



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St Thomas' Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Hodnet Drive
Ashton-in-Makerfield
Wigan
WN4 8PQ

Diocese: Liverpool

Local authority: Wigan

Dates of inspection: 16th October 2014

Date of last inspection: 28th-29th April 2009

School's unique reference number: 106465

Headteacher: Mrs Judith Jones

Inspector's name and number: Gail Fullbrook 530

School context

St Thomas' School is situated close to the centre of Ashton-in-Makerfield and most of the 227 children on roll live within the immediate area. The number of children known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average as is the proportion of pupils with special educational needs. Most pupils are of White British background with a very small proportion from minority ethnic backgrounds.

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

- The school's distinctive Christian ethos forms the foundation of school life and permeates every part of the curriculum.
- Core Christian values, recognised and understood by all members of the community, are evident in the children's behaviour, attitudes to learning and their relationships with one another.
- Links with the parish church and the wider community are extremely close and are mutually beneficial.

Areas to improve

- Involve children and adults in a formal programme of evaluating worship such that their responses will have impact upon future planning.
- Increase the involvement of children in the leadership of worship to give them greater ownership and deepen spiritual understanding.
- Refine assessment procedures in Religious Education (RE) to inform planning and ensure

that children make good progress over time.

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

This is a highly caring and welcoming school. All members of the school community are keen to express how the Christian character of the school contributes to the daily lives and good achievements of all children. Distinctively Christian values are known and understood and children readily relate them to their biblical roots. These values have a significant impact on the children's attitudes to learning and upon their relationships with each other, both within lessons and during playtimes. One child commented that, 'The values are us – you can't separate them from us. We believe in them.' Parents are keen to share ways in which the Christian character of the school contributes to school life and to the very good personal and academic achievement of the children. They attribute this to the school's commitment to teaching through Christian values and parents commented on the 'huge difference this makes to the children's eagerness to learn'. Attendance is high because children want to be in school. The value of koinonia (community) is very important to the children and they make reference to the school as being like a second family. The school offers a wide range of experiences which extend and supplement teaching. One popular club known as Friends Together provides the opportunity for Year 3 and 4 children to discuss and respond to issues of faith in creative and interesting ways. Within lessons children are encouraged to reflect upon their actions and those of their peers from a Christian view point. Children acknowledge that living as Christians helps them to behave well. The core value of serving is taken seriously by the children and they talk of collecting food for a local food bank and of raising funds for Christian Aid and Macmillan Cancer Support. Warm and loving Christian relationships characterise everyday life in school. Parents feel welcome and know that any concerns will be listened to and quickly addressed. Children's cultural and global awareness is enhanced through learning about other faiths and cultures in RE and in their cross curricular work. The contribution of visitors from other faiths to dance, drama, art and music lessons adds additional value to an already very good curriculum. RE makes a significant contribution to the distinctive Christian character of the school.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Worship is central to the life of the school and children and adults enjoy being together as a family. Worship is distinctively Christian. An opening sentence and the use of a candle remind the children that this is a special time. A key stage 1 child spoke of worship as being a time when, 'God comes and sits with us'. Worship is thoughtfully planned and supports and develops understanding of the school's Christian vision. Links are made between scripture and daily life. In the worship observed children's understanding of the importance of honesty was developed as they reflected upon the impact dishonesty can have on others. Children know that saying sorry leads to forgiveness and that it is important to apologise when they have done something wrong. Parents enjoy the support that the school's Christian teaching gives to behaviour, attitudes and courtesy at home. Times of prayer and reflection are central to the life of the school. Children recognise the importance of prayer in their own lives and in the lives of others. They pray together regularly during the school day. Some children talk of times when they pray on their own, particularly when something has upset them. A year 5 child said, 'When something lovely happens I want to share it with God'. Children are familiar with key biblical verses and the values of forgiveness, respect, service, truthfulness and koinonia are well understood. Children are familiar with major festivals in the church year and older children have a good understanding of the liturgy of Holy Communion and of its importance in the lives of Christians. They recognise the importance of Christian symbols and artefacts and are familiar with the Trinity. Members of the church ministry team lead worship regularly alongside school staff enriching the experience of the children and reinforcing the children's understanding of their importance within the church family. Whilst children make

good contributions to worship by reading from scripture, leading prayers and organising music and drama contributions, opportunities to plan and lead worship are not yet offered. The evaluation of worship is not sufficiently robust to have impact on future planning.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

