



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

### St Stephen's Church of England Primary School

Colville Drive  
Bury  
BL8 2DX

**Previous SIAMS grade: Outstanding**

**Current inspection grade: Outstanding**

**Diocese: Manchester**

Local authority: Bury

Dates of inspection: 4 February 2016

Date of last inspection: 23 September 2010

School's unique reference number: 130327

Headteacher: Rachel Pars

Inspector's name and number: Gillian Rhodes 657

#### School context

St Stephen's is a smaller than average primary school. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage but the percentage of pupils from other ethnic backgrounds is increasing. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs supported by the school is above average. The proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding is also above the national average. There have been significant changes in leadership since the previous inspection with the long-serving headteacher retiring in January 2016. The experienced deputy headteacher is currently acting headteacher and another well-established member of staff has taken the role of acting deputy head.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Stephen's as a Church of England school are outstanding

- Distinctively Christian values are deeply embedded in all aspects of school life and impact significantly on the lives and achievements of learners
- The Christian ethos and shared values of the school community ensure that the behaviour of learners is excellent and relationships throughout the school family are of the highest standard
- Great value is placed on the involvement of children in leading and participating in collective worship which is a focal point of school life
- Prayer and reflection form an important part of the spiritual development of children who contribute confidently to formal and informal opportunities for prayer
- Strong, well-established links and partnerships are of mutual benefit to the school, parents and local church communities

#### Areas to improve

- Ensure that studies of world faiths are systematically planned in the RE curriculum
- Further develop pupils' understanding of the Trinity through a stronger focus in collective worship on God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit

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

The Christian character of St Stephen's school is very clearly expressed and understood by all members of the school community. Explicit Christian values underpin all policy and practice and are shared and lived out in the hearts and minds of the whole school family. They have a significant impact on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the children. Illustrations of how core Christian values of trust, peace, hope and love are lived out are displayed attractively and prominently throughout the school environment and are reinforced and discussed in worship, religious education (RE) and across the wider curriculum. Staff speak with pride and passion of how the school's Christian ethos and mission 'to make a difference' supports the development of the whole child and impacts on their lives and achievements. Children with additional needs and disabilities are supported in their learning by caring staff who value each child as a unique child of God. School performance data shows that children make excellent progress as they move through the school, often from starting points below age-related expected standards to attainment at least in line with national averages. Attendance is encouraged through a rewards system and is in line with national figures. Children speak with enthusiasm of the opportunities they have to develop spiritually through worship in class, as a school and at the local Anglican and Methodist churches. This is reinforced through the inspirational and challenging RE curriculum which 'is the driving force behind the Christian character of the school'. The POP (Power of Prayer) group provides enjoyable experiences in which children express their thoughts and views in a wide variety of interesting, lively and creative activities. Children develop socially, morally and culturally through a wide range of activities in sport, music and service to others. As ambassadors for the local Porch project, St Stephen's children visit schools and places of worship to inform others about this charity which supports disadvantaged local families. The key festivals of Christianity and other world faiths and notable events in a wide range of cultures are marked in school. Children in the Nursery and Reception classes learn about Chinese New Year. A parent commented that the school's focus on Divali and Eid strengthened children's understanding and the school's positive relationships with families of diverse backgrounds. As a result, children demonstrate respect for difference and diversity within and beyond the community, and understanding of similarities and shared values and experiences.

