

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Esh Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Front Street
Esh Village
Durham
DH7 9QR

Diocese: Durham

Local authority: Durham

Dates of inspection: 10th December 2012

Date of last inspection: 5th November 2008

School's unique reference number: 840/3406

Headteacher: Mr Roger Ward

Inspector's name and number: Canon Linda Burton. 426

School context

Esh is a smaller than average primary school at the heart of the village community. The headteacher was appointed in September 2010. There are close and productive links with the adjacent RC school, and some facilities are shared. The area is mixed, socially and economically. Most pupils are of white British heritage. There are below average numbers of children with learning difficulties/disabilities or eligible for free school meals.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Esh Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding.

The strong Christian ethos pervades all areas of school life and its core values are fundamental to practice and are evident in the school environment. The school's leadership is excellent. Support from governors, staff, parents and the local church is very strong. The love, care and respect of all connected with the school is marked. The school's motto 'Everyone Smiles Here' is apparent in all aspects of school life, as Christian love underpins all that happens here.

Established strengths

- The outstanding leadership of the Headteacher, his team and governors, which is firmly rooted in Christian love
- Excellent relationships which exist between all members of the school community
- Excellent relationships which exist with the Church, Diocese, local and global community
- Tightly planned, deeply engaging and clearly evaluated collective worship within the context of the Anglican tradition is thoroughly enjoyed by the children and wider school community
- High quality opportunities for personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development for all pupils, led by the teaching and learning in Religious Education
- Excellent Religious Education, underpinned by strong assessment and tracking procedures

Focus for development

- Develop a pattern of school Eucharists, to include parents and the wider community
- Develop the school's new RE scheme of work, in accordance with Diocesan curriculum developments
- Further develop assessment procedures in RE to take account of children's self-assessment of their work

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

The strong Christian ethos lies firmly at the heart of all aspects of the school. It is a place where everyone feels secure, happy and confident.

The Mission Statement states that it aims to "provide a Christian environment in which pupils can gain appropriate skills, knowledge and values"; practice in the school wholeheartedly demonstrates this. All children are richly valued, highly challenged, sensitively supported and, as a result, extremely successful in their work and personal development. Children with any kind of special need are treasured and integrate well into an inclusive community. Children have a very strong voice, and they can articulate with confidence, their understanding of 'distinctive Christian character' and what this means in practice. Parents and Governors echo this. The School Council meets weekly to "make the school an even better place", and one way in which they are able to do this is by attending all Governors' meetings. Children are very polite, behave well and blend well together to form a superb, helpful, caring and supportive community. Staff and Governors are excellent role models for the children and form a very strong, very well-led team where everyone is valued and supported. There are plentiful opportunities for curricular and extra-curricular spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and these form an integral part of the pupils' education. The whole-school multi-cultural carousel in the Autumn term of 2012, participation in the Help for

Heroes day, the children's decision to open a Fairtrade Tuckshop, the Year 1 children's decision to spend money gathered in their collection of loose change on sending ten chickens to Bolivia through Present Aid, serve as examples of this. Foundation Governors provide excellent support at all levels. The school, the Church, the Diocese, the local and the wider communities are all well integrated. The environment reflects core Christian values: Christian signs, symbols and prayers are an integral part of interactive displays in every classroom, the corridors, the hall and the foyer.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is distinctively Christian, at the very heart of school life and is based on a carefully constructed cycle of well-planned themes where the presence of God is acknowledged and celebrated. The school takes care to ensure that acts of worship provide for the spiritual development of everyone in the community. Significant developments have occurred in this area since the previous inspection and the process of planning, delivering, monitoring, evaluating and (further) improvement of collective worship has become embedded and involves all stakeholders. It is highly significant that the children are given major responsibility in all aspects of this developmental cycle and they approach their role with maturity and commitment. A regular daily organisational pattern is established involving leadership by different members of staff, and the vicar (who is Vice Chair of Governors) leads worship weekly. A school Eucharist occurred in December 2012 and there are plans to develop this form of worship to involve parents and the wider community.

