

## Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

### St Thomas' Church of England Primary School

Huddersfield Road, Newhey, Rochdale OL16 3QZ	
<b>Current SIAMS inspection grade</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Diocese</b>	<b>Manchester</b>
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Rochdale
Date of inspection	4 May 2017
Date of last inspection	March 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided 105824
Headteacher	Rebecca Williams
Inspector's name and number	Gail Fullbrook 530

#### School context

St Thomas' school is a smaller than average primary school with 147 pupils on roll. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, with a statement of special educational need or an education healthcare plan are all below the national average. The majority of pupils are White British and very few speak English as an additional language. The school is situated in the semi-rural community of Newhey. A new incumbent joined the parish in October following an interregnum of three and half years.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Thomas' as a Church of England school are good

- School leaders ensure that Christian principles and practice support a community in which every person is valued and can flourish.
- Worship, religious education (RE) and the wider curriculum are underpinned by Christian values. They contribute to very good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning.
- The partnership between church and school places the school at the heart of the community. Consequently pupils recognise the importance of community and are keen to play their part in local events.

#### Areas to improve

- Develop current procedures for reviewing the Christian distinctiveness of the school to include staff, governors, parents and pupils. This will support the school in recognising what it does well and guide improvement planning.
- Review the balance between learning about religion and learning from religion so that pupils can apply knowledge learnt about the faiths they study to the lives of believers.
- Develop areas that encourage prayer and reflection in classrooms and around the school that will support pupils' spiritual development.

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

The Christian ethos of the school is apparent across all aspects of school life. It informs the relationships between members of the school community, the achievements of pupils and their personal development and well-being. Attendance is good. Where it falls below acceptable levels, the school shows Christian compassion in its commitment to the removal of barriers that prevent pupils from being in school. A secure understanding of Christian principles and the importance placed on the individual needs of each pupil, results in progress across the school that is at least good.

Learning about Christian values runs side by side with the school's current focus on unity in diversity. All pupils know that where Christian values are lived out day by day then difference and diversity is something to enjoy and celebrate. As a consequence, pupils are keen to learn about the ways in which children from a partner school in Pakistan live and play. Pupils are familiar with a wide range of Biblical stories and readily make links between stories they know and Christian teaching.

The range of additional experiences offered within the school curriculum, and through visits and after school activities, make a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Opportunities within RE lessons when pupils ask big and puzzling questions and discuss their viewpoints with others, make a significant contribution to spiritual development. Pupils are keen to engage with community events such as the annual carnival. They recognise the importance of Christian giving and regularly support charities such as the local foodbank and Mediquip.

Relationships, founded on Christian principles, are a strength of the school. Staff are approachable and personable and parents know that any concerns they may have will be addressed quickly and effectively. The school's pastoral support of pupils is gentle, nurturing and moral and is highly regarded by parents. When discussing playtimes pupils link the ways in which they behave to particular Christian values. For example, one pupil spoke of the importance of forgiveness when someone has hurt you.

The appointment of the new vicar is bringing increased vigour to relationships between the school and church communities. Pupils know that they are an important part of the family of the church and understand that, as one pupil put it, 'we are all children of God no matter how old we are'. Pupils' understanding of Christianity as a multicultural world faith is growing as they learn more about the church in Pakistan.

Teaching and learning in RE reinforces pupils' understanding of the Christian distinctiveness of their church school. They know that their understanding of Christian values and of unity in diversity are founded on Gospel stories and teaching and are unique to their school. As a result, they recognise and value the distinctiveness of their school.

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

Worship is central to the life of St Thomas' school. Pupils enjoy hearing Bible stories, sometimes dramatizing them, and stories when teachers use props to help them to remember a key message from the story. Some pupils spoke of the ways in which worship helped them to 'make sense of stories that aren't easy to understand' and to learn more about their core Christian values. One pupil sparked a discussion about Old Testament stories in which God had shown forgiveness towards his people. Another child, focussing on the value of caring, likened Jesus' healing of the paralysed man to the school's commitment to the local foodbank.

Opportunities for prayer and reflection thread through the school day and pupils have a clear understanding of the importance of prayer to Christians and the ways in which personal prayer can help them at particular times. A Key Stage 2 child talked of quietly praying in lessons when she is finding something difficult. Pupils often share prayers they have written in worship. Whilst pupils pray at particular times during the day, the time is almost always directed by an adult. Reflection areas and spaces that encourage personal prayer are not routinely provided in classrooms or around the school. As a consequence, little encouragement is given to pupils wishing to write a personal prayer or take time for Christian reflection.

