



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St Aidan's CE Memorial Primary School, Hartlepool

Loyalty Road
Hartlepool
TS25 5BA

Previous SIAMS grade: Satisfactory

Current inspection grade: Outstanding

Diocese: Durham

Local authority: Hartlepool

Dates of inspection: 4 May 2016

Date of last inspection: 18/19 May 2011

School's unique reference number: 111690

Headteacher: Lynn Scott

Inspector's name and number: The Revd Canon Steven Harvey

QA officer: Lyn Field 151

School context

St Aidan's is a larger than average primary school, serving a mixed socio-economic area of high deprivation. The majority of the 357 pupils on roll are White British. The proportion of pupils in receipt of pupil premium funding, the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals, and the percentage of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support, are all well above the national average. During the last two years there have been significant staff changes, including at headship level. The last Ofsted inspection, in October 2014, judged the school to require improvement.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Aidan's as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The school's leaders, and particularly the new headteacher, have a very clear vision for the school. This vision is rooted in Christian belief and practice and, under the headteacher's clear and confident leadership, it has driven the school's recent rapid improvement.
- A distinctively Christian vision and set of core values are deeply embedded in the school, permeate its daily life and work, and inspire its rich engagement with the local community.
- The school community places great value on collective worship and on the impact it has on the community's life and work.
- The school's partnership with the local church is a great strength and impacts very strongly on the Christian character of the school. The commitment and involvement of the parish priest and assistant curate are particularly significant.

Areas to improve

- In religious education (RE), adapt the system used to monitor and track progress so that it runs in line with the system used for the core subjects and identifies where improvement is most needed.

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

The school's Christian vision and values are displayed prominently throughout the school and are deeply embedded in its life and work. The vision statement speaks of the unconditional love of God, and this love is evident in how the school engages with each of its pupils. Pupils know that they are cherished, and that staff are there to help, support and guide them. 'Teachers won't let you go down the wrong path' was a comment warmly supported in a pupil discussion. Attendance is very high, and this reflects the school's proactive approach to attendance, the very good relationships which the school has with parents and carers, and the pupils' happiness at school. Parents speak very positively of the impact of the school's Christian character. A typical parental comment was that the school 'makes you feel that your child is the only one the staff are looking after'. Pupils are eager to speak about the school's four core values of love, compassion, trust and togetherness. They understand how these values express Christian belief and they readily articulate the impact they have on their behaviour, relationships and attitudes. Behaviour is excellent, and relationships are characterised by mutual concern, care and support. A characteristic pupil comment was that 'compassion means that we think about how people are feeling, and they think about how we are feeling'. Staff speak about the support they receive when they face personal difficulties, and attribute this to the school's Christian ethos. The school's Christian character has a significant impact on pupils' academic achievement. Pupils know that their teachers want them to do the best they can, and they respond by aiming high and helping and encouraging each other. Academic results in 2015 were the best the school has had, and showed levels of attainment at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 to be above national standards. In all classes the vast majority of pupils are making expected progress, and there is a growing proportion who are making accelerated progress. For the overwhelming majority of pupils, this progress is from a low starting point. The school's Christian character, to which RE makes a significant contribution, strongly supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. Pupils talk naturally and without inhibition about spiritual matters and have a strong sense of right and wrong. They recognise the importance of understanding and respecting diverse communities. The school's Christian character is helping pupils to become knowledgeable and thoughtful citizens in a multi-faith world.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is central to the life of the school and underpins its Christian vision and values. It is frequently inspirational and impacts very significantly on the lives of the whole community. It engages all pupils, and this engagement is reflected in their attention and enjoyment, and in the eagerness with which they participate in such things as drama and singing. The use of explicitly Christian greetings and trinitarian blessings, the strong focus on the person of Jesus, and the regular links which are made with the church's calendar, all ensure that collective worship is distinctively Christian. This enables pupils to grow in their understanding of how Christians understand God and of the central place of Jesus in the Christian faith. Worship is inclusive. This is ensured by the universal relevance of the themes of the 'Open the Book' scheme, and by pupils being invited to say or to respond to a prayer only if they wish to make the prayer their own. A calm, reflective and spiritual atmosphere pervades collective worship, and pupils take this atmosphere with them into the rest of the day when the act of worship ends. Pupils value collective worship as giving them time to think, to pray, to learn about God, and to share an experience with the whole of the school community. They speak of the very positive impact of collective worship on their behaviour, relationships and attitudes; 'it leads us to be kinder to each other' and 'it increases our goodness' are typical comments. The termly school eucharist in the parish church, and the weekly eucharists in school, develop pupils' understanding of the Christian faith and enrich their experience of the Anglican tradition. Their contributions to these services also supports the development of such life skills as public speaking. An increasing number of pupils and staff are responding to opportunities to be confirmed. Collective worship nurtures pupils' exploration and development of spirituality. They make extensive use of the reflection areas in

