



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Longhoughton CE VC First School,

Lacey Street,
Longhoughton,
Alnwick,
Northumberland
NE66 3AJ

Diocese: Newcastle

Local authority: Northumberland

Date of inspection: March 31st 2014

Date of last inspection: June 2009

School's unique reference number: 122277

Headteacher: Mrs Tracey Critchlow

Inspector's name and number: Mary Pedley NS361

School context

This is a rural first school with 97 pupils on roll which is a significant drop since 2010. This reflects high mobility: 49% of pupils come from service families based at RAF Boulmer where families stay for an average of 2 years. This results in groups of children leaving and joining the school at short notice. Recently, there has been a significant drop in pupil numbers due to postings and a reduction in personnel at the base. Houses recently built in the village have increased the number of civilian children attending giving a larger percentage of children staying from Reception to Year 4.

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

- A very inclusive, caring and supportive ethos in a school context that is unusual, clearly reflects the distinctive Christian character of the school
- Positive and strong leadership from the head teacher shapes the Christian character of the school resulting in good support and collaboration from all staff and governors
- Foundation governors are strongly committed in their involvement at all levels, especially in systems of monitoring the Church aspects of the school
- Valuable and varied worship led by different leaders, including pupils, offers worship that makes an excellent impact on all in the school community

Areas to improve

- Consideration and implementation of formal assessment systems for Religious Education (RE)
- Enhance the value and impact of marking RE work to show achievement of learning objectives and to include some questions that indicate targets which challenge pupils: thus helping them understand their progress

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

Though the distinctively Christian character is good, there are some outstanding features. The fact that almost 50% of pupils are from the nearby RAF Boulmer base has a major impact on the life of the school and on pupil numbers, yet Christian values very clearly underpin all that the school does to meet the needs of all learners. This is strongly evident in the very inclusive, caring and supportive culture that enables all in the school community, especially pupils, to welcome and befriend all incoming children and families. Parents give great value to the Christian ethos, the caring relationship all staff have with pupils and speak highly of '*one big happy family*'. Pupils benefit hugely too, because the context in which they work has significant impact on their social, spiritual and moral development. Spirituality has been enhanced by the recent focus given to children learning about prayer, writing and speaking their own and presenting these in 'Class Prayer books'. These are displayed in 'reflection' areas in each class giving pupils opportunities for thought and prayer. The school is in an area where there is little cultural diversity, but pupils gain good understanding of some different cultures, beliefs and faiths through each class being designated to a country and building a 'Passport' of information. The Diocesan link with Botswana enabled a visiting choir to sing in school, thus strengthening pupils understanding of different cultures and developing their knowledge of Christians around the world. RE teaching is given an equal profile to other core subjects and learners respond well to, and enjoy their lessons. RE teaching observed in all key stages is good with some outstanding elements showing a good variety of teaching and learning strategies used to engage and interest pupils. The RE co-ordinator is new to this role this year and is learning how this might develop. Some of the new Diocesan syllabus is being trialled and adapted for use in this controlled school, alongside the Local Authority Agreed syllabus. As yet, there are no formal assessment systems in place. Though teachers have informal knowledge of children's achievement in RE, this does not show what levels they attain. Through inspection, pupils' RE work indicates they are achieving appropriate levels, equal to that achieved in other subjects. Marking could be more helpful in asking some questions that challenge their thinking, thus helping pupils to know how to progress.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

The impact of worship is seen in all aspects of school life where attitudes, behaviour and relationships are very positive, caring and supportive by all, for all. Worship has outstanding impact on pupils' spiritual and moral development and is central to school life. It has a strong Christian focus where major Christian festivals are celebrated, both in school and in church. The parish priest, also a foundation governor, encourages the use of the church for worship and for RE learning. Effective planning is used by all leaders, including visiting leaders and is appropriately adapted from a published programme providing meaningful experiences for pupils. Pupils are engaged and enjoy interaction with different leaders and local clergy, including the RAF base padre. Worship is monitored effectively by governors, who make recommendations that are acted on and included in a worship action plan. Regular evaluation of worship is used to ensure a positive and effective impact on pupils. Worship observed had some outstanding features with pupils challenged to interpret the parable of the houses built on rock or sand and they were able to relate this to their own lives. Through their participation and good leader questioning, pupils answered well showing good understanding and knowledge of the value of life based on the Christian faith. Thus the impact of this worship time was clear and was consolidated by the word 'faith' being added to a Values display in the hall. Through ensuing discussion, pupils were able to explain meanings of other Christian values, saying that '*Jesus should always inspire us*'. Since the last inspection (2009), where prayer and reflection spaces were identified as areas for development, pupils have gained much in spiritual understanding of the value and purpose of both. This is also evident in worship times where prayers are said and reflection time is given. Classes also plan, lead and present class worship to the whole school, inviting parents and governors to join them. A recent class worship celebrated Jewish customs, beliefs, festivals and

food. Parents, governors, staff and pupils speak highly of these occasions, with parents valuing the spiritual, moral and cultural impact on their children and on themselves.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management of this church school is good, with several outstanding features. The Christian ethos is excellent and underpins the daily life of the school. This encourages every child and adult to understand, articulate, share and practise Christian values. Leadership vision reaches out through effective partnership links into church, local, diocesan and county levels creating very good, meaningful community cohesion at all levels. The head teacher's very positive, collaborative and committed leadership style is outstanding and encourages excellent teamwork from all staff and governors. All are involved with, and contribute to school improvement planning, where clear focus is given to both worship and RE teaching. Teachers and support staff work well as a team to ensure good provision for pupils' RE learning experiences and valuable worship time, within a caring Christian environment where all pupils feel safe and valued as individuals. Pupils involved in the School Council, which is organised by a foundation governor, respond positively to the opportunities and responsibilities offered. Their immediate project is to create a 'Welcome Booklet' for all new pupils and their parents. Parents from the village and the RAF base are very involved in their support for the school and appreciate the Christian values and learning seen in their children. Some parents from outside the village choose this school because it is a church school. Parents speak very positively of the care and support given to their children and many value the Christian aspects of the school. Governors give much time and commitment as managers of this church school and hold leaders to account. They are proactive in guiding and supporting the leaders in how to move the school forward. The system of linking every governor to a subject area is excellent and ensures their understanding of the effectiveness and impact of worship and RE teaching. The development of formal assessment systems for RE would enable teachers to demonstrate how standards compare to other subjects; thus help leadership and management to become outstanding.