



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

Parkgate Road
Stockton Heath
Warrington
WA4 2AP

Diocese: Chester

Local authority: Warrington

Dates of inspection: 16th October 2014

Date of last inspection: 25th May 2011

School's unique reference number: 111318

Headteacher: Ian Moss

Inspector's name and number: Christine J Buckley 525

School context

St. Thomas' Church of England Aided Primary School is a one form entry school with 220 children on roll. It is situated in a socially advantaged area. The proportion of children known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below average. The number of children supported through school action, at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average. The senior leadership of the school has changed since the last inspection with a new headteacher and deputy headteacher. Standards have risen in the last few years as have the number of children on roll.

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

- The ethos and distinctiveness is reflected in the aesthetically pleasing environment which is a constant visual reminder of Christian values.
- Religious education (RE) supports the Christian ethos and spiritual development of the children
- Senior leaders and governors work together to actively promote the Christian foundation of the school.

Areas to improve

- To develop the planning for collective worship to provide a clear structure and a coherent development of Christian themes.
- To provide opportunities for children to plan and lead collective worship.

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

During the last few years the school has worked hard to put systems in place so that children's

progress is monitored closely and all teaching and learning is good or better. Attainment at the end of each key stage is now in line with or above the national average providing evidence that children's achievement is a priority for this Christian school. At the same time the school has made the Christian foundation more distinctive. There is now a clear mission statement that most of the children know and understand and the school community recognise and value the Christian character of the school. The environment reflects and reinforces the Christian values of the school. Children speak of posters and words of the Bible on wood, as prompts that help them to think of their behaviour and attitudes. There are beautiful displays of work done by the children under the guidance of Christian artists where they have had the opportunity to express their spirituality. The spiritual development of children is supported and encouraged through a range of opportunities that include art projects, worship, prayer and reflection and other curriculum activities. The use of areas of reflection is valued by children as a place to 'be quiet' or to pray, though the use of such areas is not yet consistent across the school. Children have experience of different strands of Christianity as different ministers and visitors lead children in worship but their understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith is limited. Relationships in the school are inclusive, caring and respectful. Children are reminded that each one of them is unique and special, as seen clearly on display in a year one classroom. Christian staff provide suitable role models for children to imitate. Children spoke of forgiveness as a key Christian value in forming and maintaining friendships. Children show respect for those of other faiths and cultures, supported through RE teaching, and have empathy and compassion for others. This is demonstrated by raising funds for local and global causes. One child said that when she makes up a box for Operation Christmas child, she really feels as though she is helping someone. The children also brought gifts for the food bank at the harvest celebration and in a maths lesson the children were problem solving using real life issues about feeding a family on a limited budget which challenged children to think about the difficulties that others may face.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship is very important to the school and there is a clear policy which seeks to support those of faith and those of no faith. Most children and staff value the time of collective worship and the act of worship often includes biblical material. Some children spoke of how they felt special during worship time and that it is an opportunity to talk to God. Another said that it makes them think that 'God knows me even though I cannot see Him'. Children have an awareness of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the older children are developing an understanding of this concept. Some of the displays around school support this understanding. Children have experience of worship led not only by the local vicar but by other local ministers. This gives them an understanding of some Anglican liturgy and different traditions in worship. Children have both a knowledge and experience of the key elements of worship and the school has a focal point for worship as well as lighting a candle to signify the beginning of worship. There is an overview of planning for collective worship which includes the church's year and some Christian values. However, not enough attention is given to how Christian themes are developed through the year and there is little consultation with other leaders. Children expressed a desire to have the opportunity to be more involved and to plan and lead some of the worship. This was an area of development from the last inspection. The Lord's prayer is used regularly in worship and there are other opportunities for prayer during the day. Children spoke about feeling comfortable to pray at school and others said they pray at home even though that may not be the custom of their family. Prayer has an impact on daily life and contributes significantly to the spiritual journey of the children. This is exemplified by one child who asked his mum if they could pray at bedtime and another child who hearing about the suffering in Africa wrote a prayer and took it into school where the class teacher used it with the children. In many classes extemporary prayer is used at the end of the school day and children volunteer to choose topics and pray. Children are aware of the major Christian festivals that are celebrated in St. Thomas' church. One of the areas of development from the last inspection was evaluation of collective worship. There is a book of evaluations by

different stakeholders, though not all are evaluative and recently the children have completed a questionnaire. These results are being used to make further improvements.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Teaching and learning in RE are good. There is a clear policy and an overview of RE for the whole school. Every child receives their entitlement each week and this is supplemented by visits to churches and cathedrals demonstrating the importance of RE in school. Children in Year 5 had just visited Chester cathedral for a pilgrim day. For many children this had been inspirational and had supported their individual spiritual development. They said that they felt that the cathedral was a holy place and while they were there they too, felt holy. Others spoke of the majesty and power of God as they heard the organ at full power and others of a feeling of awe looking at the windows. Planning is thorough and creative so that the children are engaged with their learning. A variety of methods and approaches are used to accommodate different learning styles. Clear, achievable, differentiated learning objectives are given to the children with suitable challenge. The application of knowledge was appropriate and supported the spiritual development of the children. Children in Year 2 were able to articulate their understanding of Jesus as the light of the world. One child stated that when you follow him you have his love and light in you. The children went on to discuss ways in which they could bring light into their world. They demonstrated the impact of the lesson in the ways they talked about how they could do this. Similarly in Year 3 the children applied the symbolism of some of the branches used in Judaism to the use of our bodies in Christian worship. They clearly demonstrated their understanding of worship. For example, one boy said that when we use our eyes to read the Bible we are worshipping God. An area of development from the last inspection was to develop consistent assessment procedures. These are now in place and progress in RE is monitored closely and there is a focus on raising standards. Attainment in RE is in line with other curriculum subjects so that RE is at least in line with national averages and often above national averages.

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

The leadership of the school and the governing body work together very effectively to promote the Christian distinctiveness of the school. During the last few years the school has become distinctively Christian, with a new mission statement. Leaders have proved their capacity to maintain the momentum in developing the Christian nature of the school. They are concerned for the whole child which is seen in the rigorous tracking of achievement data and the provision across the whole curriculum to embrace Christian values. The headteacher and deputy headteacher take the Christian character of the school seriously and since their appointment have attended training in Christian leadership and RE leadership. Some of the governors have attended training by the diocese on the National Society requirements of a church school. These courses have made a significant impact. In the past two years the governing body have formed a Christian distinctiveness group to oversee this development. They have been involved in a learning walk and RE book scrutiny. The governors encourage, support and challenge the leadership of the school and are keen to listen to all stakeholders as they move forward. The links with the church are strong with joint events and the sharing of information taking place. Parents are very supportive of the school and they commented upon the greater Christian distinctiveness in recent years. There are effective links with the local community. One example is the school choir singing in local venues. As the leadership of RE and collective worship is seen as a priority, the leadership have visited other schools with outstanding practice and have put in place structures that have proven to be effective elsewhere. An example of this is the distinctiveness group.