each classroom and of the prayer boxes which are part of these areas. Pupils' spiritual and moral reflection inspires their support of various charitable causes, local, national and international. For example, pupils support the education of three girls in Lesotho. Pupils contribute with enthusiasm to the planning and leadership of collective worship, and their evaluation is sought and used through such things as pupil questionnaires and a worship diary, and through their representatives on the worship council. The school's close links with the parish church has a very positive impact on collective worship, through the highly valued leadership role of the parish priest and the assistant curate, and through the attendance and contributions of members of the local church community.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

In RE, standards of achievement for the large majority of pupils are in line with national expectations and are sometimes higher. Pupils make good progress. Their work displays the development of higher order skills, such as reflection and evaluation, as they progress through the school. RE has a high profile in the school. From the Early Years Foundation Stage pupils are given a secure basis for their future development. The curriculum allocates the majority of RE teaching time to Christianity, and enables pupils to develop a good understanding of the Christian faith. The linking of lesson content to the school's core values helps pupils to appreciate the contribution of the subject to the school's Christian character. The use of Godly Play resources, in which all staff have been trained, contributes effectively to the pupils' knowledge and understanding of the Bible, and complements well the 'Open the Book' scheme used in collective worship. The quality of teaching in RE is monitored by the subject coordinator, working alongside one of the senior leaders. The monitoring is thorough, and recent observation records judge all teaching to be consistently good. Currently, however, the monitoring of teaching in RE is not closely enough linked to the monitoring and tracking of pupil progress to identify where improvement is most needed. Work has begun to bring the RE assessment system into line with the school's assessment system for the core subjects, and with changes to RE nationally.

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

School and church leaders, together with the school's highly committed and involved governors, are passionate about St Aidan's as a church school. The school's relationship with the parish church impacts very strongly on the school. The clergy make a significant contribution both to the school's strategic leadership and to pupils' spiritual development. Leaders articulate clearly and confidently a vision which is rooted in Christian belief about the value and potential of every person as a child of God. They articulate equally clearly and confidently the impact of this vision on the whole life of the school. Under the dynamic leadership of the new headteacher, the vision has driven forward the school's recent rapid improvement. A great strength of the school is that, as expressed by a group of staff, 'everyone has bought into the vision'. Leaders' monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning, including regular 'learning conversations', lead directly to effective strategies for improvement and for meeting the needs of all pupils. Leaders ensure that significant time and resources are given to enable collective worship and religious education to fulfil their role in nurturing and sustaining the school's Christian character. Leaders are committed to the professional development of staff. This includes acknowledging a responsibility to help prepare staff for future leadership roles in church schools. Leaders recognise that the school has a very important place in the local community. The provision of family learning opportunities, such as an activity for pupils and parents focussing on the preparation of healthy food on a budget, is characteristic of an engagement which gives valuable practical expression to the school's Christian character. The school is a place of sanctuary for many pupils, and parents speak very warmly of the school as a welcoming, caring and trusted place. Leaders have ensured that the areas for development identified in the last inspection report, in 2011, have been addressed effectively.