



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

Astley Street
Leigh
WN7 2BP

Diocese: Manchester

Local authority: Wigan

Dates of inspection: 14 February 2014

Date of last inspection: February 2009

School's unique reference number: 106448

Headteacher: Barry Foster

Inspector's name and number: Ruth Wall (548)

School context

St Thomas Church of England Primary School is a larger than average primary school. The school is popular and generally oversubscribed. The vast majority of the children are from a white British background. A small number have minority ethnic heritage and speak English as an additional language. The proportion of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is slightly below average as is the proportion eligible to receive a free school meal. The chair of governors, vicar and the senior leadership team have all been appointed since the last inspection.

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

- A clear Christian vision, promoted by senior leaders and shared by all members of the school community, underpins the work of the school and ensures success in meeting the academic and spiritual needs of all children.
- The school is extremely successful in developing high quality relationships which contribute to the exceptional care and guidance for all children and their families.
- Relationships with the church are strong and promote a shared Christian vision.

Areas to improve

- Leaders and governors to work together to introduce a robust and structured approach to the self-evaluation of church school development which engages the whole school community.
- Promote greater involvement by the children in the planning and leading of collective worship.
- Develop the moderation of levelled work in religious education (RE) in order to support children's understanding of next steps in their learning.

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

The school's mission statement and aims now make clear its commitment to Christian values and attitudes. The school community was involved in the review, agreeing, '...at the heart of all we do is the desire that the children will grow in their Christian faith.' The school's key themes of respect, honesty and service are evident in all that the school does. A new member of staff spoke of the welcome she had received in a school, 'where Christian values are clearly evident' and 'the enriching tapestry of caring spirituality is interwoven into the fabric of the school.' A parent spoke highly of the school's Christian ethos saying, 'I am proud of how much I have learnt about Christianity from my children.' Children are polite and friendly. Their efforts and achievements are acknowledged and celebrated. In consequence, their behaviour and attitude to learning are excellent. Children's outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development arises from the whole school ethos and the commitment shown by each member of staff. As a result, there is a high level of understanding of what it means to be part of a church school. The school is both distinctive in its Christian character and inclusive in its approach to diversity. It is a highly cohesive community in which all feel valued regardless of ability. Academic attainment is generally above the national average. Rigorous tracking of children's achievements leads to early intervention. Strategies are put in place to support children in meeting their challenging targets. A high level of pastoral care has clearly had a significant impact on the school community who have united together to support adults and children during sad and challenging times. Christian symbols and high quality displays throughout the school reflect the fact that Christian values are important. Children are encouraged to show concern for world issues as part of the school's Christian service. They support a number of charities and one child spoke movingly about initiating fundraising in school to help an African child who had suffered burns following an accident in the home.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship is seen as a central and focal aspect of the school's life. Themes in worship are based on Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) and Christian festivals. Relevant Bible accounts are woven through the well-planned acts of worship. Consequently, children are knowledgeable about the Bible and how it can support people through life. For example, one child articulated the significance of 'The lost sheep' story when he said, 'We are the sheep. When we get confused, God cares.' Children understand the place of Jesus within the Christian faith and of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The relationship with the parish church is strong and the input from the vicar in planning and leading worship is appreciated by the school community. A regular Eucharist held alternately in the parish church and school is a valued time of worshipping together. Parents say they enjoy attending special services. These occasions make a significant contribution to children's spiritual development and provide them with a good understanding of Anglican tradition. Teachers and governors spoke of the impact of worship being evident in the growing number of children who ask to be prepared for confirmation. Prayer and reflection time is a particularly important part of worship and school life. Formal prayers are said during the school day but children also spoke naturally of the value of saying their own personal prayers. The beautiful prayer tree in the library has special spiritual significance for staff and children who regularly contribute their own poignant prayers to its branches. In the worship observed, children enjoyed taking an active part. They were enthusiastic in their responses but also listened quietly when they needed to. They sang well and were confident when saying the Lord's Prayer. Leaders have identified the need to give children opportunities to take more responsibility in planning and leading worship. As yet, there are no formal procedures for the community to be involved in the evaluation of worship.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Monitoring of RE has shown that teaching is always good and sometimes outstanding. This enables children to have a sound understanding of the Christian faith and of other faiths represented within the wider community. Standards are in line with those attained in other core subjects which are good in relation to national expectations. RE makes a good contribution to the Christian values of the school and to the learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The subject coordinator demonstrates outstanding commitment and a clear sense of direction in leading initiatives to raise standards of attainment. There has been a school focus on ensuring that marking of children's written work gives them a clear indication of how their work can be improved. They now respond effectively in the time given to do this. New systems for assessment and monitoring have been developed, strengthening leaders' views of the school's standards and highlighting where improvements need to be made. Assessment strategies continue to be developed. Teachers are seeking new ways to assess RE in Key Stage 1 in order to ensure standards remain high. Leaders acknowledge the need for teachers to moderate children's work together to give them a clearer understanding of the attainment levels. Children speak positively about their enjoyment of RE. They agreed with one child who said that 'the teacher makes it exciting.' Others explained how they are encouraged to ask challenging questions about God and faith. A wide variety of effective teaching and learning strategies are used in RE, including role play, art and craft, multi-media resources and recently a visit from a parent representing her Muslim faith. Visits to places of worship have been planned to further enhance children's understanding of the main practices and beliefs of other faiths.

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

The headteacher has set a clear direction for the school based on Christian principles and values. Staff and governors fully support this and are able to articulate how their school is distinctive as a church school with values firmly based on the teachings of Christ. Leaders and governors have been successful in ensuring that the academic needs of all children are met, including those with special needs and the more able. In doing so they have recognised the importance of the school's Christian character in creating an ethos which supports effective learning and their commitment to promoting equal opportunities. Governors understand the need to develop a more robust and structured approach to self-evaluation as a church school which engages the whole school community. Parents say that they are kept fully informed and that staff are very approachable and always ready to listen should they have any concerns. There is good support for the school through the active Parents', Teachers' and Friends' Association (PTFA). The school has strong and mutually supportive links with the local church and community. Through the school choir, children have used their skills to enrich the lives of others in the wider community. Children value their role in decision making through the school council and say they feel comfortable in expressing their views. They are confident that their suggestions will be valued. Great importance is attached to the leadership of RE and collective worship which are led with commitment and a genuine desire to continue to seek ways to improve. The school is committed to the professional development of teachers including succession planning for the future leadership of a church school.

SIAMS report February 2014 St Thomas C of E Primary School, Leigh WN7 2BP