



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Berwick St Mary's CE Voluntary Controlled First School

Newfields
Berwick upon Tweed
TD15 1SP

Previous SIAMS grade: Outstanding

Current inspection grade: Good

Diocese: Newcastle

Local authority: Northumberland
Dates of inspection: 10 December 2015
Date of last inspection: 10 November 2010
School's unique reference number: 122271
Headteacher: Gary Hilton
Inspector's name and number: Canon Brian Hedley NS619

School context

This is a smaller than average sized first school in the north of Berwick. The percentage of learners with special education needs and those supported by the pupil premium is above average. Most pupils are White British. The headteacher was appointed in September 2014. After a difficult period the school is now much more stable. An inspection in March 2015 judged that the school Requires Improvement.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Mary's VC First School as a Church of England school are good

- Strong Christian leadership by the headteacher together with his unrelenting drive for school improvement is moving the school forward
- Core Christian values underpin 'learning and growing' and as a result, behaviour and relationships are good
- Relevant, engaging worship and religious education (RE) contribute significantly to learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
- Partnerships with parents, local churches, schools and charities result in genuine respect and a growing harmony between people from diverse backgrounds

Areas to improve

- Rapidly increase all governors' skills in strategic planning, effective evaluation and ability to challenge in order to meet their statutory responsibilities better and share the workload more fairly
- Ensure that distinctiveness, effectiveness and the school's core values are built into the Improvement Plan and feature regularly on the agenda of governing body meetings

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

This is a warm, friendly school. Pupils care for one another well. This is because they develop and grow respectful relationships with others by living out core Christian values and drawing upon the teachings of Jesus as their inspiration.

Adults in school are excellent role models. They know every child exceptionally well, whether they are in their class or not. Parents explained that 'there is a great sense of whole-school unity but at the same time every child is known as an individual, too. Both pupils and parents were keen to point out that what is learned, especially in Worship and Religious Education (RE), makes a difference to learning, attitudes, behaviour and the decisions they make within school and also at home. One told me that, 'everyone is learning to live together; everyone gets an all-round education for life'.

A strong emphasis is placed on meeting the needs of every child. This is particularly the case for those with additional needs, many of whom do very well. The staff are now working hard to ensure that the same level of care and challenge is available to every child. For example, those in Reception are making much better progress than before.

Communication between home and school is very strong and highly appreciated by parents.

Many examples were given of whole families flourishing in the face of very challenging circumstances because of the care and support extended to them by the headteacher and his staff. One parent exclaimed, 'I love this school', another explained that, 'without this school I would be a wreck', and another that, 'I get amazing support'.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Learners are able to show a degree of sensitivity and maturity when discussing issues such as justice, forgiveness and reconciliation. For example, a small group spoke most profoundly about how these core values enable them to deal with the thing that worries them most – broken relationships.

The RE curriculum and charity work help pupils reflect deeply on those with different needs and cultures.

Though Christian values are explicit in displays and readily and confidently spoken about by pupils, they are not explained clearly enough in all school policies. As these documents are reviewed, this should be corrected. For example, the Behaviour Management Policy could helpfully describe how justice, forgiveness, compassion and reconciliation will be used to sustain relationships and underpin ethos.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

The Collective Worship policy has recently been reviewed. As a result, the importance of this vital aspect of school life has been re-stated. The careful planning of an annual programme of themes which include core values and major Christian festivals has produced a range of opportunities for the school to come together with a variety of leaders on a daily basis to reflect and deepen its spiritual understanding, whilst nurturing learners, staff, parents and visitors. This includes increased designated spaces for times of stillness and reflection outside of collective worship recommended in the last report.

Pupils speak confidently when describing the impact worship has on them. One spoke passionately about the theme of trust, saying that until they had explored this subject in worship, they had only ever thought about whom you 'could trust' and not 'who you can't, such as people who lie'.

Anglican patterns of worship enable pupils to recognise the different elements of it and to explain any personal significance for them. For example some spoke of 'Jesus, the light showing us the way' when reflecting on the use and symbolism of candles, whilst others said how they liked to join in the responses, hymns, prayers and times of silence.

Parents spoke about how they felt more welcome at worship because it had become 'open' and as a result sometimes forty or fifty of them gathered together. They expressed the view that they would rather worship in the school than make the journey to church which isn't easily accessible to many of them. This is something the vicar is reflecting upon for the future.

Evaluation of the effectiveness of the governors' worship policy is undertaken on a daily basis by staff. Parents also provide feedback, but examples from children are limited at present. The school's plan to rectify this is timely.

The partnership with the local parish is a growing strength. Given the short time the new vicar has been in post, much has been achieved and is to be applauded. His input and care of the school is sincerely appreciated.

The arrangements for collective worship meet statutory requirements.

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

The headteacher and assistant headteacher share a strong Christian vision. This drives their unrelenting efforts and ambition to make human flourishing at all levels a reality for everyone at St Mary's - pupils, staff and parents alike. They have established a clear direction for the school and have fully embraced the support offered by a range of educational professionals. As a result, staffing is now more stable, the quality of teaching and learning is improving, pupils are making better progress - especially notable in Reception, and self-evaluation is much more robust. By their example and unequivocal commitment they have galvanised the staff team so that, together, they now have an effective plan to help them work towards excellence. At the moment however, the impetus for all of this comes mainly from them.

Leadership and management are not yet good because strategic planning, effective evaluation and challenge by governors remain relatively weak. The Governing Body continue to rely too much on the headteacher and a few of their number to shoulder the majority of their responsibilities. Though there has been a recent skills audit and some training on assessment and monitoring for governors, this is currently 'a work in progress' and at the moment, there is little evidence that it has resulted in their meetings having any major or improved impact. This must be rectified urgently.

A recent review of the school's vision and aims has produced a much clearer definition of its direction as a Church of England school. The governing body have recently begun to relate the requirements of the SIAMS Evaluation Schedule 2013 to the school's Improvement Plan, but there is still some way to go with regard to defining how their chosen core Christian values will raise achievement. This element should be included regularly on the governing body agenda.

SIAMS report December 2015 St Mary's First School Berwick TD15 ISP