



Name and address of school	Whitburn Church of England School, Nicholas Avenue, Whitburn, Sunderland. SR6 7EX
Type of school	Secondary
Status	Voluntary Aided
Diocese	Durham
LEA	South Tyneside
Dates of inspection	March 14 and 15 2006
Date of last inspection	Not applicable
School's Unique reference number	134512
Name of Headteacher	Paula Williams
Inspector's name with National Society	Andrew Lumsden
Inspector's number	DDBE 12
<p>Whitburn C of E School became voluntary aided on January 1 2004. This was based on a specific request from the headteacher supported by governors and staff. The admission policy of the school remains unchanged so pupils are admitted from the local community irrespective of church allegiance and commitment to the Anglican tradition.</p>	

### **Established strengths**

Whitburn C of E School is an outstanding school which is transforming successfully into a voluntary aided school based on implicit Christian values, attitudes and expectations. The school's spiritual journey is gathering pace and momentum.

It is judged that as a consequence of the school's guiding principles of valuing each individual and offering excellence for all, many aspects of school life are poised to transfer successfully to the planned new premises. There is substantial evidence of this in classrooms, in the school generally, as well as through the work of the Excellence and Inclusion unit.

Leadership and management of the school is evaluative and visionary supporting the school as a reflective and responsive community.

Teaching and learning engage and challenge pupils to consider positions of faith. Pupils are involved significantly in the life of the school and take a key part in target setting both for achievement and attitudes to learning. The improving RE GCSE outcomes indicate sustained progress being made in this subject.

The wide range of charitable work includes the most recent AquaAid project for need in Africa. The support of the whole school community in these endeavours is worthy of note, reflecting the commitment to reach out to those less favoured, based on Christian values of compassion and care.

### **Focus for development**

- Revise the RE scheme of work to emphasis Christianity more fully.
- Provide more artefacts for major world faiths for use in RE lessons.
- Increase opportunities for participation in collective worship through music, communal prayer and reflection.
- Extend experiences of Anglican traditions in worship.
- Provide guidance and examples of how different subjects and experiences may contribute to spiritual development.
- Provide further opportunities and spaces for contemplation, reflection and meditation.

***Note that the pace of change must enable all to be part of the process.***

**How well does the school, through its distinctive Christian character, meet the needs of all learners?**

This is an outstanding school characterised by excellent provision for all its learners. The school builds extremely successfully on its implicit Christian principles of kindness, fairness, justice, care, honesty, respect, inclusion, tolerance, love and forgiveness so that learners feel special and valued. Excellent systems are in place to enable all to engage with learning, either in classrooms, in support provision, or through extra-curricular opportunities.

It is a reflective community where people are valued and where there is a very supportive and strong ethos. Staff are fully committed to the school motto of Excellence for All, which ensures that everyone matters to God and in all aspects of school life.

As a maturing voluntary aided school steps have already been taken which are influencing the establishment of explicit Christian values and Anglican practice in a systematic and measured way.

The classroom environment is lively and attractive, providing for pupils' work to be valued as well as aiding their learning. The physical characteristics of the building limit the space for reflection and meditation although the memorial garden created in remembrance of a former staff member provides a good focal point for contemplation.

There are few direct examples of Christian symbolism around the school or those connected with the Anglican tradition. The display of stained glass window designs and Bible quotations in corridors are good examples of contributions to the school environment based on Christian values, enhanced by classroom displays where pupils' work is recognised and valued.

The recent staff conference on ethos has improved considerably their understanding of spiritual development. As a consequence there are now emerging opportunities for subject leaders and others to become more aware of and contribute to the spiritual development of both staff and pupils.

**What is the impact of collective worship on the school community?**

Over the past two years collective worship has taken on an increased significance. At this stage of the school's spiritual journey the provision and impact of collective worship as an Anglican voluntary aided school is good. To deal with the constraints of the building, varied types of collective worship are provided. These are year group assemblies, key stage assemblies and "Thought for the Day" in long registration periods.

Collective worship meets statutory requirements and correctly reflects the Christian dimension. It is carefully planned by the Spiritual Director, an ordained Anglican minister, with seasonal or weekly themes across the year. This planning is provided for all staff. The Anglican tradition is being strengthened through services in the Parish Church and regular participation of the Rector as School Chaplain in school based acts of worship. These are impacting more strongly on practice in the school and are establishing a secure foundation for further growth. In addition, the range of worship leaders from staff is extending and enhancing the experience for students and is directly upskilling the staff involved.

