

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Blackburn St. Thomas' Voluntary Controlled Church of England Primary School

Newton Street, Blackburn, Lancashire BB1 1NE

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Blackburn
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Name of multi-academy trust	N/A
Date of inspection	22 February 2018
Date of last inspection	March 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Controlled 119355
Headteacher	Carolyn Morris
Inspector's name and number	Kathryn Pym 726

School context

Blackburn St Thomas' Church of England Primary School is a large primary school with a 58 place nursery. The school serves an area of significant deprivation. The vast majority of pupils are of Asian heritage, 63% of whom speak English as an additional language. 25% of pupils have special educational needs or disabilities. Since the last denominational inspection, a new deputy head teacher has been appointed. In spite of an interregnum, the school has very close links with the parish of St Jude's. The school was judged to be good during its last Ofsted inspection (2013).

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

- The core values that the school prioritises form a direct link between the Bible and aspects of school life, such as behaviour, learning and leadership. Consequently, relationships and pastoral support for all members of the school community are exceptionally strong.
- Strong links with the parish and the wider community are mutually beneficial and develop a generous sense of shared Christian service.
- Spiritual, moral and social development is outstanding and provides the pupils with self-confidence and motivation to make a difference to others locally, nationally and internationally.
- The school mission statement 'Preparing children today for a new tomorrow; nurturing their dreams, hopes and aspirations within our Christian values and principles,' is fully embraced by the whole school community. It is lived out, to ensure a happy and purposeful learning environment where every individual is valued and can flourish.

Areas to improve

- Provide further opportunities for spiritual development through creating an outdoor reflection area and explicitly celebrating the Christian distinctiveness of the school, in particular in the school's entrance area.
- Embed the recent improvements to worship through implementing a systematic approach to evaluation by all sections of the school family.
- Ensure that self-evaluation of the school focuses on the impact that the school has on the pupils' spiritual development, Christian distinctiveness and effectiveness.

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

The development of the school's mission statement; 'Preparing children today for a new tomorrow; nurturing their dreams, hopes and aspirations within our Christian values and principles,' has been highly effective in ensuring that Christian distinctiveness is firmly at the core of all aspects of school life. This, along with the focus on their explicit Christian values such as perseverance, generosity and justice, provide firm foundations for all aspects of school. The creative, enriched and engaging curriculum, clear policies and strong relationships are firmly rooted in Gospel teaching. All pupils, including the most vulnerable, make good progress in their learning despite very low levels of entry and leave with academic success across the curriculum.

The school's extensive focus on nurture and care is demonstrated in the commitment to pastoral support for families in need, which is reflected in pupils' outstanding levels of attendance, excellent behaviour and attitudes to learning. Parents value school as a place of support, love and 'extended family.' This is evident in the pupils' confidence and enthusiasm for school life. The extended curriculum provides opportunities to enrich the pupils' experiences and further develop spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) aspects of learning, in particular language development and acquisition.

Pupils demonstrate great understanding of their Christian values through the confident way in which they talk about them and live them out across school life and in their local community. A parent explained the impact that this has at home; 'My whole family now knows what perseverance is.' The pupils have a deep understanding of many Bible stories and can confidently explain how these expand their appreciation of Christian values. 'I know that I have to persevere with my learning like Noah persevered doing God's work.' Charitable giving has a high profile in the school, driven by the school's Business Club, 'so that we can do our duty to help others. Generosity is a Christian value and is also part of my Muslim faith' explained the pupil who had the original idea to establish the club. The pupils are knowledgeable about world faiths and their understanding is enhanced through links with contrasting schools. Pupils are excited and challenged by religious education (RE). Consequently, it makes an excellent contribution to the spiritual development of pupils and impacts well on their understanding of the diverse society in which we live. Currently there are missed opportunities to utilise the grounds and areas of the school building to explicitly promote the Christian distinctiveness of the school and provide space for prayer and reflection within the school grounds.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is inclusive, inspirational, valued by all and central to school life. It not only unites the school family, but reaches out to the parish and wider community. Worship defines the ethos of the school and challenges everyone to aspire to live out its Christian values. Worship enables the school to keep the profile of the core Christian values at the forefront of its life on a daily basis, within the context of biblical teaching. The observed class worship provided pupils with the opportunity to read and reflect on Jesus' time in the wilderness, before reflecting on times when they are tempted.

Anglican prayers and responses are used confidently and provide a good structure to worship. The school has an enthusiastic, knowledgeable and proactive worship team, who have a clear vision for future development. This group has secured strong partnership with the parish, which now embraces all opportunities to work in partnership with the school. This has been a significant development since the last denominational inspection, despite the parish being in an interregnum. Foundation governors acknowledge the seamless partnership that now exists between school and parish, in spite of no families being part of the congregation. All parents actively support these mutually beneficial links and enjoy school services and aspects of the RE curriculum taking place at St Jude's.

Pupils have an age-appropriate appreciation of the Christian belief in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and speak confidently about having a relationship with God. Worship is vibrant, creative, engaging and provides pupils with the opportunity to pray, reflect, learn and praise God. Many opportunities for prayer are made throughout the day, which includes saying and appreciating something of the significance of The Lord's Prayer. The vibrant approach to singing and praise during worship is particularly strong and unites the whole school community. Staff value the opportunity to worship on a daily basis as a school family and acknowledge the impact that this has on each individual and the daily life of the school. They acknowledge that this has been a significant improvement in the life of the school in recent years. Worship would now benefit from a systematic approach to evaluation, so that the opinions of the whole community can be heard when considering future improvements.

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

The Christian leadership of the headteacher has a significant impact on the whole school community, in particular on families served by the school. The school's Christian distinctiveness is highly effective in supporting and driving forward development as a church school. The issues from the previous denominational inspection have been fully addressed and have had a significant impact on the Christian distinctiveness of the school, particularly with regards to partnership with parents.

Highly effective school leadership brings about a clear focus on ensuring that each pupil is given the opportunity to flourish and reach their full potential as 'children of God'. One child explained, 'As we go through school, we transform into a beautiful butterfly.' This provides a clear interpretation of the school's emblem. Highly effective leadership of worship and RE ensures that both areas maintain a high profile in school.

The mission statement unites governors, staff, families and the local community to provide an excellent Christian education for the pupils. 'When I visited this school, it touched my heart.' explained one parent. Governors are actively involved in self-evaluation and the life of the school and provide appropriate challenge and support to the headteacher. However, self-evaluation needs an increased focus on the impact the school has on pupils, in particular their spiritual development, progress with learning and Christian distinctiveness. This will then ensure clear and focused school improvement planning. Governors demonstrate a clear commitment to Christian leadership and succession planning, through its commitment to professional development for all staff and in recruitment procedures. Statutory requirements for worship and RE are met and both areas are given a high priority in school life, leading to highly effective practice. Leadership at St Thomas' ensures that the presence of Christ can be felt throughout the school.

SIAMS report February 2018 St Thomas' CE (VC) School, Blackburn, Lancashire, BBI NE