RE has a high profile within the school and children clearly enjoy learning about their own faith and the faiths of others. Standards are in line with national expectations and on occasions exceed them. Children make good progress across the school and have a secure understanding of Christianity and the other faiths they study. They are able to reflect on their learning and skilfully make links between Christianity and other faiths studied. For example, when talking about the school's core Christian values a child made the comment that he was sure that people of all faiths would recognise the values as being important to them. The vast majority of teaching is outstanding and never less than good. Knowledge and understanding is developed through a rich variety of experiences which ensure that knowledge is embedded and understanding is nurtured and developed. Children share favourite RE units of work with enthusiasm and eloquently express their understanding of different religious practices and beliefs. Mathematical diagrams are used to support children in expressing their learning and led to an understanding that Christians and Muslims worship in different ways but have much in common including making pilgrimages. The flexible and richly varied curriculum encourages children to ask perceptive questions such as, 'How did Jesus do that?' when thinking about the healing of the paralysed man. Teachers have access to high quality resources. Reflective questioning is used to deepen understanding and encourage children to make personal responses within lessons. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is embedded within RE teaching and learning. For example, when considering the value of thankfulness, a group of children reflected on the fact that whilst they recognise the importance of being thankful, often they take things for granted. This was followed by a discussion focussing on the things people of different cultures might take for granted. One child wondered if a child in Africa might take the sunshine for granted whilst a child living in England might not notice green fields and flowers. Effective marking supports planning but assessment procedures are not sufficiently robust to give an accurate record of progress over time. All staff have received recent training in assessment but this is not yet fully embedded. The monitoring of workbooks and teaching is effective and the coordinator gives good support to individual members of staff when required.

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

The distinctive Christian vision of this highly effective primary school is clearly articulated by all stakeholders and is evident in every aspect of school life. Children work hard and achieve well. They understand that they have an important part to play in the success of the school. Staff know the children well and recognise and respond to the needs of individual children discretely. Parents are appreciative of the care offered to their children and one parent spoke of the support given to her child when a foster child was introduced to the family. Another recognised the school's commitment to all children, including those who experience times of struggle in their learning and those who are very able. Governors fully support the headteacher's belief that the well-being of all within the school family should have the highest priority. Teachers feel well supported and the children know that they are safe. Based on self-evaluation the school has established ambitious plans for its future development as a church school. Governance is highly effective, being both supportive of the school and acting as a critical friend. For example, when discussing the impact of the implementation of the school's four core values, governors asked that these be put on the homepage of the school website to stress the school's Christian ethos. Governors play a role in self-evaluation procedures and are familiar with the guidelines for church school inspections. The professional development of staff is seen as being very important and good links with Liverpool diocese ensure that training needs are satisfied. Succession planning is evidenced in the recent promotion of three staff to local church schools. The foci for development identified at the time of the school's previous church school inspection have been largely addressed although, as a result of

implementing a new scheme of work in RE, assessment procedures require further development. Parents cannot speak highly enough of their appreciation of the school and firmly state that this is because of its Christian distinctiveness. They comment that the school belongs to its community. The partnership between the church and school is outstanding and contributes to the effectiveness of the school as a church school. The parish ministry team are regular visitors to the school and children enjoy their contact with them. The fact that some staff members have responsibilities within the church consolidates the seamless and mutually beneficial connection between the two communities.

SIAMS report October 2014 St Thomas' CE Primary School Ashton-in-Makerfield WN4 8PQ