

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Dalton St Michael's Church of England Primary School

Higher Lane, Dalton, Wigan WN8 7RP

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Diocese

Liverpool

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Good

Date of inspection

15 June 2017

Date of last inspection

April 2012

Type of school and unique reference number

Voluntary Aided 119493

Headteacher

Adele Robinson

Inspector's name and number

Robert Haigh 660

School context

Dalton St Michael's is a much smaller than average-sized primary school serving an extensive and mainly rural community of mixed socio-economic character. Almost all pupils are White British. The proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average. The proportion for which the school receives pupil premium funding is currently below average. Nursery provision was started in 2015 and the number of pupils who enter Reception has increased as a result. The school holds a number of environmental and health-related accreditations and the Diocese of Liverpool Church and School Partnership Award 1. The two-year interregnum experienced by the parish church is due to end in September 2017.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Dalton St Michael's as a Church of England school are outstanding

- Outstanding Christian leadership from the headteacher, supported by the dedicated staff team and strong governance, means the Christian ethos secures the school's vision to be 'a place to shine'.
- The school is confident in its Christian distinctiveness. The culture of welcoming, supporting and serving others is fundamental so that Christian hospitality and a sense of belonging is experienced by all who encounter the school.
- A belief in the God-given value of each child inspires outstanding pastoral care. This promotes pupils' confidence, impeccable behaviour, respect for others and love of learning.
- A rich curriculum, interwoven by the golden threads of enquiry, creativity and Christian values very strongly promotes the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of pupils.
- The strong link between school and parish enriches the spiritual experience of pupils, strengthens the church's contact with families and provides a beacon of Christian witness in the community.

Areas to improve

- Enable pupils to apply their writing skills in religious education (RE) more fully so they can develop their writer's voice, express ideas more fluently and make the most of their impressive subject knowledge.
- Ensure consistency in the quality and rigour of teachers' marking in RE to confirm for pupils what their next steps in learning are so the pace of improvement in standards can be maintained.

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

Dalton St Michael's is a happy school. Everyone is enthusiastically engaged in its mission to be a community where pupils 'Belong. Believe. Achieve'. These school aims are supported by the six embedded core Christian values of truth, trust, compassion, friendship, respect and forgiveness. They were chosen by the whole school community and are woven through every aspect of its life. They are a topic of conversation at home and parents know that the core values permeate the school. Pupils explain the positive effect of the values on their attitudes and behaviour. A Year 4 boy remarked, 'We see our Christian values as life lessons both for now and in the future.' All pupils are known well and cared for deeply. They feel safe and loved. This, together with a strong sense of belonging, explains why their behaviour is outstanding. They are courteous, polite and respectful. The school's nurturing and vibrant Christ-centred culture is also very conducive to learning. The atmosphere is calm but pupils fizz with motivation. High expectations are combined with impressive support, which for the most vulnerable is transformational. Pupils make consistently good or better progress in all key stages. Those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar progress to others. Pupils' achievement is at least good in all areas. The standards of attainment in 2016 were in line with national averages. Being enabled to shine, however, involves more than academic success. It is a challenge to fullness of life for each person and to be a blessing to others. As a result, this is a community which lives well together. Relationships are excellent. Throughout the school pupils work and learn collaboratively. They show compassion in the way they speak about other children's needs and their willingness to befriend them. A Year 4 girl expressed the thoughts of others when she said, 'We care for everyone in our school family. We love each other even more when we are sad.' Older pupils look after younger ones in the playground and around school. This buddy system has a positive impact on the confidence and self-esteem of both groups. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is promoted strongly in religious education, worship and the wider curriculum. Pupils respond well. They express their ideas about faith and morality and the influence of them in their own lives with confidence, insight and maturity. They have helped create high quality engaging worship points in their classrooms and eye-catching ethos and values tapestries, mosaics and paintings in public areas. These nurture their spiritual and moral development. The imaginative and thought-provoking faith trail in the school grounds includes quiet areas where pupils sit to reflect and pray. The emphasis on learning Bible stories, drawing from the beliefs of other religions and the discussion of current affairs means that pupils have a strong sense of right and wrong. They show empathy for the needs of victims and the marginalised in society. Pupils organise charity fund raising, which they say reflects the values of compassion, friendship and justice. The efforts of the enthusiastic gardening club are inspired by and promote a sense of wonder at and stewardship of God's creation. The active link with international Christian organisations and the growing display of crosses from around the world enable pupils to understand Christianity is a multi-cultural global faith. Their study of Christianity and a range of world faiths in RE gives them an understanding of different religions, cultural diversity and shared values.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Great emphasis is placed on worship which is an inspiration and impetus to school life. Imagination and creativity make it engaging, affirming and memorable for all. Pupils, staff, governors, parishioners and parents speak about the challenge, encouragement and strength it provides. Carefully planned worship themes enable pupils to talk with understanding about Christian values, Bible teaching, religious festivals and the seasons of the church's year. The very close proximity of school and church mirrors the spiritual unity they have determinedly preserved during the interregnum and which enhances the worshipping life of the school. Pupils grow in their understanding of Anglican practice through a variety of greetings, prayers, readings and the structure of worship. They say that school worship, the Eucharist and the monthly and seasonal celebrations in church are thought provoking, build their faith or help them to think more deeply about what it means to be Christian. They approach worship with quiet anticipation and relish taking part. They enjoy the wide variety of musical experiences included. Pupils sing joyfully which they say lifts their spirits as they praise God. Opportunities for silence and thoughtful reflection are incorporated which pupils say enable them to experience the closeness of God. Consideration of current affairs and local events is also included. Through worship, therefore, a Christian perspective on the wider world is permeating pupils' awareness and understanding. Pupils value the school's culture of prayer and reflection. They explain that prayer, 'our opportunity to share our thoughts with God', in the words of a Year 4 girl, enables them to give thanks, say sorry and think about the needs of others as well as their own worries. They enjoy writing and contributing prayers to worship and the school's prayer tree. Worship enables pupils to develop their understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit through the symbols on the worship table, the choice of Bible stories, prayers and songs as well as the themes included in the planning cycle. The leading of worship by visiting clergy deepens the spiritual experience of pupils. Pupils plan and lead worship regularly which they say increases their confidence and skills, enabling them to understand how to make it special for everyone. As a result of their evaluation of worship, more pupils have become involved in its planning and leadership and the range of available resources has increased.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

