



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

### Whitburn Church of England Academy

Whitburn  
Sunderland  
Tyne & Wear  
SR6 7EF

#### Diocese: Durham

Local authority: South Tyneside  
Dates of inspection: 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> March 2014  
Date of last inspection: 19<sup>th</sup> March May 2009  
School's unique reference number: 136836  
Headteacher: Mr Alan Hardie  
Inspector's name and number: Canon Linda Burton. NS426

#### School context

Whitburn is an over-subscribed Church of England Academy with 977 pupils aged 11 to 16. The school has Maths and Computing specialism and serves Whitburn and the surrounding villages. It does not have any faith- based admissions criteria. The current Free School Meals figure is 11.6% and there are 5 Looked-After Children. Most pupils are White British, with 4% from ethnic minority groups. The Principal has been in post since 2011.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Whitburn Church of England as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The strong Christian ethos pervades all aspects of the Academy's life.
- The Academy's visionary Christian leadership is excellent at all levels.
- The Academy's ethos statement is enacted in all aspects of its life.
- Pupil progress is excellent and improving.
- Relationships throughout the Academy are strong and underpinned by Christian values.
- Collective Worship is inclusive, engaging and inspirational.
- Examination results in RE at GCSE are excellent and are amongst the highest in the Academy.
- Governors are effective in ensuring that the Christian character of the Academy is sustained and continually developed.

#### Areas to improve

- Increase opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding and appreciation of diversity and of other faiths and cultures locally and globally
- Make more explicit the links between Religious Education, the Collective Worship programme, and opportunities for spiritual development
- Embed the new Diocesan curriculum developments in Religious Education at Key Stage 3, including the development of higher level skills, Attainment Target 2 work and knowledge and understanding of Christianity.
- Develop and refine community partnerships

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

The Academy's ethos Statement underpins all of its policies and practices. Christian values are firmly embedded here. It is a happy, relaxed, purposeful and thriving Christian community of pupils, staff, governors and parents. The values are modelled in the quality of relationships, attitudes, behaviour and approaches to learning. The Chair of Governors stated, 'Every child is a unique individual – a child of God'. Pupil progress is excellent in a significant range of subjects including RE, with 5A\*-C (including English and Maths) grades at 77% in 2013, an improvement on 73% in 2009 when the previous inspection occurred. Attainment is significantly above national average for Pupil Premium pupils.

Attendance is outstanding, behaviour is exemplary and relationships between all community members are excellent. There is tangible evidence of understanding and respect amongst pupils for members of faith communities other than Christianity within the Academy. Pupils demonstrate great support and concern for each other's wellbeing and demonstrate high levels of responsibility. The whole staff works unstintingly as a team to remove any potential barriers to success and to support all of the pupils, particularly those experiencing difficulties. An example of this is the invaluable work undertaken at the Bridge Centre. Support is given for any pupils who experience difficulties in their behaviour for learning with forgiveness and the making of a fresh start being at the heart of the Academy's philosophy. The Reflection Room facility is used in order to reduce fixed term exclusions and, as a result, rates of permanent exclusion are very low.

There is a wealth of opportunity for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development across the taught curriculum. In an outstanding Year 8 History lesson on the British Empire in India and the causes of the Indian Mutiny, pupils considered the clash of two different cultures, the importance and impact of religious beliefs on the lives of believers, and debated the moral and ethical implications of the actions of the British in India. Pupils then reflected on whether changes to heritage, tradition and culture could be justified.

This is complemented by the richness and variety of the collective worship programme set within a Christian context, and through the extensive range of extra-curricular activities available, for example the recently introduced Whitburn Challenge for Year 7 pupils, the Discussion Group and Train Club. The Academy community has a well-developed social conscience, raising significant funds for local, national and global charities. During the inspection it ran many miles to raise money for Sport Relief. The culture of continuous self-evaluation and further improvement embedded in practice in the Academy ensures that pupils' spirituality and personal growth remain high priorities. The forthcoming implementation of the new Diocesan Syllabus for Religious Education Key Stage 3 Schemes of Work will encourage fresh opportunities for Spiritual development and increase time for pupils to develop an understanding and respect for difference and diversity within local, national and global faith communities.

## **The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding**

Collective worship is distinctively Christian and is at the very heart of Academy life, providing a central focus for each day. It is an inclusive, engaging and inspirational occasion from which no pupils are withdrawn. It is based on a carefully constructed yearly plan with Themes for the Week which reflect Whitburn's 'Be' Values, Christian values, the Christian year, Biblical teaching, school, national and world events. During the inspection acts of worship for year groups in Key Stages 3 and 4 and a form act of worship were observed which developed the theme 'Generosity'. Pupils planned and led all of these in a confident, creative and reflective manner. Explicitly Anglican traditions were evident in what was clearly a well-established pattern of worship which included the singing of worship songs and an opportunity for self-reflection in addition to a more formal prayer time.

