

Tritlington C of E VA First School,
Tritlington,
Morpeth.
NE61 3DU
Diocese of Newcastle
Northumberland LA
Date of inspection: June 22nd 2009
Date of last inspection: May 2006
URN: 122299
Headteacher: Mrs Liz Donaldson
Inspector: Mary Pedley
National Society inspector's number: 361

School context

Tritlington First School is a small rural school serving local and surrounding villages. Church status and an inclusive ethos, result in parents choosing to bring their children here from outside the catchment area. There are 56 children on roll, including the Nursery, and most children are from White – British backgrounds. They are taught in 3 mixed age classes with Nursery children alongside Reception children in an Early Years Foundation Stage Unit.

Summary Judgement

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of this school as a church school are good.

Since the last SIAS inspection in 2006 there have been clear improvements which have enhanced the Christian ethos of the school. The head teacher's strong Christian values are shared through established leadership and management and all are now committed to further improvement.

Established strengths

- A much improved Christian ethos that is inclusive in caring for the needs of each child and where strong values become everyday practice for the children
- A leadership style that encourages and uses the skills and specialisms of all in the school community:

Focus for development

- A fully consistent approach to planning, evaluating, assessment and monitoring for Collective Worship and Religious Education
- Though there is some excellent RE teaching, an effective marking system needs to be implemented where targets help children know how well they are doing and where they might improve

The school's distinctive Christian character is good and meets the needs of all learners

The distinctive Christian character of the school is good with some outstanding features. There has been clear improvement since the last SIAS inspection. One member of staff said, *'We have gone from 'ticking over' to a clear forward moving direction.'* There is a very strong Christian ethos that supports all children and learners with special needs are inclusively managed. This ethos permeates the school's life and is reflected positively in how parents, church, village and wider communities all have high regard for their school. A parent praised the school as a church school *'for its high aspirations'*. The children are very happy, much enjoy their school time and achieve good standards. The school environment, learning and teaching, care and guidance are all good and ensure that children make clear progress in their personal, social, moral and spiritual development. This is reflected in children's ability to think about and deal with a variety of challenging situations in their learning, through worship and around school. They have high levels of self esteem, maturity and independence and willingly support others. Children in Nursery and Reception years enjoy learning in an exciting and challenging environment, where the teacher and teaching assistant work very well together. All children have a voice through the recently established whole school council: they are rightly proud of their achievements which have had a definite impact on improving several areas of school life. Children's understanding and experience of multicultural diversity is achieved through some excellent RE learning, worship time and visits. There is a strong sense of all working together as a school team, where Christian values lie at the heart of decision making and further improvement of the school's distinctive Christian character.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good.

Collective worship is an effective part of each day for the whole school. The impact of worship time is good and there is clear improvement since the last SIAS inspection. The head teacher is the Worship co-ordinator and shares the planned worship themes with staff and church readers who take turns in leading worship time. A more consistent and evaluative approach to using the objectives of weekly worship would enhance the impact of worship time on children's spiritual growth. Children participate very naturally and with enthusiasm in singing, acting, movement, discussion and answering questions. They learnt much about the meaning of the story of the 'Feeding of the Five Thousand' and were encouraged to relate this to their own lives. Time for prayer and reflection helps children to gain spiritually, though this could be strengthened by emphasising this quiet time. It is clear that children understand the facts about having a faith and many opportunities are given to them to help them understand the relevance of faith in their own lives. Focus is given to the 'worship area' in the hall, which is used well for relevant displays of religious artefacts and books: these make valuable links between worship themes and RE learning. Worship is clearly Christian and helps to increase children's understanding of the Anglican tradition through good use of prayers and through their contributions to festivals and other events in the parish church. There is a valued 'celebration assembly' each week, to which parents are invited and where children's achievements are recognised. Governors are supportive in their managerial role of monitoring collective worship. This could be more effective through more qualitative evaluation of the impact it has on the children's spiritual growth and understanding.

The effectiveness of religious education is good.

The overall effect of religious education is good. Teaching of mixed age classes, with a wide range of abilities, is very good and there is clear differentiation for different abilities and those with special needs. The head teacher is co-ordinator for RE and teaches all classes in the school. Early Years Foundation Stage children are gaining good RE learning in the context of the six learning areas. All children respond positively to a wide variety of good and challenging RE learning experiences, supported by good use of relevant resources, including ICT. Children's work shows they are working at appropriate levels for their ages and their behaviour and attitudes to learning are good. Multicultural and other faith learning is addressed through activities that challenge the children's thinking about similarities and differences. The children of Y3 and 4 were enthusiastic in their paired role play of how to think about different views on cultural beliefs and dress codes as presented in a newspaper article. The Diocesan RE syllabus is now in place and children's learning is beginning to be assessed. This is presently being addressed through the school improvement plan: planning, assessment and recording could be clearer in showing outcomes for both RE attainment targets and achievement for every child. Marking of children's RE work could be more helpful in guiding children about their achievements and targets. Governors are supportive in monitoring RE teaching and learning, but more qualitative evaluations could have greater impact on further improving standards.

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

The overall effect of leadership and management of the school is good. The head teacher's positive and collaborative style of leading ensures all staff, governors, parents and children are valued and that they all share an understanding of the Christian vision for the school. Children know and understand the head teacher's theory and practice of *'I'm not the sage on the stage, but the guide on the side'*. The school enjoys productive and supportive links with the local church community, other community groups, local schools and businesses: these give the children a wider perspective of life beyond their school and shows good community cohesion. There are valued and effective links between the parish church council and the head teacher is a member of the PCC, where she believes that *'the message of the school is taken to the church and so is more enriching for children and their families.'* Children's knowledge and experience of other denominations and faith groups is limited because of the school's rural context, but leaders strive to meet this need through inclusive teaching, learning and worship time. There has been clear improvement in the quality and provision of RE and collective worship since the last inspection. Through some very good RE teaching and learning, children gain understanding of other major faiths. Though parents and carers speak very positively of the school's ethos, they might be given more opportunity to evaluate the faith aspects of this church school. Governors are very positive and supportive in their roles as managers, give good pastoral support to the head teacher, and are keen to give time to learning how they can improve the impact they have on the Christian aspects of school life. Because the head teacher co-ordinates both collective worship and RE, governors might consider how they can best support her in these roles. There are monitoring and evaluation processes in place, but leaders and managers could ensure that a more effective use is made of these in evaluating the school as a church school, through religious education and collective worship.