On the day of the inspection the Headteacher led whole-school collective worship on the meaning of Christmas. Explicitly Anglican symbolism and traditions were used: for example, the lighting of a candle to signify the start of worship, a gathering song and a dismissal sung by all. Children from the entire age range participated with confidence and enthusiasm. 'Away in a manger' was sung with commitment by the school community, including Governors. Opportunities were provided for silent personal reflection, allowing children to lead their own prayers in a spontaneous and natural way. The choir, which included a substantial portion of the school, gave an excellent performance of 'Love shone down'. A clear distinction was made between collective worship and assembly, in which class trophies were presented.

The effectiveness of the Religious Education is outstanding

The Religious Education (RE) Coordinator is inspirational and innovatory; she has recently completed the Leadership in Church Schools programme. Her teaching is outstanding and she leads a team of enthusiastic and committed colleagues. The high quality displays of RE topics around school contribute to learning opportunities in both attainment target areas.

RE is an integral part of whole school improvement planning. Major innovative curriculum revision is under way, driven by Diocesan syllabus revision and priorities identified by the school itself following a curriculum audit. Standards in RE are outstanding. Children demonstrate depth of understanding of important aspects of Christian faith and practice. Teaching about other world faiths is strong and RE takes a leading role in the school in celebrating religious and cultural diversity. A wide variety of teaching and learning styles were evident in the lessons observed and all children were positive and enthusiastic. Highly competent use of subject-specific language was complemented by thoughtful and reflective responses to questions posed and issues raised.

In a lesson with a mixed Reception and Year 1 group, in response to a question about what gifts they would like to give to the world, children answered, 'peace, love, joy, shelter, enough water, enough food'. In a Year 6 lesson in a wide-ranging discussion about hopes for the coming year children demonstrated a commendable awareness of current issues and concerns in the world and how Christian teaching could impact on responses to these. RE takes the lead in the school's provision for the Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development of all children.

Assessment procedures in RE are consistent with those in other curriculum areas. Individual tracking takes place against QCA National Expectations; work is moderated. There is much evidence of the use of creative methods of recording the progress and achievement of even the youngest children in the school, although procedures could be developed further to take greater account of children's self-assessment in RE.

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

The headteacher has brought considerable energy, purpose and commitment to the post and articulates a clear inclusive Christian vision. He leads a very effective and committed senior team and they have made considerable progress since the last inspection. The school, through its leadership, has a clear strategic view about church school improvement, based on its detailed Toolkit, updated SEF, links with the Diocese and day-to-day life. The headteacher's management style is enabling: he believes in engaging the views of all stakeholders to drive forward improvements, and he supports others to make appropriate changes, for example, introducing the

Tea Club and more interactive homework.

Governors take their responsibilities very seriously: they are supportive and are actively involved in monitoring, evaluating and developing all aspects of school life. Staff and governors have shared refresher training on core Christian values. A programme of regular lesson interactions has been introduced to enhance Governors' understanding of how children learn and the teaching strategies that enable this learning to take place. Governors are articulate, and prepared to challenge the school to account for itself as a church school.

Parents' views are sought and valued, and the school enjoys their regular and active support, as attested by the high return rate in parental surveys and the high level of satisfaction they express. Attendance at the annual parents' meeting is high, and many parents are regularly involved in daily life here.

Core Christian values underpin policies and practice, permeate the physical environment and are clearly communicated to visitors to the school. There are excellent relationships with the Church, Diocese, local and global community. Involvement in the development of Messy Church, the level of commitment of the (huge) mixed choir to sing at old people's homes in Langley Park at the end of the Christmas term in 2012, and the Zambian Exchange, organised jointly with the RC primary school in Esh, serve as excellent examples of this.

SIAS report, December 2012, Esh Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, DH7 9QR