

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Newington Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

School Lane
Newington
Sittingbourne
Kent
ME9 7LB

Diocese: Canterbury

Local authority: Kent

Date of inspection: 7th September 2011

Date of last inspection: 1st – 2nd April 2008

School's unique reference number: 118649

Headteacher: Jacky Darling

Inspector's name and number: Judy Bainbridge, 328

School context

Newington is a one-form entry voluntary controlled primary school serving a large village to the north of Sittingbourne. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds, with a small number coming from other ethnic groups, including Romany/Irish heritage. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average, as is the percentage known to be eligible for free school meals. The school has experienced a number of staffing changes over the past few years. The recent OfSTED report assessed the overall effectiveness of the school as satisfactory, but judged the care of pupils and their behaviour and personal development to be good.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Newington as a Church of England school are good.

The school's Christian distinctiveness has been strengthened since the last inspection, and there is good potential for further improvement. Its inclusive, caring ethos promotes a learning environment where pupils feel safe, happy and confident.

Established strengths

- The school provides a safe and caring environment in which pupils establish very good relationships with each other and with staff.
- Pupils' personal development is well supported, enabling them to develop a keen sense of compassion and social justice.
- Music makes a very strong contribution to collective worship.
- Commitment and hard work on the part of school leaders and governors have ensured good progress since the last inspection.

Focus for development

- Following recent staff/governor INSET, help pupils and their parents to identify and articulate the Christian values that underpin the school's ethos.
- Develop the formal evaluation of collective worship to include staff and pupils.
- Put in place a new subject leader for Religious Education (RE) to ensure consistency of provision across the school.
- Ensure that the school and the church community collaborate more closely in planning and preparing for worship in church.

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

Underpinning the school's ethos is the aspiration, expressed in its mission statement, to enable pupils to 'become the special people God created us to be'. As a result, Newington is a caring and welcoming community where all pupils know that they are loved and accepted, and where they are enabled to establish very good relationships with each other and with staff. One parent described the school as 'a big family'. Within this context, pupils' moral and spiritual growth is promoted very well. The school environment is used imaginatively to remind them of its Christian character. Following the last inspection, prayer corners have been created in each classroom, and there is a well-used prayer station outside the hall. RE and worship contribute well to pupils' personal development. In particular, they speak very positively of the way in which RE helps them to understand the beliefs and customs of people of different faiths. In some classes, RE is very effective in helping pupils to relate religion to their own lives. However, in others such opportunities are missed and there is an over-emphasis on learning about religion. Within the school, pupils are keen to take responsibility, as buddies or eco-warriors, for example, and are preparing well to become good citizens. The school fosters a keen sense of compassion and social justice, expressed in pupils' enthusiastic support for a range of local and international charities. However, they do not yet relate these activities explicitly to Christian teaching and values.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good.

In describing the school's Christian distinctiveness, one pupil commented: 'It's special because we worship God in church and at school.' Most pupils say they enjoy worship, especially valuing the sense of community generated by the 'coming together' of the whole school. They appreciate opportunities to take an active part through contributing prayers, acting out Bible stories or playing instruments. Music has a central place in worship. Pupils love singing, and join wholeheartedly in hymns, chants and sung responses. They are eager to answer questions and respond well to times of reflection and prayer. The act of worship observed helped them to think about the wonder of creation, and God's care for each individual within it. The lighting of a candle and use of formal opening responses contribute to pupils' understanding of Anglican traditions and practice. This is strengthened further by visits to church at festival times, and parents as well as pupils say how much they enjoy these occasions. Worship in both church and school is very well supported by the parish clergy. However, they have expressed a need for much closer collaboration with staff when church services are being planned. Planning of the daily act of worship in school is based on the Diocesan scheme, and ensures that worship helps pupils to explore themes linked to key Christian teachings and to relate these to their own lives. Since the last inspection, monitoring by governors has been put in place. The school recognises the need to extend the process of formal evaluation by including staff and pupils.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a Church school is good.

Since the last inspection, the Headteacher, staff and governors have worked hard to develop the Christian character of the school. The mission statement, the prospectus and website now clearly proclaim its distinctive status. Key policies, such as that for behaviour, are explicitly related to the mission statement. A recent INSET day for staff and governors has helped them to develop their vision further by defining the school's key Christian values more clearly. They now need to communicate this vision more effectively to pupils and parents, so that all members of the school community can articulate the Christian values that make it distinctive. Self-evaluation by staff and governors is thorough, and there is now scope to widen participation in the process to include parents and pupils. Priorities for development are included in the School Plan. Good use is made of Diocesan opportunities for professional and spiritual development, enabling both staff and governors to extend the skills and understanding necessary for the leadership of a Church school. However, while the Headteacher and governors are aware of the importance of succession planning, recent staff changes have made it difficult for them to anticipate future needs. In particular, they recognise the need to put in place a new subject leader for RE who will help to develop teacher confidence and ensure consistency of provision across the school. Established links with the parish church and partnerships with local groups and businesses enhance pupils' learning and contribute very effectively to community cohesion locally. Newer links with schools in London and on Ascension Island are making pupils aware of different communities nationally and globally.

SIAS report September 2011. Newington Church of England Primary School, School Lane, Newington, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME9 7LB.