



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St Thomas the Martyr CofE Voluntary Aided Primary School

Highgate Road, Up Holland, Skelmersdale, WN8 0HX

Diocese: Liverpool

Previous SIAMS grade: Good

Local authority: Lancashire

Date of inspection: 5 February 2015

Date of last inspection: November 2009

School's unique reference number: 119495

Headteacher: Julie Butcher

Inspector's name and number: Mike Graham 286

School context

The school is of below average size and is situated in the semi-rural village of Upholland, close to the town of Skelmersdale. Most of the children live in the village. The number of children with Special Educational needs is above average. The proportion known to be eligible for the pupil premium is also above the national average. A phase 3 children's centre has been built on site since the last inspection, opening in 2010.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Thomas the Martyr Primary as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The headteacher gives outstanding Christian leadership and is supported wholeheartedly by all the staff. As a result, achievement as well as spiritual development has improved significantly during recent years.
- Christian values are lived out in the excellent relationships in the school family. This results in exemplary behaviour.
- Worship is central to the spiritual life of the school. It is sincere, vibrant and empowering and has a positive effect on the spiritual development of the whole community.
- Religious education (RE) includes excellent teaching from the Bible and the children have a deep understanding of Christianity and Christian values.

Areas to improve

- Expand and develop the teaching of non-Christian faiths so as to deepen the children's understanding.
- Devise a child-friendly mission statement that summarises the school's Christ-centred approach, and celebrates the way in which all members live out Christian values.

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

The school's loving and caring Christian ethos creates a secure and joyful context within which all the children are enabled to give of their best. Christian values are exemplified and taught by the staff. The values on which they focus are kindness, service, perseverance, respect, friendship, forgiveness and trust. These values are lived out at St Thomas the Martyr and are far more than just ideas in the mission statement. There is therefore no fear of failure, and the enthusiasm with which the children tackle their work and life in school leads to outstanding academic and personal development. The rate of progress for children of all abilities is excellent. Attainment in most areas is well above the national average. The Christian character of the school supports the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all the children to excellent effect. Their spiritual maturity is significant. A Year 5 girl, discussing the evidence for Christian distinctiveness, commented straightforwardly, 'Jesus is here'. A Year 6 girl said of silent prayer, a key feature in the school's worship, 'It's from your head to Him!' All are warmly welcomed, and a Christ-like openness and love are present. The schools' minister said that 'Awe and wonder at the presence of God is here in the everyday activities in school.' Children and adults are polite and respectful, yet full of life and joy in learning. The school motto, 'growing and achieving together', is very appropriate. The children's behaviour is impeccable, and one child said, 'If we fall out with friends, we say sorry and do something for them to find a resolution.' Relationships amongst all members of the school community demonstrate Christian values superbly. Parents readily attribute this to the Christian values at the heart of the school's life. One said of the school's teaching on Christianity and the values, 'They've got the balance just right'.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship takes pride of place in the life of the school. The variety of content and leadership supports a vibrant and appealing mix of worship experiences. These occasions enrich the lives of all the participants. Everyone in the school community places great value on the acts of worship, readily acknowledging the impact they make on their lives. Christian values, Bible stories and readings, reflection, prayer, drama, humour and wonderful singing all contribute. The worship is distinctively Christian, with Jesus at the centre. His life and teachings are the basis for the values chosen each half term as themes for worship and for the whole of school life. Personal spiritual development is enhanced through a strong focus on prayer. Prayer trees and class worship encourage children to write their own prayers. Reflective, prayerful times are not limited to morning worship, but occur naturally through the day. For example, during an exceptional RE lesson in the nursery class, most of the children said simple yet moving 'thank you' prayers to God for His creation. These included thanks for making the stars, the rainbow and the beach! The children's understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is impressive in its maturity. They have a sense of the awe and wonder of God the Creator and Father, Jesus the Saviour and Son, and the Holy Spirit who 'is represented by doves and flame. We know He is around us', as one Year 5 boy put it. Worship brings the whole community together at key points in the church calendar. The impact in terms of the building of mutually beneficial relationships between the village, school and church communities is significant. The children have a clear understanding of the wider Christian family as a result of these joint worship services. The rector, the schools' minister and the Methodist minister play key roles here, leading worship weekly in turn. They plan these worship times together in liaison with the headteacher. They bring theological yet accessible teaching and elements of the Anglican tradition to the children, staff and parents. They are without doubt key contributors to the faith life of the school. The schools' minister and key church members run the weekly 'Explorers' club in school. This supports and deepens the spiritual development of the large number of children involved. Children in the developing worship group and staff also plan, lead and evaluate worship, giving vitality and a constant desire for further improvement and development. A team of children plan an annual joint service with two partner schools. This is a highly effective way to bring the wider community

together for worship.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

The achievement of the children in RE is good overall, with some children making outstanding progress. There is a welcome emphasis on the impact of faith on a believer, leading to deep spiritual understanding. The reflective approach that is used demonstrates the excellent progress made by the school following the last inspection. Teaching is inventive, well planned and resourced, and all teachers play their part with enthusiasm and love of the subject. The co-ordinator is an experienced and inspiring leader and is passionate about her work. The impact of RE on the children is clear and highly significant. The learning is good or better throughout the school as a result of good to outstanding teaching. RE sessions are lively and progressive, with teamwork, impressive use of technology, drama and role-play to reinforce the teaching. There is sensitive use of open questions and gentle support when needed. This helps all children to become fully involved and to understand the lessons. In a dramatised retelling of Jesus' healing of the ten lepers, a Year 2 girl showed great insight. Acting as a healed leper she responded to a question about her feelings when she had leprosy by saying, 'It felt really sad to have no-one to cuddle'. In Year 6, discussions, teamwork and insightful expressions of ideas about freedom demonstrated remarkable maturity and depth of understanding. Monitoring and assessment are thorough and developmental, leading to continuous improvements and developments in the curriculum. Children's understanding of Christianity is excellent. However, teaching of non-Christian faiths, whilst thorough and inclusive, is underdeveloped.

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

The headteacher, leadership team, staff and governors are united in striving to live out the Christian vision for the school. The headteacher's Christian faith shines out in every aspect of her leadership, and the academic and personal achievements of the children have improved dramatically over recent years. These successes have been achieved through exemplary teamwork, with the whole staff group united with the headteacher and governors to bring Christian values into every aspect of school life. The chair of governors said of the head and deputy, 'Faith radiates from them'. Governors and clergy are fully involved in all aspects of the school's work and activities. Indeed the rector described these partnerships as 'deep friendships'. Christian values have been promoted vigorously, yet with sensitivity. Systematic and thorough reviews of the school's work and Christian distinctiveness, with full involvement from the governors, demonstrate the passionate striving for constant improvement. Leaders prepare for future leadership in this and other church schools through excellent in-service training, teamwork, delegation and coaching. RE and worship fully comply with statutory requirements. Partnerships, or deep friendships, with the local churches, diocese and the wider community are strong and mutually beneficial. The school council lead the way in raising money for local and international charities, demonstrating Christian compassion in action. The parents are very appreciative of the Christian care demonstrated in ensuring that the wellbeing of every child and every family is paramount. Parents are immensely proud of their school, giving excellent support, including fund-raising. They feel fully involved, and comments about the school included, 'If there's ever a problem, it's always dealt with quickly' and from a mother speaking about her two daughters, 'Even when they're ill they still want to come!'

SIAMS report February 2015, St Thomas the Martyr CofE Primary, Upholland, WN8 0HX