

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Acklington C of E Voluntary Controlled First School

The Village,
Acklington,
Morpeth,
Northumberland.
NE65 9BW

Diocese: Newcastle

Local authority: Northumberland

Date of inspection: 22nd November 2010.

Date of last inspection: 17th July 2008

School's unique reference number: 122270

Headteacher: Ms Effie Fenton

Inspector's name and number: Karen Pemberton No: 287

School context

Acklington C of E Voluntary Controlled First School is a very small, rural school. There are 26 pupils on roll aged between four and nine years, several of whom travel to school from outside the village. All of the pupils are of White British heritage. There is a higher than average percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils are taught in two mixed-age classes and are grouped according to their stage of learning for basic skills teaching. In January 2010 a new Head Teacher took up post, replacing the previous job-share arrangement.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Acklington CE First School as a Church of England school are good.

An ethos of love and care permeates every aspect of school life in this warm and nurturing family environment. High expectations of pupils are reflected in caring and supportive behaviour, good attendance and increasing popularity with parents. Exceptional relationships at all levels bear witness to the school's stated aim "To promote the growth of Christian values, including relationships based on respect, consideration and forgiveness."

Established strengths

- The strength and depth of the love and care which pervade the school and are reflected in relationships at all levels.
- The exceptional strength of leadership displayed in the planning and monitoring of Collective Worship and Religious Education.
- The enjoyment and spiritual fulfilment derived by all stakeholders from Collective Worship and collective and individual prayer.

Focus for development

- Focus more strongly on the school's role as a Church of England school by evaluating regularly the impact of this aspect of the school's work on learners, staff and the community.
- Make more obvious use of Christian symbols and references to celebrate more overtly the school's Christian ethos, with particular regard to their use on the school website, in the brochure, in display and in focus areas in classrooms.
- Increase the involvement of learners in the planning and delivery of Collective Worship and put in place a formal mechanism for evaluating its impact on learners' spirituality.

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

The ethos in the school is clearly one based in love and care for each member of the community as an individual. Christian values have a clear impact upon the children's caring and supportive behaviour, good attendance and obvious enjoyment of their learning. All learners are able to articulate that they are valued and value each other. The inclusion and support of children with special educational needs is an integral part of school life and recently some parents have transferred their children to Acklington because they value the ethos of a school where there is no bullying. The quality of relationships is outstanding at all levels. A warm and loving atmosphere permeates the school and older children are able to articulate that their forgiving approach to each other is based in the teachings of Jesus. As one child in Year 4 put it "We are kind and act like God would want us to act." There has been some recent turnover of staff and the newly-established staff team is exceptionally supportive of the ethos as developed and promoted by the new Head Teacher. Whilst the school's Hall has an obvious focus area, and classrooms have areas for reflection available to children, the school environment in general could be better used to encourage spiritual development. In particular the comment in the 2008 SIAS inspection that school documentation and the website need to reflect more obviously the status of the school as a church school has not been acted upon.

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

Collective worship overall and prayer in particular play a very important part in school life. The children are overwhelmingly positive about the daily act of collective worship. For many it is their favourite part of the day, an opportunity for calm and quiet in an otherwise very active curriculum. Planning for collective worship is excellent and all staff are involved in participation and delivery. Prayers used in acts of worship are often standard, although some children's prayers are occasionally included. Acts of worship could be more personal if children's own prayers were used more often, and then displayed or kept for future use. The children spoken to during the inspection were extremely positive about worship and complimentary about all staff. However, they particularly enjoy worship led by regular visitors. Pupils and staff alike are clearly uplifted by participation in worship. During a whole-school assembly the singing was very enthusiastic and the children participated willingly. As the children enjoy the peaceful atmosphere, more effective use could be made of opportunities for reflection. There are plans to participate in more worship in the nearby church and all stakeholders are enthusiastic about the prospect. There is good evidence of the informal and formal monitoring and evaluation of the *act* of collective worship, but no formal evaluation of the *impact* of worship on the children. More regular evaluation is needed in order that worship can develop further. Whilst collective worship at Acklington First School is clearly Christian, it is not overtly Anglican. Christian symbols are displayed and the Lord's Prayer is said in some acts of worship. Services for the major Christian festivals are held in church and the significance of holy communion is covered during Religious Education for older pupils. This is an area which could be further developed.

The effectiveness of Religious Education.

As Acklington CE First School is a Voluntary Controlled school, there is no statutory requirement to inspect Religious Education.

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

The school has an undeniable Christian ethos which is seen by staff and governors as “intrinsic” to its being. The underlying supportive and mutually-respectful nature of this ethos is promoted as the number one priority by the new Head Teacher, the staff and the governors. All staff feel highly valued and able to support the ethos of this small, family school. The school enjoys excellent links with the local community, for example with the Sunday Schools at Acklington and at nearby Warkworth, and these links will be extended still further after Christmas when the school begins again to use the church for worship on a regular basis. Parents are very positive about the school’s leadership and feel that the new Head Teacher has already effected some welcome improvements. The recent move to appoint one Head Teacher with one vision is viewed as a positive one. Leadership and management of Collective Worship and Religious Education are excellent and links between the planning of worship and RE and of the curriculum as a whole are impressive. However, the Christian ethos of the school is not promoted overtly and particularly not through published documentation such as the brochure and the website. More importantly, the impact on the children of the school’s church status is not monitored and evaluated as much as it should be at every level. There is no forum, as yet, to discuss and evaluate the success of Acklington First School as a church school. The creation of such a forum would assist stakeholders to formulate a development plan for the future of this as a church school.

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