A high priority is given to RE as a core subject and there is a clear understanding of its importance in a church school. It is well led and managed by the headteacher. Teachers share her view of RE as a journey of spiritual discovery in which matters of faith and belief are to be encountered, explored and responded to. As result, pupils engage, reflect and are becoming wise questioners. They make links between the topics they are investigating and their own lives which contributes greatly to their spiritual and emotional development. For example, pupils in Year 3 and Year 4 investigate their understanding of the role of prayer in different faiths and reflect on how it helps them develop their own relationship with God. Pupils enjoy RE, are inspired to learn and achieve well. This is evidenced in class portfolios, lesson observation and pupils' books which show the variety of creative learning experiences provided by their teachers. They particularly enjoy the RE lessons which take place in church. For example, Year 1 and Year 2 pupils, led by their teacher and the priest-in-charge, enact the baptism ceremony with curiosity and wonder. They share a plenary discussion of their questions and conclude with prayers informed by their new knowledge, using lighted baptism candles as an aid to quiet reflection. Pupils do not, however, use their skills in grammar, punctuation, spelling and presentation consistently well in RE. They do not have sufficient opportunities to apply and practise them in their extended writing to make more effective use of their ideas and strong subject knowledge. This is recognised by the school as an area for development.

Standards are monitored and evaluated effectively. Externally validated school evidence shows that RE teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. As a result, outcomes in RE match those in other core subjects and pupils' progress and attainment are in line with and sometimes exceed expectations. The content of lessons is rich and varied. Teachers' use of drama, art, music, craft and interactive technology enables pupils to be imaginative in their creative responses. Teaching in RE enables pupils to learn about and from religion and ponder on new knowledge and experiences. Links with the school values and pupils' SMSC development are explicitly planned for and taught. Pupils are confident to make these connections and apply the skills of enquiry, analysis and interpretation. Their teachers are very skilled at asking thought-provoking questions and facilitating discussion to deepen learning. Teachers and their assistants work as a team. This is well planned and enriches the pupils' collaborative learning, which in turn promotes the skills of listening and empathy. It is acknowledged by the school that the marking of pupils' work is not used consistently well by teachers to prompt progress and further thought. Pupils demonstrate excellent knowledge of Christianity. They enjoy learning about different faiths and are becoming more confident in making comparisons between beliefs, practices and value systems across a range of religions.

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

The school's mission to be 'a place to shine' and its core Christian values impel leadership and management. The headteacher, her senior colleague and the staff team live out and promote this Christian vision which illuminates all aspects of school life. The headteacher's deep personal faith underpins her outstanding leadership. Teamwork is strong. Rigorous and insightful self-evaluation is effective in informing the school's priorities as a church school. These are reflected in the school development plan and key policies. Governors are pro-active, vigilant and have a strong presence in school. They know the school well and are conscientious in offering robust challenge and generous support which is enhancing the effectiveness of leadership. They and the headteacher are guiding the strategic development of the school adeptly. For example, by attracting more pupils to secure sustainability, by engagement with the Diocese of Liverpool to explore closer inter-school collaboration and by creating exciting plans with the new parish priest to enhance the impact of the church-school alliance. Governors ensure that collective worship and RE are well resourced and retain a high profile. The areas identified as needing attention at the last SIAMS inspection have been successfully addressed. The recent community-wide consultation, which led to a revision of the mission and priorities, has also enhanced the effectiveness of the school's Christian distinctiveness. The culture of teamwork means that pupils are entrusted with responsibilities. They relish the roles they play as monitors, buddies, guides, councillors or representatives. Such delegation fosters their confidence, leadership skills and commitment to the school's aims.

Links with the church represent a strong partnership. This influences the school's life and inspires its service at the heart of the community. Church groups, such as messy church and sports church use school premises and school worship, celebrations and RE lessons take place in church. This brings school, families and church closer together. The development of Christian leadership is receiving attention and the induction and ongoing support of new governors and staff into a church school is effective. There are beneficial links with the diocese, local authority and cluster schools. Governors, leaders and teachers say this professional development enhances their expertise and effectiveness. The school knows the pupils and their families very well. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive and full of admiration and gratitude for what is being achieved by the school. They see their children's journeys in faith and their happiness and success as rooted in its Christ-centred ethos and character.