

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Whitley Memorial Church of England First School

Gordon Terrace, Bedlington, Northumberland, NE22 5DE	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Newcastle
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Northumberland
Date of inspection	28 June 2018
Date of last inspection	10 July 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided First School 122281
Headteacher	Sally Hobson
Inspector's name and number	Richard Goodman 889

School context

Whitley Memorial is a larger than average voluntary aided first school. The school has established an Early Years Unit with an onsite nursery in which almost all children transition to the reception year. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and those in receipt of pupil premium funding is above national averages. The vast majority of pupils are White British and very few pupils speak English as an additional language.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Whitley Memorial as a Church of England school are good

- Staff and pupils have a clear understanding of the school's Christian vision and values and are able to articulate the impact this has on their achievement and how they treat others.
- Collective worship is extremely well led and managed which significantly contributes to pupils' understanding of Christian values and biblical teachings.
- The introduction of Understanding Christianity within the religious education (RE) curriculum has ensured that pupils are developing a secure understanding of Christianity and the Bible.
- School leaders have formed strong and mutually beneficial partnerships with the local church and parents helping to enrich the lives of learners.

Areas to improve

- Ensure that the school's distinctive Christian vision and values underpin all aspects of the school development plan and policies so that it is clear how they shape the work of the school.
- Continue to refine the practice of pupil evaluation of collective worship in order to drive and sustain improvements.
- Map out how Christian values link to the RE and wider-school curriculum so that their contribution to the school's Christian character can be evaluated fully.
- Provide a consistent approach to teacher feedback in RE books so that further progress can be seen.

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

This is a loving and inclusive school where staff and pupils understand and live out its distinctive Christian vision and values. All staff use the school motto of 'Believe to Achieve' as a guiding principle for their actions. At the heart of the school's ethos are the recently introduced 12 Christian values. Collective worship is used extremely effectively as the main vehicle for developing pupils' understanding of these values and their links to biblical teaching.

The school believes in the God-given potential in each child so teachers adapt their teaching to suit individual needs. This is emphasised through the school's focus on the Bible teaching, 'I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me' (Philippians 4:13). Parents speak warmly of how all staff take the time to get to know their children. Through personalised love, care and support, pupils are encouraged to believe that they can achieve and this has a positive impact on the progress they make. Consequently, achievement is good with many pupils, including more vulnerable learners, making expected levels of progress. Credible improvement strategies have been put in place and their effectiveness is evaluated at regular points across the year. Noticeable impact is already being seen, particularly with regards to the progress pupil premium and SEN pupils are making in reading and phonics.

A rich curriculum and varied extra-curricular opportunities provide a framework for supporting effective spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. Initiatives such as Whitley MPs and Worship Leaders emphasise how pupils live out the Christian values. Corridors and classrooms proudly display pupils' work and achievements, showcasing how Christian values are put into practice on a regular basis.

Pupils' behaviour is good and relationships are positive: characterised by a consistent display of love, care, trust and honesty towards each other. Pupils speak with confidence of how the school's Christian values help them to think how they should behave towards others. Teachings such as 'treat others how you'd like to be treated' and following Jesus' example of helping those in need, are used as examples by pupils of ways to model their behaviour. Weekly Wonders of Whitley (WOW) awards recognise pupil achievements, including the modelling of Christian values throughout school life. A small group of pupils have recently been given the role of Values Detectives. This requires them to identify examples of Christian values being put into practice. Exciting plans are in place to develop this so that further examples can be celebrated.

The RE curriculum and collective worship positively contribute to raising pupils' awareness that there is a multi-faith and multi-cultural world beyond the school. Pupils across each year learn about different major world religions and visits to religious places of worship, such as the local synagogue, provide real life experiences. This helps to develop respect, love and tolerance towards all people. The introduction of Understanding Christianity has ensured that pupils develop a secure understanding of Christian belief and practices. School leaders have correctly identified that further action is needed in mapping out how Christian values link to the RE and wider-school curriculum so that their contribution to the school's Christian character can be evaluated fully.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

School leadership, governors and staff place great value on the importance of collective worship. Pupils are enthused and inspired by high quality worship in both class and whole-school worship. Collective worship is used as the prime factor in developing the school community's understanding of its Christian values. Worship is focused on a different Christian value each half term and is used to unpack its meaning and biblical links. Pupils speak candidly of how their learning in worship stays with them and provides a reference point for how they should treat others. The Bible is central to collective worship and is used extensively within it. Pupils talk with enthusiasm of Bible stories and their links to Christian values, such as the betrayal of Jesus by Peter and the association to truthfulness. Through collective worship and RE pupils develop a secure understanding of the person of Jesus and how God can be understood through the concept of the Trinity. The school community's spiritual development is strengthened by regular visits to the local church; services celebrating Easter, Harvest, Christmas and Eucharist develop pupils' understanding of Anglican traditions.

