

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

### **St Mark's Elmtree VA Primary School**

St Mark's Close  
Fairfield  
Stockton on Tees  
TS18 5AJ

#### **Diocese: Durham**

Local authority: Stockton  
Dates of inspection: 14 March 2013  
Date of last inspection: 1 November 2006  
School's unique reference number: 133301  
Headteacher: Val Hall  
Inspector's name and number: Brian Hedley 619

#### **School context**

In this average-sized Primary school, a well-below average number of pupils are eligible for pupil premium; an above-average number of pupils are supported at school action; an average number of pupils are supported at school action plus or have a statement of special educational need. The school holds a number of awards and meets the Government's current floor targets for English and Mathematics.

#### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Mark's Elmtree Voluntary Aided Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding**

This is a happy school where all are welcomed and cherished. Children, parents and carers value the vital part it plays in their lives and appreciate the unconditional love and commitment extended to them at all times.

#### **Established strengths**

- The school is exceptionally well led and managed; it is constantly improving
- Christian values are lived out day by day; positive relationships and excellent behaviour abound
- Collective Worship and RE contribute strongly to the wonderful opportunities offered to all
- Strong links exist between home, school, community and Christian groups

#### **Focus for development**

- Continue to support and encourage new staff as they uphold the ethos of the school
- When reviewing whole-school policies, ensure that core values are interwoven more explicitly into the body of the text

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

This is a very successful school because everyone shares responsibility in its quest for excellence. Core Christian values and a strong commitment to human flourishing form the bedrock upon which everything is built. As a result, behaviour is outstanding and makes a positive contribution to learning and relationships. Expectations are high and children are proud of the part they play in their education: 'no-one is higher up than anyone else here, we are all the same; it's a very honest place; when something goes wrong, we all try and learn from the warnings'; we try to look after each other and keep everything happy'. Children achieve well because teachers are committed to ensuring that every child is the best that they can be. Parents and carers said that St Mark's is a place of generous hospitality, and that 'the school gets a good balance between academic progress and teaching children to be decent human beings'. They praised the staff team because 'they go the extra mile for every single child', and 'help children and their parents to find the building blocks for success'. The school has a wide range of strategies in place to support pupils and families who experience difficulties. The parent-support adviser was praised for her work, as was a classroom support teacher, who, on the day of inspection helped to provide tangible evidence of everyone's voice being important and heard, perhaps most movingly, one of the 'less strong' voices.

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

Worship is well-planned on an annual cycle. It unashamedly places God at the centre of school life. On the day of inspection, Reception Class led Community Worship which included about thirty family and friends. Those present were warmly welcomed by the Headteacher and reminded that the school wanted them to be right at the heart of things. The message for Lent delivered confidently and proudly by the children was straightforward, passionate and linked to the theme of 'Ourselves and Creation': God gave us a brain to make choices; what will you choose to do to look after your body during Lent? The gathering was given time to think – just as Jesus had taken time to think over forty days and nights. Drama, role play, singing, humour, prayers, reflection and silence played a valuable part in making this occasion distinctive, relevant and meaningful. Earlier in the day class worship explored Psalm 139 and the theme 'we are God's special creation'. When asked why the teacher was lighting a candle, a child said 'even though God is here all the time, we light the candle to show he is even closer during worship'. Café Church for Y2 is held once per week at lunchtime in the dining hall whilst everyone is eating. This innovative activity is led by a Youth Worker from Holy Trinity / St Mark's, and provides an opportunity for children to talk about their day then hear Bible stories. This is generating great interest, and children other than Y2 are now asking if it can be organised for them. Youth for Christ after school club was attended by 25 children on the day of inspection. The children, excited to see the seven leaders present, were immediately engaged in activity and chat, clearly motivated by faith, the sharing of the Good News, and relishing the opportunity to tease out ideas in fellowship with one another.

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

The current RE Co-ordinator, building on the work and success of her gifted predecessor, is making sure that the curriculum remains relevant to the lives of all pupils. Aply supported and encouraged by the newly-appointed RE governor, much is being done to embed 'values for life' and the example and teachings of Jesus so that individuals can decide for themselves, which path they might follow. During a Y4 lesson, energetic teaching involved learners in reflecting on the story of Easter. High levels of engagement and thinking resulted in one child saying that 'during his life, Jesus was showing people what it means to be a Christian', and another said that 'Jesus was also saying to God, I have done my best to try and help people become Christians'. When asked what he liked about RE lessons, a boy responded that 'you have to give your own opinions on things'. The depth of thinking in Y5 could be seen first-hand during a class discussion on the experiences of characters in the Easter story. In response to the question 'What can we learn from what Jesus went through' one child answered, 'I think the trust that Jesus had in God is very important', to which his friend added, 'I agree, but I think the trust that the disciples had in Jesus about the after-life is also really important'. This level of mature consideration and profound reflection was common throughout the day and underlines the way in which children are being drawn into a deeper exploration of ideas to take their learning on.

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

The Headteacher is a highly effective leader. Staff support her fully, and there is a very strong team approach. Recently appointed teachers are well-cared for and are quickly making their own unique and valued contribution. The Governing Body shows wholehearted commitment; they monitor ethos and progress and the impact of their policies. Consideration should be given to interweaving core values fully into documentation as this will make evaluation even more rigorous and explicit. Governors know the school's strengths yet challenge it to do even better. They are rightly proud of the school's achievements and the positive effect it has on community life. Everyone at St Mark's Elmtree is passionate about high-quality learning and there is a constant drive towards excellence. The school's communication with home makes a huge contribution; parents speak very positively about how they can come to school at any time if they need to; they like this partnership and talk of their own growing confidence because of it.