

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Thomas Church of England Primary School

Marriott Street, Stockport, Cheshire, SK1 3PJ

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Satisfactory
Diocese	Chester
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Stockport
Date/s of inspection	23 March 2017
Date of last inspection	January 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary controlled 106109
Headteacher	Jill Gray
Inspector's name and number	Tracy Beatty 890

School context

This is a smaller than average school with 184 pupils on roll. Pupil numbers have risen considerably since the time of the previous inspection. Most pupils are white British but the proportion of pupils from Pakistani, African and other backgrounds is rising. It serves a community of significant social and economic deprivation and has high levels of pupil mobility. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is much higher than average, as is the number of pupils with SEND. The church is currently in a period of interregnum. The school holds the Inclusion Quality Mark.

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

- The school's aims are based on Christian values that are understood and respected by pupils and adults, and underpin the school's management of behaviour and attendance.
- The headteacher has created a safe haven for the pupils in this community, resulting in all feeling valued and nurtured. A Christian ethos is central to the high quality relationships that permeate the whole school community.
- Pupils have a very well developed concept of diversity and difference rooted in Christian values of tolerance and respect. They are able to confidently articulate their views on faith.

Areas to improve

- Increase pupils' participation in worship by giving them opportunities to plan, lead and evaluate collective worship.
- Establish a rigorous system to monitor and evaluate collective worship over time so that the impact on learners can be identified.
- Take every opportunity to use the Bible to illustrate and underpin the school values and display them in the school environment.
- Accelerate the development and effectiveness of the governors through training so that they support, monitor and challenge the school's Christian distinctiveness as a major factor in school improvement.

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

The school has a core set of values, most of which are distinctively Christian. They permeate school life and make a marked difference to the lives of the school community. For example, the behaviour strategies are based on a restorative approach which allows each pupil to make a fresh start each day. However, how these values contribute towards the spiritual development of the school community is not consistently articulated by the staff in school. Therefore, opportunities to explore Christian values in everyday learning and allow them to influence the lives of pupils and staff are not harnessed. The school's mission statement 'Believe to achieve' is displayed beautifully in mosaic in the front entrance. It is readily articulated by all pupils and has a positive impact on pupils' spiritual, moral and social development. The mission statement and values have a direct influence on the behaviour of the pupils in that they want to persevere in their learning and believe they can succeed. The progress of pupils is good from their starting points. Leaders attribute this to their Christian values and are committed to improving the attainment of pupils, particularly in the early years. Most classes display a cross although reflection areas and celebration of the Christian character through artwork in the school environment is limited. Opportunities for reflection are provided throughout the curriculum and many high quality responses to this are captured in PSHE books, of which the pupils are very proud.

This is a generous school which gives regularly to a wide range of charities stemming from its Christian value of empathy. The headteacher has created a culture where many services are provided to parents free of charge, such as sibling club and free full time nursery places. Parents commented on how this is a good example of the Christian care that is demonstrated behind the scenes. Parents are very supportive of the school and enjoy attending the termly services in church. One parent talked about the welcome they received when they joined the school mid-term, knowing no one. She said, 'Friendship is a strength of this school. Plus all the staff know every child here, like their own.' Pupils have a very good understanding of diversity resulting in mature attitudes to difference and other faiths. They have a basic understanding of Christianity, to which Religious Education (RE) contribute. The RE lead describes how the teachers make the subject as practical as possible, resulting in the pupils affirming their enjoyment of the lessons, particularly the visits that are organised to different places of worship. Pupils and staff are proud of their school, which they refer to as a big family. A Year 5 child said, 'School is like my second home. I don't ever want to leave.' Staff love working at the school and are very supportive of each other, modelled by the headteacher who staff refer to as very considerate and approachable.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is satisfactory

Collective worship is the main way the school promotes its Christian character. It is an affirmation and celebration of the school's Christian ethos but improvement since the last inspection has been limited. Collective worship occurs daily and is enjoyed by the pupils, especially the enthusiastic singing which is Jesus centred and accompanied by actions. A group of pupils spoke positively of worship, particularly when teachers allow song requests and drama, and would welcome the opportunity to plan it themselves. There is clear evidence of moral development as a result of collective worship. For instance, the school council related how they are encouraged to forgive each other because they have learnt about how Jesus forgives us. However, opportunities for spirituality are less developed and there is limited impact on the wider school community. Links with the local church members provide pupils with a greater understanding of the Bible and an awareness of Christian values. There is evidence of worship planning around Christian values, Bible stories and Christian festivals supplemented by visits to the church and other places of worship. A Year 4 child said he enjoyed going to church because it made him feel 'connected'. The recent loss of the vicar of St Thomas church has affected the school greatly but they are working hard to bring other visitors into school, such as the church family worker and youth worker. The PSHE lead is passionate about improving links with the church and community through initiatives such as the One Voice project and the Ignite club. She has also worked with the church youth worker to promote the introduction of spaces of hope. Learners' understanding of the Anglican tradition is supported by their knowledge of the Lord's prayer but could be developed further, particularly in helping pupils understand the Trinity. All the classes have daily class prayers at lunchtime and home time but there are limited opportunities provided for pupils to learn about its relevance for their personal lives. Monitoring and evaluation of collective worship are not established practice, a development point from the last inspection.

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

The leadership team is very effective at creating a warm, nurturing environment where every pupil feels safe despite significant demographic challenges. The headteacher has a strong vision for the school as a safe, friendly place for all pupils to enjoy learning. She has an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and priorities. Parents and staff describe how the headteacher gives extensive practical help based on Christian principles, providing an excellent role model to all. However, the Christian distinctiveness is not explicit. Since the last inspection, the attention of the governors and leadership team has been on raising standards. Improvement strategies for worship have not been a focus, so sustained improvement is not evident. This has been a development point for the last two inspections, which the new chair of governors now intends to address in his new role. The RE lead attends diocesan cluster meetings and governors have started to access diocesan training. Workshops on Islamophobia and homophobia have been delivered, demonstrating the school's commitment to respecting diversity. A local authority advisor commented on the mature attitudes of the pupils to the homophobic training they received. This reinforces a Year 5 child's comment, 'We can be ourselves here because everyone is accepted and loved'.

Until recently, the clergy were regular visitors to the school and significantly enhanced the Christian distinctiveness. The previous incumbent advanced partnerships with the church which provided a good foundation for the school to build on. The school now has many activities planned with other visitors to sustain good links with the church. Governor systems for self-evaluation as a church school have been informal and not sufficient to inform identified priorities for improvement. The new chair of governors is keen to remedy this and drive a distinct Christian vision in the future. He acknowledges the importance of recruiting staff sympathetic to the Christian ethos, and diocesan training for staff to assist in succession planning. This is supported by the enthusiastic and proactive RE and wellbeing leads, whose improvement strategies are beginning to have some impact.

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