Worship provides extensive opportunities for pupils and adults to explore their inner feelings and engage with prayer and reflection, significantly contributing to their spiritual development. Worship is used not only to celebrate good things in life but also to address pain and sadness, helping the school community through hard times. Worship challenges are set weekly and develop an understanding of Christian values through, for example, the writing of prayers for what to be thankful for. Pupils' prayers are displayed within each classroom, on the school prayer tree and are read out within worship. An engaging peace garden has recently been created and school leaders have inspiring plans for how this garden will be used by the school community for further prayer and reflection.

Collective worship is extremely well led and managed. A range of worship leaders generate an inclusive, varied and appealing atmosphere which aids the school community in their spiritual journey. Pupil Worship Leaders and Champions work effectively with the local vicar and are extensively involved in the planning, delivery and evaluation of worship, contributing to a sense of pupil-ownership.

School leaders recognise that they are at the start of the process of pupil evaluation of worship and solid plans are in place drive and sustain improvements. Effective systems for governor monitoring and evaluation of collective worship ensure that they understand the impact it has on the lives of pupils.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

The school's leadership regard RE as a core subject and it is the curriculum driving force in developing pupils' understanding of Christian values. The RE curriculum follows the diocesan syllabus and elements of Understanding Christianity have been incorporated into it. This ensures that explicit opportunities are provided for pupils to engage with Bible teachings, particularly related to Jesus, and to consider the impact these have on their own lives. The quality of teaching in RE lessons is consistently good across all year groups. Consequently, most learners including the most vulnerable, make expected levels of progress or better when compared with other core subjects. Pupils clearly enjoy their RE lessons and speak warmly of the varied teaching methods used to facilitate learning. This was especially noticeable with work linked to Judaism and the creation of individual prayers to be placed inside a mezuzah. Significant opportunities are afforded for pupils to learn about and from religion and to consider how religion impacts on their own lives. The RE curriculum, and visits to places of worship, ensure that RE is engaging and relevant and that all pupils develop a secure understanding of different world faiths. Pupils consider a range of concepts and festivals from Hinduism, Judaism and Islam, helping to forge a level of respect and tolerance to those who may have a different faith to themselves.

RE is well led and managed. The RE lead ensures that effective assessment tasks are in place enabling teachers to develop a clear understanding of pupil achievement and progress. Pupils' RE books show consistent feedback that teachers give for pupils to improve their work. However, not all pupils respond to these comments. Regular learning walks, observations and work scrutiny enable the RE lead to gain a clear understanding of the quality of teaching and learning. This informs the specific support provided for teachers to improve their confidence and skills. Coaching, sharing good practice and joint learning walks have improved RE teaching. The RE lead benefitted from recent diocesan training on Understanding Christianity and had the opportunity to roll this out to all staff, so that they are more secure in their delivery of this resource. Governors are regularly involved in the monitoring and evaluation of RE, providing challenge and support to help drive forward improvements. The RE lead appreciates the importance of mapping Christian values across the RE curriculum, in order to ascertain a comprehensive understanding of where this takes place. Effective plans have been put in place for this to occur.

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

The headteacher and acting deputy headteacher passionately articulate and live out the school's Christian vision. As a result, all staff live out the vision that all pupils can achieve and reach their God-given potential. School leaders have a good understanding of pupils' achievement and through regularly evaluated improvement strategies can demonstrate that progress is improving. Governors work closely with leaders to hold them to account for the school's effectiveness as a church school. Governors frequently complete joint monitoring of RE and collective worship; feedback is provided to all staff and discussed by the governing body. Consequently, governors have a secure understanding of the school's Christian vision and can articulate the impact this has on pupils' achievement, relationships and well-being. Although Christian values are embedded across the school, the vision and values do not yet underpin and inform all school development priorities. All staff have access to a range of professional development opportunities which impact positively on their practice. Significant time has been invested in the future leadership potential of the RE and collective worship lead who is now the acting deputy headteacher. Opportunities have been given for her to cascade her training and expertise, such as with Understanding Christianity, to all staff resulting in improved practice across the school.

School leaders have formed strong, effective and mutually beneficial links with the local church which helps to enrich the lives of learners. The local vicar is an enthusiastic and regular visitor in school, leading and planning worship with pupils and monitoring RE and collective worship in his capacity as a governor. Pupils regularly visit the local church, taking part in services such as Remembrance Sunday, Easter and Christmas. This deepens their understanding of their local heritage and Anglican practice. Pupils engage in a range of community activities and charitable projects, such as with St. Oswald's hospice and local care homes: testament to living out the Christian values of love and compassion. Multiple occasions are provided for parents to engage with and contribute to the life of the school. Regular newsletters, an active parent-committee, and invitations to weekly celebratory worship ensure that parents are involved in the life of the school and see how values are lived out each day. The school meets statutory requirements for RE and collective worship.