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

Collective worship is a central focus of the life of St Stephen's school. Children are highly engaged in planning, leading and participating in worship, particularly through the pupil worship committee. Christian values and biblical teaching are the keystones for all worship themes and impact positively on relationships and behaviour in school. Pupils of all ages responded with understanding to Bible references and to the worship leader's use of a puppet to model children's feelings and behaviour when discussing the value of forgiveness. Collective worship has a strong focus on Jesus Christ and children display excellent knowledge of his life and teachings. A variety of prayers promotes children's developing understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Children understand that prayer is communication with God and can take many different forms and approaches. Year 6 pupils worked on a project making canvasses for each class in order to include liturgical colours in worship. Year 5 children take responsibility for setting out the worship table each day to provide a focal point for prayer and reflection. Prayer is a key part of the school's daily routine and children take great pride in writing prayers for worship and for classroom reflection areas. The prayer station in the hall provides a quiet area for personal, private reflection. 'The bubble lamp reminds us that our prayers go up to God when we say them out loud or in our heads,' explained a child. The Lord's Prayer and other well known prayers are used regularly, as is the school prayer which all children know. The seasons of the Church's year and key Christian festivals are celebrated in worship in school and in the local churches. Collective worship in school is regularly led by representatives of the local Anglican and Methodist churches so children have a rich experience of different Christian worship traditions. Collective worship is monitored and evaluated by a range of stakeholders,

including pupils, governors and parents. As a result of pupil feedback the worship committee was established. This group has had input into the range of worship songs used and into the focus on the school's core Christian values in worship.

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

Children at St Stephen's are inspired by RE. They describe how the class RE scrapbooks 'show all the different things we do'. Assessment is carried out regularly by the RE subject leader and exemplar evidence of standards shows that teaching and learning in RE are consistently good and often outstanding. As a result standards are at least in line with national expectations and progress from pupils' starting points is significant. The introduction of a new syllabus for RE has provided increased opportunities for pupils to learn creatively through art, music and drama. Links with school values and the development of children spiritually, morally, socially and culturally are explicitly planned for and taught. RE very successfully encourages children to reflect on the impact of faith on their own and others' lives. Year 6 consideration of self-sacrifice in response to the events of the crucifixion allowed them to develop and apply skills of interpretation, evaluation and reflection. Nursery children learnt about Jesus' friends the disciples when painting colours on their hands, shaking hands with a friend and making mixed-colour painted friendship hand-prints. Year 3 role play of the story of Zacchaeus and Year 2 reflection on the story of Bartimaeus regaining his sight, highlighted the impact of Jesus on believers' lives and the understanding of change in children's own lives. Links are successfully made between teaching and learning in RE and in other subjects and with worship and Christian values. Reception children reading the traditional story of Rumpelstiltskin thought about honesty, forgiveness and saying sorry as highlighted in the story and in the current worship theme. The acting headteacher has retained her role as RE subject leader and so the subject has high profile. She has worked successfully on the introduction of the new curriculum in order to avoid unnecessary repetition during the transition. However, the study of world faiths other than Christianity is not yet systematically planned. This is addressed in action plans which also ensure that the new RE curriculum will be reviewed to maintain and enhance high standards.

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

Leaders consistently live out and promote a clear Christian vision for the school which remains as a solid foundation for all aspects of school life in a time of leadership change. Self-evaluation involves all groups in the school community. Governors visit the school informally to take part in and help with events. They carry out more formal monitoring through focussed learning walks. Feedback from learning walks prompted the greater prominence now given to class prayer areas. These areas now include children's reflection on current and global issues such as refugees and migration. Parents speak of the welcome they receive from all staff and the emphasis the school places on the children's well-being. They enjoy social events organised at school and speak proudly of the children's community work for the Porch project and other charities. Community responsibility is at the root of children's contributions to their chosen class charities such as the Air Ambulance Service and Children in Need. School links with local churches are strong and mutually supportive. The church's commemoration of World War I involved groups from the local community, including the school. Church groups make regular use of the school building and school services take place in church. School news is included in the parish magazine and church events in school newsletters. Consequently the school family is at the heart of the local community. Professional development is a key priority of the school with particular support currently being given by the governing body to the acting headteacher, ensuring a very smooth leadership transition. In turn 'the pride we have in our school and our children' ensures the commitment and loyalty of staff to the current leadership team. As RE subject leader, the acting headteacher attended Diocesan training in the new RE syllabus. As a result, school planning for development in RE focuses on creative approaches to teaching and learning, and staff are highly motivated to implement this.