

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

### Lowick Church of England Controlled First School

Main Street,  
Lowick,  
Northumberland,  
TD15 2UA

#### Diocese: Newcastle

Local authority: Northumberland

Dates of inspection: 17<sup>th</sup> September 2010

Date of last inspection: 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2007

School's unique reference number: 131221

Headteacher: Mrs Christine Vanson

Inspector's name and number: The Revd Nicholas Chamberlain 508

#### School context

This very small Church of England Controlled school works in soft federation with Holy Island (Aided) school to serve a rural community in North Northumberland. The particularity of each school's context is respected while the advantages of frequently learning together are fully grasped. The school's building and grounds have been expertly developed to provide a rich environment for learning. All pupils are from a White British heritage. There is a higher than average proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or with disabilities.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Lowick Church of England Controlled First School is outstanding

Building on the outstanding achievements that were noted during its first denominational inspection, Lowick School has continued to develop even further. Creative leadership, focussed governance, loving and talented teaching, all combine to deepen the school's already outstanding Christian ethos, to strengthen its partnership with Holy Island School and to offer generous Christian education of the very highest quality.

#### Established strengths

- Outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is enabled through the establishment of a loving, safe, transparent, generous and rigorous Christian ethos.
- Outstandingly co-ordinated, scrupulously prepared, corporately led worship enriches the life of the whole school and helps with the process of embodying its values.
- Outstanding practice by the Headteacher, combined with the honesty, realism and commitment of the Governing Body, contribute to the school's outstandingly effective leadership and management as a church school.

#### Focus for development

- The school recognizes and values its partnership with the local church and sees this as a key feature in its future development.

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

Day begins at Lowick School with half an hour spent in tutor groups in which the children read, supporting each other and being supported by their tutor, and also during which opportunity is given to share how each person is feeling. From the very beginning, therefore, purposeful learning is potently combined with attention to the state of the whole person, child and adult alike. This, combined with the circle time that punctuates the school day, helps to establish the school's outstandingly enabling, supportive and happy ethos. Every person matters and knows that they do. Different life-events are handled completely appropriately. Positive behavioural norms are established, allowing any (extremely rare) divergence from them to be swiftly checked. Respect for the person, for the school body as a whole and for the environment is made tangible. The fluctuating nature of the school's population (sometimes including children from Holy Island, sometimes not, according to the tides) is thus consummately handled. Disruption is eliminated because the children have learnt to listen to each other and the adults with exceptional attentiveness. The result is one of the most positive Christian environments that I have encountered. Christian values are articulated

through living them, thus giving individuals the freedom to espouse them if they choose to do so. The adults work together in a highly sophisticated team, revealing thereby to the children the power and the success that can be derived from trust, clear communication, attention to feelings and scrupulous honesty. The children's outstanding social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is enabled by the fact that they experience the values and concepts that are being taught. I was particularly struck by the transparency of the way in which the children's own suggestions and contributions to the day are woven into what happens in school, with for example a spontaneous play offered by one tutor group to the whole school being welcomed, evaluated and reflected upon right until home time. Moreover, the creation of such a safe environment for the whole school allows the children to experience learning that acknowledges their physicality as well as their emotional, social and other needs: a child feels safe enough to fall asleep because it is the end of a day at the end of only his second week in school and he is relaxed in worship; a child settles down to pray leaning against a teacher and her friend. This is embodied learning of the highest quality. I agree with one governor's estimation that 'this is the most creative educational environment that I have ever experienced'.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding**

Collective worship is jointly planned for both Holy Island and Lowick schools. However, it is delivered in ways that are appropriate to each school's context. I saw evidence relating to the previous day's worship (in which I had shared on Holy Island) during the inspection of Lowick. The Lowick children had responded just as creatively as their Holy Island friends, but in ways that were particular to them. This rootedness of the worship in the particular context of the community at the time was further evidenced during the worship in which I subsequently shared in school. This worship involved both cohorts of children and celebrated the achievements of the week. Rather than this being a simple litany of teacher-chosen success there was a sense of the whole school body participating in both congratulating those who received awards and discerning some of those who should receive one. For example, there was open discussion among the staff and students about which of a number of possible candidates should be given the Barnabas award for encouragement. One candidate was appraised by a fellow student as 'maybe a little bit encouraging, but not all the time'. The student in question fully accepted this appraisal and joined enthusiastically in congratulating the eventual recipient. I was struck by the honesty, rigour, enthusiasm and love that were demonstrated during this process and throughout the worship; one could suggest that this indicates worship that is truly offered though the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is clear how the worship reinforces the school's ethos and vice versa. When at the end a child spontaneously offered to lead the whole school in prayer this was a natural culmination of a deeply meaningful time of corporate celebration and reflection. The collective worship at Lowick School is one of its outstanding strengths and helps to establish the embodiment of values which is the school's most distinctive feature.

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

The Headteacher's outstanding contribution, together with the Governing Body's clear grasp of strategic and developmental issues, ensures that the effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is outstanding. The Headteacher has assembled a staff team that is creative, highly-skilled, and able to function with rigour and flexibility. Her deployment of resources so that the team has time to work together properly and her recognition that investment of time in shared school ethos-building activities will pay dividends in terms of learning outcomes is wise and brave. As in the previous inspection, the SEF and the SIAS Toolkits are models of their type, demonstrating the clarity and accuracy of the school's leaders' and governors' self-perception. Recognised areas for on-going development include the school's partnership with the local parish church and its hope to extend the children's understanding of other world faiths. The school's outstanding ability to develop further is grounded in the hard work of the staff and governors, their rigorous honesty, and their commitment to developing Lowick as a genuinely Christian environment for learning. Aspirations for working more closely with the parish church should particularly be encouraged and supported by diocesan colleagues.