

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Harbottle C of E Voluntary Aided First School

Harbottle,
Morpeth,
Northumberland,
NE65 7DG.

Diocese of Newcastle

Local authority: Northumberland
Dates of inspection: 21st June 2010
Date of last inspection: 25th January 2007
School's unique reference number: 122292
Headteacher: Revd Sue Joyner
Inspector's name and number: The Revd Nicholas Chamberlain 508

School context

This very small school serves the deeply rural community of Upper Coquetdale. It is in federation with Netherton Northside First School, six miles away. The headteacher currently leads both schools. All pupils are White British, none have a statement of special educational needs, Early Years Foundation stage is provided through a mixed-age class of Nursery, Reception and Key Stage One children. All teaching and assistant staff are part-time.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Harbottle Church of England Aided First School as a Church of England school are outstanding

The best things about this school, according to the children, are that it is a Christian school, that the teachers are very kind, and that the lunches are very tasty. These comments, drawn from a random sample of pupils, encapsulate much about what I agree to be an outstandingly effective Church of England school: a tangible, engaging and respectful Christian ethos; very supportive staff; and a sense of a real team in which everyone matters and contributes.

Established strengths

- Outstanding knowledge of, expectations for and care for the children by all adults connected with the school, together with deeply embedded Christian values and practice, form the basis of the school's success. Every child is valued for who they are, and for who they might become, as is every adult.
- Worship is expertly woven together by a team of leaders and inspires participants for the rest of the day.
- Scrupulously planned R.E. is enjoyed and valued by the children and contributes strongly to their outstanding personal, social and spiritual development.
- An active and involved governing body works in synergy with the staff team in the school, skilfully deploying resources so that what is already a model of generous Christian community is being expertly shaped to meet the challenges of the future.

Focus for development

- As new clergy are appointed to the local church, build on the already outstanding links that exist between the school and the ecclesiastical parish through drawing on their strengths and potential contribution.

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

The children of this school are confident, happy, and appropriately mature young people. They thrive in the supportive atmosphere that is created for them by the staff and the other adults who are involved in the school. They relish a rich and creative curriculum and comment very positively about the range of trips that they undertake, charities that they support, and visitors who are part of their experience. Although they form a tight-knit community, with currently 30 learners from Nursery to Year 4, the closeness of their relationship actually supports their individual and distinctive flourishing. For example some of the pupils explained to me about the particular needs of one of their friends, demonstrating both their respect for him and their sensitivity to him. This sensitivity and respect is modelled by all the adults in the school, and I suggest that the outstanding knowledge of and concern

for the young people that is consistently displayed by the adults is one of the key reasons for the children themselves being so personally and socially well-developed. This atmosphere, however, is not cloying; these are real young people with real adults, who do encounter problems, and who deal with them: 'If some-one's sad, you try to cheer them up. You keep an eye open for them at the Friendship Stop'. A similar straight-forwardness is encountered when the topic of prayer and worship is mentioned: 'this is the disciple that I drew' said one child, showing me a frieze in the quiet corner. I interrupted him talking with his friend about what it means to follow Jesus, and he then explained it to me. The Christian foundation is simply intrinsic to the life of Harbottle. Never forced, it is enabling, supportive and inclusive.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

The potential that a small school offers for creativity in worship is well-grasped by Harbottle. Since the last inspection, the venue for regular worship has changed and effort has been placed into making a multi-purpose space as attractive and enriching as possible. Whole-school worship now takes place in the same room in which there is the quiet corner, and this in itself helps to allow the impact of formal worship to permeate the rest of the day. The worship that I observed was very well-planned and conducted, and included opportunity for both reflection and celebration. Every child present was included in what was going on, either through answering a question or through having responsibility to set the atmosphere by playing recorded music or through having shared in producing the video presentation that was part of the morning's story-telling. The singing of the song 'all the colours of the rainbow', and the actions that went alongside this, were performed with real enthusiasm and meaning. A key part of the success of worship in the school, and of its outstanding impact, is that the school seizes the opportunity afforded by its small size to make worship responsive to need. This means that regular opportunities are given to the children to lead and shape worship themselves. It also means that there is the freedom to include in worship unexpected events from the life of the school, the community, or the world, and to honour these more easily than in a larger organisation. The organic nature of the worship, flowing also into worship in the local churches, is one of its great strengths. The worship in the school has an outstanding impact on the young people, as evidenced by their own and adults' response to it; an impact that is being continually reviewed.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Scrupulous planning (an acknowledged strength of the Head-teacher in the eyes of the governors) leads to outstandingly effective religious education. Again, it is the impact of what is offered that is most telling: the children remember what they do in Religious Education; they are energised by it and they make connections between their formal learning in lessons and the rest of their life. The variety of techniques that is used ensures that the huge range of character and ability that is present in each lesson is fully accommodated. In the lesson that I observed, kinaesthetic learners were engaged through participation in drama and reflective learners through being given an opportunity to meditate. The head-teacher is aware of each child's needs and tries to offer each child something that will be both affirming and appropriately challenging. Alongside the planning there is a clear annual reporting structure to parents about attainment. Care is taken to ensure that work in Harbottle coheres with what will be done at Dr Thomlinson Middle School, to which most of the pupils go when they leave. This awareness of a wider perspective underpins an objectivity of analysis that is another key component in achieving such high quality provision.

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

Through the extremely able leadership of the Head-teacher and Governing Body, the staff and other adults linked with Harbottle school have formed a Christian community that is valued by local people, whatever their faith, and that is recognised to contribute hugely not only to the education of the children of Coquetdale but to the fuller texture of local life. Team work is crucial to this, as is good communication and a welcoming, direct manner. The leadership and management of the school have an outstandingly clear perception of its strengths, and of the areas in which development is possible. Links with the local parish continue to be outstanding and there is the opportunity to develop these further through the arrival of new ministers. Governor, staff and parental expertise and skills are shared very effectively, so forming the school's identity, and could fruitfully be offered on a much wider stage. Although isolated geographically, Harbottle First School has an eye on the world.