



YR EGLWYS  
YNG NGHYMRU



THE CHURCH  
IN WALES

## Gwella Inspection of a Church in Wales School

### **The Town Church in Wales Voluntary Aided Primary School, Aberdare.**

Wind Street  
Aberdare  
Rhondda Cynon Taff  
CF44 7HF

#### **Diocese: Llandaff**

Local authority: Rhondda Cynon Taff  
Dates of inspection: 22 - 23 November 2018  
Date of last inspection: 14 -15 January 2013  
School's unique reference number: 674/3317  
Headteacher: Mrs Clare Werrett  
Inspector's name: Mr Christopher Cherry

#### **School context**

Town Church school is a larger than average size, Church in Wales, Voluntary Aided, primary school situated in the centre of the town. It predominantly serves the parish of St Elvan's, Aberdare. Most children come from the local area but some travel by bus from Penderyn, Hirwaun, Mountain Ash and Abercynon. There are 300 children on roll and the school is currently oversubscribed. Most children are of White British ethnic origin. Almost 13% of children are identified as having additional learning needs, which is below the national average. The percentage of children eligible to receive free school meals is just over 5%, which is below the national average. The school is currently on track to meet its attendance target of 95.4%. There are 12 teachers (including the headteacher and 4 part-time teachers) and 12 learning support assistants serving 9 class groups plus a nursery. The headteacher was appointed in September 2014, with a new deputy being appointed the following January. There has been a significant change in the membership of the SLT over the past four years. Five new staff have been appointed since September 2018.

#### **Established strengths**

The strengths of the school are:

- Christian beliefs and values are exemplary and tangibly evident around the school.
- Staff build exceptional supportive relationships with nearly all children, parents and the worshipping community.
- Nearly all parents are effusive in praising the strong personal example set for children by the head and staff.
- Children are treated with great sensitivity and respect and their opinions are clearly both sought and valued.
- The outstanding quality of meaningful, informed discussion by children, especially in religious education (RE).

## Focus for development

The school has four areas in which to focus development:

1. Improve the extent and quality of monitoring, evaluation and tracking of RE, in line with a developing RE curriculum, to identify good and excellent practice across the school.
2. Provide increased opportunities for staff to collaborate and share the good and excellent practice identified in teaching RE.
3. Increase opportunities for children to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of other cultures and religions as this is currently underdeveloped.
4. To build upon the current successful relationships with church schools in more diverse settings.

## Overall Judgement:

The overall judgement of the school is **excellent**.

## **KQ1. The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is excellent at meeting the needs of all learners.**

The school's motto, 'Gair Duw Goreu Dysg' – 'God's word is the best learning', is underpinned by a mission statement with five explicitly Christian aims written by the school community. The central importance of God's word is embraced by both children and staff, across the school. Clearly stated, high expectations ensure that every opportunity is taken to encourage children, of all ages, to talk about Jesus and the life examples He provides. Children are regularly supported to carefully consider stories from scripture in an atmosphere of awe and wonderment. Nearly all children are confident in relating Bible stories to their own lives. The quality of child-initiated, informed discussion about their faith, beliefs and values is exceptional, especially in the upper-school, thus ensuring the school's tangible, distinctive Christian character. Links with the community and parish are highly effective with the school developing a reputation of being active participants within the worshipping community.

The school is driven by a strong set of Christian values, which are clearly communicated around the school in displays and the actions of all stakeholders. Children are confident and enthusiastic communicators, who relish the opportunity to talk warmly and proudly about their school. Children from across the school show a mature respect and tolerance for other religious traditions.

The RE curriculum is full and engaging and, although introduction of the new Understanding Christianity curriculum is in the early stages of development, the school has responded positively to advice and has already created meaningful links to established work on values. Christian values, and the individual and collective response of children, make a significant impact on the whole school community, as in the range of involvement in community projects. The contribution of school upon family life is strongly emphasised by parents. Several credit the "Town Church School" experience as being hugely instrumental in the spiritual growth and practice of their own children. Opportunities to reflect, at all levels, is given a very high priority. Most children make regular, effective use of classroom prayer/spiritual areas, showing a mature awareness of the needs of others from the prayers and reflections on display. The school consistently promotes the wellbeing of all stakeholders, with children being offered regular opportunities to engage in high quality experiences intended to develop a relevant, personal spirituality. Pupil voice is strong and valued. Year six children, through the school's Senedd (Council), wear a different uniform to highlight the responsibility of their position. The Senedd has been instrumental in promoting the development of a Faith Garden.

## **KQ2. The impact of collective worship on the school community is excellent.**

Very high levels of active participation and the creation of a respectful, receptive environment typifies both school and class collective worship. The school community places great value on collective worship in all its forms. There is a consistent focus on the life and actions of Jesus Christ. Children of all ages are confident and secure in relating Bible stories, often highlighting the specific relevance of Christian values, to their own lives. An example of this was an act of worship in preparation for the celebration of Christ the

King. Children entered the school hall wearing crowns they had made in class, having first discussed Jesus' entry to Jerusalem as king. Parallels were then drawn against the differences between a potential school visit by the Queen and Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. All children were fully engrossed and many enthusiastically offered suggestions about how the school might prepare for such a royal visit. Children were also set a task by the headteacher to find out more about this church celebration.

