their lives. They enthuse about the opportunities to support others in need locally and on a world-wide level via the worship topics covered. One parent was touched by the willingness of her child to send their pocket money to a charity which had been the focus of worship.

Impressive routines allow pupils to review worship and their findings are acted upon positively. The questions which worship themes raise in pupils are cleverly and sensitively answered and developed. Pupils appreciate the opportunity to reflect and develop their understanding of Christianity in this way. The warm, family feeling created during worship stimulates pupil involvement. They enjoy the lively, theme linked songs and feel supported to volunteer their own responsive prayers which are thoughtful and touching. The community as a whole appreciate the importance of prayer in their daily life and particularly at times of need in their own and others' lives.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Pupils enjoy RE and speak with great positivity about the subject. The standard of work in books is comparable with the high standards of other subjects and the skills used progress across the different year groups. The absence of the RE coordinator has slowed the development of marking and assessment systems in school, however strong support has been taken from the diocese to improve this. Cross federation staff development and use of federation RE expertise has helped staff to feel more confident in their delivery of the subject. New systems of assessment give

an indication of the attainment of pupils, but further development of the accuracy in this area is of great importance. Class teachers now teach their own class in RE, further raising the profile of the subject.

In lessons, pupils participate and answer with impressive knowledge and accuracy. The introduction of 'big questions' has allowed them to apply critical enquiry and analysis skills, particularly challenging higher ability learners. The use of these questions is not however standardised across all classes. The introduction of RE journals has allowed staff to begin evidencing the more original and inspirational lessons which are delivered. Pupils' ability to be creative and original in their application of knowledge is now more obvious in the short time that these journals have been used.

Visits to and visitors from an impressive array of Christian organisations has developed secure knowledge of the Christian faith. Pupils speak with confidence and enthusiasm about their learning of other faiths and beliefs but less opportunities are available to develop this due to the context of the school locality. In the absence of the RE coordinator, senior staff have given priority to the consolidation and development of RE and this continues to be an area of development for the school.

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

Leaders have a thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of this church school. They model Christian values throughout times of challenge and adversity. Those involved with the school appreciate the passion leaders have to develop the school and the compassion they show to those they work with. Numerous staff and parents shared the support they had been given during times of distress and were clear in their description of a headteacher who lives out the values which strengthen relationships in the school and wider community.

The headteacher confidently articulates the impact of the explicit values she has helped to promote. Her knowledge combined with accurate analysis of performance has allowed her to create a positive and productive vision for the school. Whilst many staff are new to the school, they are all understanding and supportive of the Christian direction which has been set and this has created rapid progress as a Church school. Staff feel the values of the school shape them as people and feel a positive impact on their own spirituality.

Leaders have ensured that the Christian character of the school is present in all decisions and this shapes the superb attainment and social development of pupils. Strong and beneficial relationships have been created in the local and wider church community. Links with the diocese and other Church schools are having significant impact on the academic and spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of the pupils. Strengths across the federation with Whalton Church of England first school have also been utilised well, particularly to ensure that support for RE is available. Both RE and worship are given high-priority and, as such, meet statutory requirements. New staff are well supported and developed whilst opportunities to develop leaders across the federation have also been taken. Parents are particularly supportive of the work of leaders to create an environment driven by Christian values where their children are happy and successful.

SIAMS report May 2017 St. Helen's C of E First School, Longhorsley, NE65 8UT

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