The very proficient Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) Coordinator (assisted by the Principal and Chaplain) has a key role in planning the programme for collective worship and for its organisation. Considerable developmental work has been undertaken here since the

previous inspection. A daily organisational pattern is in place, with whole school, key stage and form worship. This ensures the development of the week's theme, as well as providing continuity and variety of approach which involves pupils and a wide range of staff in leadership roles.

The cycle of continuous improvement is firmly embedded and it is significant that pupils are given major responsibility in this development cycle. The marking of significant points in the Christian year through the collective worship programme is one example of how this area of Academy life benefits from ongoing improvement planning. There is robust evidence of the high quality of acts of collective worship, of their impact on pupils, staff and governors, and of their contribution to the SMSC development of the whole Academy community. Excellent relationships exist between the school and the church. There is a church service for each year group annually, a Christmas service in church, a Year 11 Leavers service and an alternative curriculum day for Year 7 pupils in church (of particular significance given that few pupils joining the Academy are from Church schools).

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is good**

Outstanding progress has been made in addressing the focus for development from the last inspection report. All pupils take full course GCSE Religious Education (RE) and for the last three years RE has been amongst the highest attaining academic subjects in the Academy. The Head of RE is the sole subject specialist, supporting and supported by a team of committed, experienced and enthusiastic non-specialists who, in the five lessons observed during the inspection, used a variety of interactive approaches to encourage engagement and learning. Two non-specialists were observed teaching GCSE lessons on Just War and Pacifism. Both were highly competent in their use of subject-specific language. Questioning was challenging and drove the pace of learning; there was opportunity for independent enquiry and reflection and for pupils to share and evaluate ideas. The positive and respectful relationships in the Department between teachers and pupils and between the pupils themselves promote increasingly positive perceptions of RE. The School Review Monitoring System ensures continuous improvement in teaching and learning and teaching is at least good with some outstanding.

Pupils have 1 hour per week for RE in Years 7-11 (4% of curriculum time at each Key Stage). The current Key Stage 3 curriculum provides limited opportunities for pupils to develop a wide range of higher level skills and to apply these to understanding the impact of religion on believers and to addressing questions of meaning and purpose. The use of level descriptors in Years 7 and 8 across RE, History and Geography lacks consistency. The excellent use of level descriptors observed in a History lesson provides a useful model to adopt in RE.

Before beginning their GCSE RE course some pupils lack secure knowledge of some of the main teachings of Christianity and the Bible and of some other world faiths. There are limited opportunities for the involvement of visitors in lessons or of visits to places of worship. Links exist between the RE teaching, the collective worship programme and SMSC development but these are not explicit. The Head of Subject is a member of the Diocesan Network for Heads of RE and the South Tyneside STEP network for Heads of RE.

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

The leadership and management of the Academy is highly effective. Its motto 'Excellence for all' is rooted in its core Christian values, and in order that all pupils are able to fulfil their God-given potential, the culture of continuous effective and insightful self-evaluation and improvement is embedded. The Academy Development Plan drives the pursuit of excellence, focussing on improvement in pupil attainment. The capacity for future development is therefore very strong. Considerable developmental work has been undertaken since the previous inspection by the whole Academy community in its development as a Church of England Academy. The impact of the explicit Christian vision on the work of the Academy is articulated and implemented in its daily life. Staff promote and model core Christian values; for example, kindness, forgiveness and trust. The review of the Collective Worship programme by

pupils, staff and governors and the development of new Themes for the Week and 'Be' Values by pupils, staff and governors has given the whole community a greater understanding and sense of ownership of the Academy's values. Year 7 and Year 11 pupils regard their 'Assemblies of Light' as significant rites of passage in their lives: they set down clear markers for the Christian context of their learning and education. A particular academic strength is the curriculum provision of full course GCSE RE for all pupils and the drive to raise standards of pupil attainment in RE to amongst the highest in the Academy. The Academy connects well with its community, at diocesan, parish and local community level, and governors play a full role in its life. Senior leaders at the Academy have a very important role in enabling the development of outstanding practice in other schools in the Diocese, through part-time secondments to other schools, through membership of the Strategic Working Group in the Diocese and through the targeted support of individual schools. At Local Authority level the Academy leads the South Tyneside Excellent Practice Network and has successfully organised five annual borough-wide training days for its nine secondary schools.

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