



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 Controlled Primary School

Sherwood Avenue
Bradley
Huddersfield
HD2 1RQ

Previous SIAS grade: Good

Current inspection grade: Good

Diocese: West Yorkshire and the Dales

Local authority: Kirklees

Dates of inspection: 4 March 2016

Date of last inspection: 10 November 2011

School's unique reference number: 382027

Headteacher: David Rushby

Inspector's name and number: Geraldine Cooper 696

School context

The school has seen a period of significant change as the amalgamation of the infant and primary schools has been embedded. The headteacher has appointed a new senior leadership team since the last inspection. The school is a larger than average primary school of 442 situated in an urban area on the edge of Huddersfield. The majority of pupils are white British with a significant number of children of African Caribbean heritage. The proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium is higher than average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is below average.

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

- Through its clearly defined Christian ethos the school creates a stable and caring environment in which pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is central.
- Well defined Christian values foster very positive relationships across the school and the wider community.
- All members of the school community appreciate the impact of well-structured collective worship on their lives and learning.
- The headteacher, senior leadership and governors share a consistent and strong vision of the school as a Church school which has enabled all staff to work together to develop an holistic and aspirational approach to pupil development.

Areas to improve

- Continue to develop the rigour and frequency of self-evaluation of the distinctiveness of the schools effectiveness as a Church school, involving all stakeholders, particularly children.
- Ensure that governors, particularly foundation governors, regularly access training which will enhance their capacity for effective self-evaluation of the school as a church school.
- Provide regular opportunities for the worship committee to lead collective worship.

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

School leaders demonstrate a sacrificial commitment to the spiritual, physical and academic development of all pupils and also to the well-being of their families and the wider community. Core Christian values of love, hope, belief, thanks and aspiration are central to the school and create an environment in which children flourish. Although achievement continues to be below national average the gap is closing and there is a strong upward trend in pupils making more than two levels of attainment. Pupil progress and behaviour are monitored on a daily basis, through the 'Dojo' system with which all pupils are fully engaged. This enables swift and targeted interventions to be put in place. Sensitive and well informed support ensures that vulnerable pupils make progress in line with their peers. All members of the school staff demonstrate a commitment to the school's distinctive Christian character and this is evident in the very positive and supportive relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils readily talk about the school's Christian values which they understand as 'Wow words' and the impact that they have on behaviour and relationships. They understand these values in the context of Bible stories and particularly in the life of Christ who they take as an example of the way they should treat others. Because of this pupils strive to treat each other with respect and to appreciate the diversity within their school. Pupils greatly enjoy the opportunities offered by the 'Job Centre' to develop new skills and accept responsibility. This provides affirmation, particularly for more vulnerable pupils and has enabled positive relationships to be developed between different age groups. Extremely well planned topics such as 'Chief Seattle – People of the Earth' are effective in promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Teachers create a learning environment and adopt teaching styles that stimulate learning and pupils enjoy being at school. Because they enjoy school, attendance is good and opportunities to progress are enhanced. Parents speak extremely positively about the support that they and their children receive from school. They attribute this to the school's distinctively Christian ethos and the genuinely 'Christian care' offered by all school staff. Religious education (RE) is seen as a very important aspect of the curriculum and pupils and their parents speak with appreciation about the fact that they learn about a range of faiths and also that they have the opportunity to visit places of worship. Learning in RE has also prompted pupils to consider the needs of others in the community and to make a regular commitment to supporting the Huddersfield 'Welcome' charity with donations of food. Spiritual development is fostered through a very imaginative use of the school grounds and through the opportunities offered by the forest school to promote physical and emotional resilience.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good.

