



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

### St Hild's College Voluntary Aided Primary School

Renny's Lane  
Durham  
DH1 2HZ

**Previous SIAMS grade: Good**

**Current inspection grade: Good**

**Diocese: Durham**

Local authority: Durham

Dates of inspection: 8 February 2016

Date of last inspection: 1 & 5 December 2010

School's unique reference number: 114270

Headteacher: Alex Ryder

Inspector's name and number: Canon Brian Hedley NS619

#### School context

This is a smaller-than-average-sized primary school situated on the outskirts of Durham city. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals and those who have special educational needs is significantly higher than the national average. Most pupils are White British; less than 10% speak English as an additional language.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Hild's College Primary as a Church of England school are good

- The headteacher and governors provide good Christian leadership. Consequently the school's ethos is used effectively to drive it forward and raise achievement.
- Creative, challenging worship and religious education (RE) underpin the spiritual and emotional well-being of learners very well
- Relationships with local churches are very strong. As a result, the spiritual life of the school and wider community is being sustained and developed.

#### Areas to improve

- Eradicate inconsistencies in teaching to improve outcomes for all children.
- Incorporate the requirements of the SIAMS schedule more formally into the governors' monitoring timetable and school development plan to tighten the evaluation of evidence.
- Link the SIAMS schedule for RE into the comprehensive subject action plan so that success criteria and evaluation of effectiveness are matched.

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

A strong and continually developing Christian ethos gives the school a distinctive focus; there is a genuine acceptance of the uniqueness of every child created in the image of God. This results in real commitment from everyone to 'be there for one another' and to contribute towards

everyone's success. Staff seek to improve attainment and well-being for all, and to support their colleagues well. Children speak of respect and the Biblical teaching of, 'treating one another as we would like to be treated'. They say that, 'it doesn't matter what you believe though, everyone is valued here'. Parents and carers appreciate the efforts made by the school to include and welcome them into a supportive Christian family. One reflected that, 'they are always here for you; no-one is ever excluded'. Core values matter at St Hild's because they focus the attitudes and behaviour of all; a small group of pupils explained that, 'they help us to think about our actions, not just in school but outside school, too'. Parents agreed, and were able to give several examples about how teaching has had impact at home, such as the way in which arguments are settled, and in relation to care for the environment and stewardship of resources.

The school is not yet outstanding in its effectiveness because, whilst there are many examples of good and outstanding teaching, particularly in Reception, Year 2 and Year 5, there is some variation in the quality of teaching and progress across the school. This is being addressed by the leadership team. Nevertheless children describe their learning as, 'fun but hard work', one explaining that, 'we always have to give reasons for our answers, and that's hard sometimes'. There are a whole range of meaningful, high-quality displays and reflection spaces which offer good opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, not least of which are the new and exiting 'prayer spaces' – a joint project with local churches launched this week. The religious education programme and daily acts of collective worship cement the school's core values in the Christian faith. A range of generous charity work supports a wide variety of organisations, helping pupils to gain knowledge about those with different needs. Much is being done in partnership with local churches to support children and families at their point of need. Notable examples are the after-school drama group and youth work on local estates. These skills-based activities keep events 'open to all', yet allow participants to see the 'values of faith' in action through the role modelling and service offered by leaders.

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

Collective worship at St Hild's is vibrant and inclusive. The school come together each day to share in prayer and praise and to be inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus. Worship really matters. One child explained that, 'if you want to, you can build your life on Jesus', and another said, 'we like to think about one another and the world, and to think about God'. Another said, 'After worship I like to work out what I believe'. This core activity, at the heart of school life, is not just confined to the allocated slot on the timetable. There are ample opportunities for learners to respond to questions such as, 'What do we learn in collective worship?' and 'How do we use the themes from our collective worship in our lives?' Learners' contributions ensure that they shape and lead worship; their collective worship committee meets regularly to develop and monitor themes in line with the school's chosen Christian values. Years 5 and 6 are about to undertake some training through the diocese which will help them train others in worship planning. Successful evaluation stems from careful monitoring and feedback by children, parents, governors, staff and visitors. Parents say that they welcome the invitations they receive to come to services, whether at school or at church. They praised the relationship with the parish priest, saying that he has the ability to 'keep religion light and informative', and he, 'brings it down to our level so we understand'. There was appreciation of the inclusive Eucharist and celebrations of Christian festivals; parents say they are not just for the children but for their families also. Prayer in its variety of forms is a growing strength both of collective worship and in school generally. Pupils are taught its significance and given a number of opportunities to be personally involved. This week, children, staff and parents and governors are being given the chance to explore spirituality and faith in a safe, creative and interactive way through 'prayer spaces week'. Taking a broadly Christian approach as a starting point, opportunities have been created to develop the skills of personal reflection and to explore prayer in an open, safe, fully inclusive environment, so that each person can form their own understanding about forgiveness, injustice, being thankful and being still.

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

The subject leader is passionate in her belief about the role this subject has as a major contributor towards personal spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and whole-school improvement. She constantly looks for ways to enhance the curriculum on offer to children; although currently based on the new diocesan syllabus, this is being tailored to meet the needs of the school community. There is a comprehensive action plan for religious education (RE). This relates learning to the school's core values and is driving the subject forward. To heighten its effectiveness still further and to ensure robust evaluation, links should be made between the stated success criteria and the requirements of the SIAMS schedule.

RE anchors the school's values and challenges learners to develop and grow an understanding of the Christian faith and the integral part it, and other world faiths can play in life and learning. Levels of attainment are rising as teachers gain greater personal knowledge and confidence. Most children achieve at least in line with national expectations.

In the very best lessons, pupils respond with great interest and enthusiasm because they are challenged in their thinking and skill development. Time-limited tasks added a sense of urgency to their work yet give pupils control over their own learning. Because of this approach, pupils are using their knowledge and creativity to learn well. For example, they are told that re-telling a story from the Bible is unacceptable; what is required is evidence that shows they understand the impact of the events in the lives of the characters. They are then invited to think about what the message might mean for them today. Even with the very youngest children extremely skilled questioning and gentle, expert guidance, enable some of the most reluctant learners to have conversations about Jesus, the stories he told and the message he came to share. Learners are able to discuss their feelings because they feel safe.

Teachers take time to mark RE books sensitively. Their reflective comments are tailored to the individual needs of each learner: some ask for a deeper response from pupils; some congratulate them; almost all enable them to know how to improve their work next time.

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

The headteacher has a strong Christian vision for the school. She communicates this effectively and has the full support of the governors and staff team. After a period of instability, the school is moving forward because there is wholehearted commitment towards excellence for all.

Systems for evaluating attainment and progress are in place and currently reveal variations between year groups. Governors are taking action; plans are already under way to address the issue urgently and to ensure that all children receive a well-rounded education.

Leaders and governors ensure that collective worship and RE meet statutory requirements.

The school improvement plan and governors' monitoring timetable is comprehensive, but at the moment there are no links between these documents and the SIAMS schedule. This means that evidence of the school's effectiveness as a church school is less robust than it could be, and that current evidence does not accurately record the positive impact of the school's Christian ethos on raising achievement.

Continuing professional development is a priority for all staff and governors. It is linked to the school's improvement plan and performance management priorities.

Partnerships with the parish and other local Christian churches are strong and continuing to grow. The spiritual life of the school is enhanced by the ministry of the Anglican parish priest who exercises highly valued pastoral care for the school. Much is being done by the churches to strengthen the bonds of community life even further. Joint working is developing an understanding of those with different needs; it is building links and making a significant contribution to pupils' overall development.