

South Otterington Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

South Otterington
Northallerton
DL7 9HD

Diocese: York

Local authority: North Yorkshire
Date of inspection: 13th January 2011
Date of last inspection: 17th January 2008
School's unique reference number: 121603
Headteacher: Mrs K. Williamson
Inspector's name and number: Penelope Heptonstall 634

School context

South Otterington CE Voluntary Controlled Primary School serves the villages and rural district south of Northallerton. It is smaller than most primary schools. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is much lower than average. There is a much lower proportion of pupils with special educational needs or disabilities than in most schools. Nearly all pupils are from a white British background. The headteacher was appointed just over a year ago.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of South Otterington School as a Church of England school are outstanding.

South Otterington provides an excellent, distinctively Christian education for all its pupils. The school is unusual in the strength and breadth of its relationship with the church, woven into the fabric of school life. The school has made very good progress since its last inspection, inspired by the commitment of the foundation governors, the vision of the recently appointed headteacher and the teamwork of the staff.

Established strengths

- The strong sense of common purpose that underpins everything that happens in the school, clearly linked to the school's Christian foundation.
- A well structured and creative curriculum focusing on each child as a unique individual.
- Rigorous evaluation used as a platform for highly effective school improvement.

Focus for development

- Offer opportunities to parents to be involved in the school's project to develop pupils' personal, social and emotional learning.
- Develop formal evaluation of collective worship by parents.
- Establish a purposeful global link to support multicultural awareness.

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

The warm and smiling welcome to the school sets the scene for a dynamic and committed team of adults who participate in developing the highest standards of provision for the pupils in the 'South Otterington family'. This family is created by tireless efforts to provide a curriculum and environment where pupils can flourish as individuals, making the most of their abilities and their experiences of the world as in the 'Forest Schools' project. Christian values are constantly reinforced by linking activities across the curriculum to values taught in collective worship. They are further underpinned by the very close links to the local church and clergy from Anglican, Methodist and Baptist denominations working together in the school. These strong values are taught right from the start in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) through circle time. This special time is used to give children opportunities to put Christian values into practice in games, learning how to be unselfish by helping and

including their friends. In addition there are many chances for reflection and personal thought. Opportunities are carefully created throughout the school in both an informal and formal way. There is outside seating for quiet times, 'thinking boxes' for children's ideas, children's 'thoughts' in interactive displays and teacher led times for reflection. These experiences are a valuable part of the spiritual development for all members of the school community enabling a child in the EYFS to wish that 'everyone is rich enough for what they need' and a Year 2 pupil to speculate that 'the world was created from love'. Pupils are encouraged to think about big questions linked to all aspects of their rich curriculum, such as 'When the earth turns how does the sea stay on?' They live out their Christian values in many ways, including the fundraising activities of the school council. Parents and secondary schools speak highly of the way in which pupils carry their values forward into their future lives. The use of 'family service' at lunchtime reinforces family values and gives older children a caring role and opportunities to develop good relationships with visitors from the wider community. Pupils indicate that their sense of value and worth is further reinforced by the wide range of interesting and exciting extra activities offered by the teachers.

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

Collective worship is absolutely central to the life of the school, as it is here that the school's strong values are given a sharp focus and linked to Christian teaching. Because worship is formally evaluated by all pupils and especially by the 'worship helpers', their views strongly influence planning. This has led to further opportunities for pupils to actively participate and interact during collective worship. In addition older pupils plan and lead collective worship. As a result of this pupils are highly engaged and readily make links between the stories and activities offered to them and Christian values being taught. Pupils and parents say that these values inspire helpful and kind actions both in and out of school and pupils are helped to resolve differences when they have disagreements. The range of clergy and other visitors involved in leading collective worship give the pupils a wide variety of stimulating interpretations of the themes being developed. Music and drama are also used very effectively to help pupils' understanding of themes. Because all teachers attend and lead worship there is a clear message that this time in the school day is of central importance. Pupils' understanding of Anglican tradition is well developed through liturgical colours and the celebration of key festivals during the church year. Their understanding is developed further by teaching linked to displays and prominent Christian artefacts in classrooms and central areas of the school. Prayer is a very important part of school life and is enriched by the 'prayer tree', where children can informally express their own concerns as well as focusing on issues in the news and 'big questions' they encounter in the curriculum. Parents feel welcome to attend acts of worship and say that there are many informal opportunities for feedback. Nevertheless, there is scope for formal evaluation by parents.

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

The headteacher expresses an exceptionally clear vision based on a deep understanding of Christian values and how they should underpin school life. This is complemented by very well structured support from the foundation governors through monitoring and evaluation, which feed into analysis and developmental actions. Governors also have an excellent understanding of succession planning and make very good use of links with the diocese to ensure high quality appointments and good induction training. This is reinforced by the very good relationship with the local church. Because all teachers and other stakeholders are consistently involved in planning and evaluation, there is a very well informed and robust approach to developing Christian values across the school. Senior leaders work closely to plan for pupils' personal, social and emotional development (PSED) and cleverly link it to Religious Education (RE), using innovative approaches within a creative curriculum. This has led to the introduction of a highly effective PSED project for pupils. However, parents are not yet fully involved in PSED and there is potential for development. The largely mono cultural nature of the school is compensated for, by a focused approach to pupils' understanding of other cultures and faiths. This is done through a range of visits, visitors, information and communication technology (ICT) and other resources. The school plans to further develop and enhance pupils' understanding of other faiths and cultures with a purposeful global link.