Collective worship occupies a central place in school life and is effective in promoting pupils' spirituality and developing their knowledge and understanding of the Bible. Pupils are able to make connections between the 'Wow words', (Christian values) and the stories that they hear. The collective worship committee, in conjunction with the RE co-ordinator, plan collective worship themes which clearly place Bible stories in a modern context. This enables pupils to understand the significance of Christian stories and teaching to their own lives. They make meaningful links between the example of Jesus' life and their own life choices and speak of 'aspiring to be like Jesus'. Worship is carefully planned and an effective choice of music enables pupils to develop an understanding of Christian symbolism and theology. Collective worship is structured in a way which maintains the importance of Christian faith whilst being accessible to pupils of other faiths. All pupils enthusiastically engage in all aspects of worship and spiritual experience is enhanced through opportunity for reflection and personal prayer. Collective worship enables pupils to develop an understanding of prayer and pupils are able to talk articulately about prayer and their relationship with God. Pupils and parents make direct links between 'believing in God, self-belief and achievement'. 'Hand to Mouth' are regular visitors to the school and pupils have the opportunity to experience prayer journeys which provide a variety of stimuli for prayer. Many pupils are able to articulate a growing sense of a personal

relationship with God e.g. 'He holds us in his hands'. Pupils are proud that they can submit their own prayers for use in collective worship. They also appreciate that if they are worried about something they can put a prayer in the 'worry box'. These are followed up by the headteacher and systems are in place to ensure that pupils, and their families, receive appropriate support. Because of this pupils talk about 'prayers being answered because somebody will do something'. Members of the church are able to offer prayer ministry to school staff and this is considered as an important link between church and school. Members of the church lead collective worship on a regular basis. The link between the local church and school has been enhanced through the school's celebration of major festivals in the church building. The church sees this as contributing to their mission and parents appreciate the opportunity to participate in worship both in church and in the school's weekly celebration worship. The school has systems in place to monitor and evaluate collective worship and data indicates that collective worship is seen very positively by pupils and 'gives them a moment to think about God'. The collective worship committee assists in planning and evaluating worship and in practical aspects of daily worship but they are not involved in taking a proactive role in leading collective worship.

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

Since the last inspection the headteacher has appointed a new senior leadership team and together they have successfully embedded a new strategic direction for the school which is firmly based on the school's Christian values and ethos. The renaming of the school has revived relationships between school and church which have proved mutually beneficial and have also benefitted the local community. The school makes effective use of the character of St Thomas to promote the importance of asking questions. This enhances pupil attainment because it enables them to develop critical thinking skills. School leaders have a very strong awareness of the challenges that face pupils, their families and the wider community. They have chosen the Christian values which are central to the school in order to develop aspiration, resilience and self-belief. They have worked together to develop a bespoke curriculum through which pupils receive opportunities and experiences which promote spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Although attainment is not yet in line with national standards data demonstrates an upward trend in attainment for all pupils. The quality of leadership within the school is recognised at local and national level and has a significant impact on the development of effective teaching in the school. All staff work together to meet the high standards of teaching and pastoral care which the school leaders consider to be essential to the academic and personal development of the pupils. Because these expectations are set in the context of well established Christian values, staff are highly motivated and levels of staff retention are high. RE is given a prominent place in the curriculum and is well resourced. The subject leader carries out regular monitoring of teaching and learning in RE but systems for monitoring pupil progress are at an early stage. The school and church work in harmony to provide a focus of stability to the local community. Parents describe the school as a focus for the community and this is evident in the way that the school is used for a wide range of community initiatives. The school's Christian ethos is evident in the way that the school supports these initiatives including the Family of the Year Award which recognises and celebrates the contribution that families make to the community. Governors take a proactive role in school life and use their knowledge of the school and the community that it serves effectively. The governing body acts as a critical friend to school leaders on a wide range of issues. Foundation governors have provided strong support for the senior leaders on the school's journey since amalgamation and this is evident in the way that Christian values have become central to the school. However, school leaders acknowledge that the governing body, particularly the foundation governors, would benefit from training which would enhance their capacity to contribute to the regular self-evaluation of the school as a church school.