Pupils are engaged and attentive during worship showing good reverence and enjoyment with careful listening and reflection on the prayers raised by the worship leader.

Opportunities are more limited for singing of spiritual songs or hymns; for joint speaking of prayers such as the Lord's Prayer; a school derived prayer or a collection of available prayers. 'Thought for the Day' arrangements offer shared experiences and good interaction. Pupils have produced prayers and reflective writing which clearly shows the value and impact of these experiences. In year group worship, tutor groups in Y7 and Y8 have contributed in readings, music and leading of prayers.

Pupils of other faiths, or none, participate in acts of collective worship and they feel that their own position has been respected and acknowledged. The School Council takes a major part in evaluation of collective worship which provides a good measure of its impact and contributes to the school review process.

Rightly, the school has separated the business part of an assembly to the start so that the worship element concludes the occasion in order that at dismissal the pupils themselves can carry out the message and so heighten its impact and relevance.

A paper on collective worship is in hand as part of the ongoing process of self-evaluation which recognises that collective worship has three elements: opportunities for spiritual development, for examining and sharing Christian beliefs and practices and to develop the knowledge and understanding of the Anglican tradition.

Attendance at Durham Cathedral by Year 7 pupils as part of the Diocesan celebration has been a great success and enhances the pupils' awareness of the wider Christian and Anglican community as does the considerable practical support for the Diocesan links with Lesotho.

There is a positive emphasis on practical support for charitable work, most recently AquaAid and Cancer Research as well as many other charities and pupils understand that this is part of the Christian mission and outreach. Offerings taken up during acts of collective worship for such work are duly recognised through thanksgiving and prayer.

### **How effective is the religious education?**

Religious Education is good and is well led. It has taken on an enhanced role since the school became an Anglican School in January 2004. All pupils are entered for the short course in Religious Studies.

From a position of 27.9% in 2004 the A\* - C grades moved to 49.6% in 2005. The mock results in 2006 predict 59% A\*-C grades with no pupils expected at grade U. Significant factors in this improvement are the provision since September 2005 of one hour per week taught time in both key stages, not just Key Stage 3; the emphasis on teaching by subject specialists and those with empathy for the subject; and the clear emphasis in lessons on learning styles developing thoughtful and reflective pupils.

Lessons are characterised by thorough and detailed planning, enquiry methods, paired/shared discussions, pace and rigour, so as to engage learners of varying interests and abilities in meaningful ways. There is mutual respect in these lessons with pupils and staff able to speak openly and freely about their beliefs and practices.

Spiritual development is enhanced in many instances through the engagement by students in the range of activities offered. Very good use is made of interactive whiteboards in support of RE lessons.

It is agreed that the current scheme of work, which reflects QCA guidance and the Agreed Syllabus, requires adjustment so that the recommended central role of Christianity in the RE curriculum is provided for, typically between two thirds and three quarters of the time available.

Presently, the classrooms in which RE is taught are characterised by a wealth of displayed pupils' work and aids to learning. NRV Bibles and the facility to listen to Christian music from a wide variety of traditions are available in these rooms for use by learners. There are insufficient artefacts for Christian or other faiths available at present.

### **How effective are the leadership and management of the school as a church school?**

The leadership by the Headteacher and governors is outstanding and provides a strong, structured direction for the school's future growth. Effective support for the leadership of Whitburn as a church school in this journey of faith is given by the Spiritual Director and the Head of RE.

The Christian vision of the Headteacher allied to the commitment and vision of governors and staff is the critical bedrock on which the direction and pace of Whitburn's progress towards a mature voluntary aided school is securely based. This vision is strongly in evidence in all aspects of school life and is acknowledged as such and contributed to by pupils and all staff.

Rightly, there is a quiet determination to build upon success and to ensure that consolidation is secured before further innovations or changes are made.  
*(Isaiah 28 v10 'precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little.')*

Systems for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the school are rigorously and consistently applied. This includes religious education and collective worship.

The school subscribes professionally to the value of teamwork with the emphasis on building consistently on agreed, effective practice to make it even better. Learners of all ages are complimentary of the implicit Christian ethos of Whitburn, the commitment to excellence for all individuals and the high quality of learning provided.

The relationship with the Parish Church is close and productive and the regular visits of the Rector in his role as Chaplain are clear endorsements of this partnership.

There is increased demand for places in the school and parents clearly value and appreciate the work of Whitburn C of E School on behalf of their children.