Worship is Biblically based and includes teaching about key Christian concepts as well as developing understanding of the school's core Christian values. Pupils have an age appropriate understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are familiar with a number of aspects of Anglican worship. Pupils recognise that candles are lit to remind them that Jesus is the light of the world. They understand the importance of saying sorry to each other and to God. Pupils enjoy singing and can share their understanding of the themes and concepts that underpin the songs they sing.

Worship is led by a range of adults including members of the church and wider Christian community. Pupils make a good contribution to worship through drama, readings and prayer. As a next step the school is keen to develop a team of worship planners and leaders from amongst the pupils. Worship is well planned and reflects the Church year. It includes praise worship, worship led by the vicar and occasional class worship. Key festivals are marked by worship in church and this is almost always led by the children themselves. The evaluation of worship is not yet embedded in such a way that it supports the development and improvement of worship plans.

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

Pupils enjoy RE lessons and by the end of Key Stage 2 attainment is in line with national expectations. Teaching and learning is generally at least good although there is some variation between classes. Where questioning is open and the responses of pupils are valued, pupils make very good and sometimes excellent progress. Assessment is thorough and supports teachers' future planning.

Pupils are encouraged to listen carefully and respectfully to the viewpoints of others. They recognise the importance of considering the ways in which the beliefs of people of faith affect their response to events in life. Pupils in Class I, during a lesson about friendship, discussed the importance of sharing and being nice to one another. They went on to draw on their knowledge of Christian values to support their understanding. Older pupils, using key skills such as enquiry, reflection and interpretation, considered the nature of loss. They learnt of the many ways in which people are affected by loss and of the difference faith can make to people's experience of loss. Teachers show creativity in their approach to teaching and learning and as a consequence pupils develop confidence in making personal and well thought through responses.

The syllabus used by the school provides a clear framework that informs teacher planning. The balance between learning from and learning about religion is generally good. However, not all pupils are given sufficient opportunities to learn about the ways in which faith can affect the lives of believers. At the point of inspection the focus in RE during the academic year had almost entirely been on Christianity. The school has identified the need to address this in the future. Pupils talk with confidence about themes studied. The focus in one class of the roles of women in the Bible had clearly had a significant impact on pupils, as did a reflection on the nature of God. Through discussion, creative teaching and open questioning, pupils' SMSC development is well supported.

Regular scrutiny of pupils' books and occasional lesson observations contribute to the monitoring of RE. The coordinator is aware of current strengths in teaching and learning of RE and has plans in place to address areas prioritised for development. Once in place these actions will bring greater consistency to teaching and learning from class to class and enable teachers to share current excellent practice.

Opportunities for professional development are in place and are supported by focussed staff meetings and occasional visits from external providers.

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

The effective vision of a school rooted in Christian values where staff create a safe space for pupils to develop and learn is widely understood. The image of the school as a Christian family encompassing not only pupils but their families, is recognised by all adults, including parents. This image provides the foundation of school life. Pupils know that they are valued and that their teachers are aspirational for them. Whenever they struggle with learning, they and their parents are confident that support will be given. Consequently, achievement through the school is good and sometimes very good. Pupils' SMSC development and RE are effectively prioritised across the wider school curriculum. Teachers know their pupils well and are committed to ensuring that each pupil is given the opportunities that will support their personal development and well-being. As a result, pupils behave well and are keen to learn.

Current self-evaluation procedures, whilst in place, do not involve all members of the school family and sometimes lack rigour. As a result, governors do not always have the information they need to hold the school to account for its Christian distinctiveness. They are however, kept well informed about the life of the school as a church school through informal discussion and regular reports from the headteacher. Areas identified for development at inspection in 2012 have largely been addressed.

The professional development of staff for their work within a church school is supported by links with a local church schools' network. Links with the diocese are good and the headteacher recently took part in a diocesan visit to Pakistan. The benefits of the visit can be observed in pupils' growing understanding of a culture very different to their own. The vicar and the church community are supportive in maintaining and developing the Christian character of the school. Pupils and families feel a clear sense of belonging to the church and welcome the ways in which it supports and enhances their children's school life. Parents are welcomed into the school and enrich school life through the additional events they organise. St Thomas' school offers hospitality on a number of evenings to local groups and lies at the heart of community of Newhey.