Children across the school show an awareness of the structure of the church's year, its core celebrations and festivals. Children are encouraged and enabled to take both leading and supportive roles in CW. Children consistently display high levels of respect for adults and each other. There is a tangible feeling of joy in their enthusiastic contribution and participation in CW. The school has very strong links with a range of local churches and parishes. These connections work very effectively in developing mutually beneficial supportive arrangements with their local church high school. An instance of this is regular team teaching with the head of the high school RE department working with the Year 6 teacher. The schools periodically work together to develop joint projects that contribute to a greater impact to CW.

Children are confident in planning and leading worship at both class and whole school levels. Children are encouraged to make full use of the spiritual areas in their classrooms, indeed many do so on a regular basis. Children show a mature understanding of personal prayer being an integral part of their spiritual journey. They are happy to share their thoughts on how such opportunities had helped them in times of stress.

The school makes very effective use of a wide range of music to enhance and enliven worship, from the school samba band to Taize chant. Children join in the singing with great gusto. The school now has a Worship and Wellbeing Cabinet Group, as part of the Senedd who contribute to action plans in order to move the school forward.

### **KQ3. The effectiveness of religious education is good.**

Overall standards of attainment of learners are in-line with other core subjects. Most children rapidly develop a mature understanding of Christianity and a broad range of religious beliefs. Nearly all children see the relevance and importance that this has to their everyday lives. The development of a comprehensive RE curriculum is still in the early stages of development but inspirational school leadership has empowered staff to take opportunities to be more creative or innovative as with the childrens' depiction of 'Y Ston Fawr' – 'The Big Freize'. The school has forged mutually beneficial working partnerships with other church schools (with different settings – St Monica's CiW Primary, in inner city Cardiff), Professional Learning Communities and parishes. The school is an enthusiastic contributor to further the development of Understanding Christianity. Teachers and support staff know their children well and are thus able to monitor the progress of children at an individual level, through a basic assessment and tracking system.

Lesson observations show a range of effectiveness (from excellent to adequate, with some good features). Excellent lessons were typified by high levels of engagement, a powerful dialogue and probing questioning skills that promoted excellent independent learning. For example, in an upper junior lesson, based on the value of courage (the value being studied that month) children initially placed their opinions on post-it slips and then refined these through group discussion and negotiation. Throughout the lesson children paid rapt attention to the opinions of others and behaviour was exemplary.

Also, a team-teach lesson totally engrossed a year six class and stimulated some profound discussion on the similarities between other world religions through exploring the interiors of various places of worship. This experience, combined with other collaborative working, contributes significantly to ensure the positive transition between key stages 2 and 3.

This kind of excellent practice, however, is not yet shared effectively across the school and other partnership schools. In addition, opportunities for children to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of other cultures and religions is currently underdeveloped.

Governors are active in regular learning walks. They are both engaged and informed of the school's continued development and effectively hold the headteacher to account.

**KQ4. The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is excellent.**

The head is totally committed, hard working and exudes a 'can-do' approach. She displays a high degree of sensitivity and, as a result, staff rapport and team spirit are excellent. Expectations are clearly expressed and an effective system of devolved leadership is now having a very positive impact upon the work of the school.

School leaders lead by personal example. They confidently articulate explicit Christian values, highlighting the potential positive impact that Town Church school can have on the lives of learners and the benefit to the whole life of this worshipping community. Through interviews, meetings and questionnaires, parents and governors are effusive in praising the strong personal example given to their children by staff, at all levels. Through questionnaire returns and meetings, parents stated that "Town Church School" is a "nurturing, caring school with strong significance given to the development of morals and values. The teachers and children show mutual respect, children are encouraged to express their feelings and opinions. Children are listened to, encouraged and praised". These comments are confirmed by observations made during this inspection. The leader for RE is passionate about her subject and ensures that it has an important place in the overall curriculum. She is very effectively implementing Understanding Christianity throughout the school and has a secure grasp of how to continue to develop it as a resource.

The school's Gwella Church School Self-evaluation Report is detailed and involves all groups within the school community. It has a strong focus on improvement and maintaining a concentrated effort upon maintaining a strong Christian ethos and provision that meets the needs of all learners. Children of all ages are encouraged to take responsibility for their own actions and the welfare of others. This was especially in evidence during playtimes where, although well supervised by adults, designated children displayed a genuine concern for the wellbeing of those in the Foundation Phase. They were also involved in monitoring across all three playgrounds for children who were withdrawn or in need of a friend. These pupils, readily identified with different coloured tabards, contribute greatly to the effective running of a very happy school. High expectations placed on all children make a significant contribution to the consistent excellent behaviour and attitudes children have whilst participating in a wide range of school activities. Children talk warmly about their school and how much they enjoy being a part of it.

Governors are integrated into the monitoring process and visit logs and evaluation sheets indicate they are involved in structured visits and learning walks focussed on Christian ethos.

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| <b>The school meets the statutory requirement for collective acts of worship</b> | <b>YES</b> |
| <b>The school meets the statutory requirement for religious education</b>        | <b>YES</b> |

Gwella November 2018 Aberdare Town Church in Wales VA Primary School, Aberdare CF44 7HF