

Herdley Bank First School

Coanwood
Haltwhistle
Northumberland
NE49 0QT

Diocese: Newcastle

Local authority: Northumberland
Dates of inspection: 15th July 2010
Date of last inspection: 27th June 2007
School's unique reference number: 128090
Headteacher: Mrs Judith Dwyer
Inspector's name and number: Sheila Bamber 621

School context

Herdley Bank is a very small first school with a large rural catchment area. The school is federated with Greenhead CE First School. Both schools are active partners in the informal group of West Tyne Church Schools, currently sharing staff and other resources to support RE, music and language teaching.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Herdley Bank Church of England First School as a Church of England school are outstanding

It is clear from the moment that you enter the school environment that this is a Church school and that everyone is welcomed, respected and cared for. Although this is a small school in a small community, all members identify themselves as part of the bigger family of the church, other schools and the wider world, and particularly value the weekly shared days with their friends from their partner school, opportunities for teaching across the schools and the larger curriculum days within the cluster of schools. This 'outward facing' and collaborative approach, developed under the careful leadership of the head teacher, contributes significantly to the distinctiveness and effectiveness of the school.

Established strengths

- Outstanding RE teaching across the school, both from a specialist teacher and within the wider curriculum, which uses a range of learning strategies
- Relationships with parish clergy from both parishes involved in the federation
- The contribution made through West Tyne Church Schools to developing the distinctive Christian character of the school.

Focus for development

- Further develop the evaluation of Christian distinctiveness through all self evaluation activities.
- Provide more opportunities for children to plan and lead significant aspects of worship.

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

The introduction to the school Safeguarding Policy includes the statement 'Nothing is more important to us that the physical, emotional and spiritual welfare of our pupils' and this sums up the way in which the school works with each individual to develop self confidence and foster a positive self image. Pupils reviewing their time in school included material on safety, learning experiences and 'us having fun', in a well-structured comic book. Reception children spoke sensitively about the importance of not hurting people's feelings, and were respectful and supportive of one another. Christian signs and symbols are evident throughout the school, and the up to date photographic record and DVD in the entrance area show engagingly how the Christian character of the school underpins all activity, including links with the parish and wider community.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Children listened attentively to the story of Jesus' visit to Mary and Martha, which was effectively used to illustrate the theme of friendship. All joined in the singing enthusiastically, and signed the final song sensitively and with understanding, and the youngest children joined confidently in the Lord's Prayer. The children make good use of the indoor and outdoor areas for reflection. Children, families and church members attend the Eucharist services held in church at major festivals, and children speak warmly of receiving the blessing as a special sign that they belong to the church family. One of the younger children volunteered to lead the grace before lunch and did so confidently. Children actively engage with the worship, and this would be enhanced by the provision of more opportunities for them to plan and lead significant aspects of worship.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

RE is taught with imagination as both a stand-alone subject and within the creative curriculum. In reception children were able to talk confidently about special places and special things and link this to the special places and things for Jewish people. Assessment is integrated within the overall assessment of key subjects, and shows clearly that pupils make at least as good progress in RE as in other areas. Children are encouraged to reflect on their learning and this is supported by their excellent use of ICT. Thoughtful presentations celebrating creation and the local environment, with excellent landscape photography by the children, were used to good effect in the worship, and reflected the impact of spiritual development in the wider curriculum.

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

Governors, staff and children identified the key values of the schools as family, enjoyment, caring, respect, valuing and support, reflecting the strength of the shared vision that has developed under the leadership of the head teacher. All school policies are being reviewed to make their impact on spiritual development more explicit. The links between West Tyne Church Schools enrich the curriculum and support the distinctive character of the school, and careful management enables all staff to share in leadership roles and develop specialist skills. Governors are challenged by the range of opportunities and issues that the school faces, and through continued questioning focusing on the impact of activities on their school ensure that WTCS and other partnerships are of real value, and provide an appropriate level of challenge to the school leadership. The school is at one end of a large parish area, and part of a small rural community, but strong mutual support between parish, school, parents and the wider community means that every opportunity is taken to give children a broad range of experiences in a variety of contexts.

SIAS report July 2010 Herdley Bank CE First School, Coanwood, Haltwhistle, NE490QT