

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

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

Newton Street,
Blackburn,
Lancashire,
BB1 1NE.

Diocese: Blackburn

Local authority: Blackburn with Darwen

Date of inspection: Thursday 14th March 2013

Date of last inspection: 29th September 2008

School's unique reference number: 119355

Headteacher: Mrs. Carolyn Lord

Inspector's name and number: Mrs. Anne B. Woodcock 445

School context

St. Thomas' Church of England School is a large primary school serving the Audley, Shadsworth and Whitebirk wards of Blackburn. The area experiences significant socio-economic deprivation. The vast majority of pupils are of Asian heritage, mostly from Pakistan and India. The number of pupils attracting the pupil premium is above average and the number of pupils speaking English as an additional language is significantly above average. The school benefits from recent improvements to the fabric and building, which provide improved teaching and learning facilities.

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

St. Thomas' Church of England Primary School provides a Christian witness within a very culturally diverse community. The Christian character of the school has been strengthened and developed through the leadership and commitment of the headteacher and senior leaders. All those involved in the school work to challenge and inspire pupils to achieve their potential.

Established strengths

- The very positive and caring relationships, based on the Christian values of love and hope, which support effectively pupils and their families.
- The vision, leadership and example of the headteacher and senior leaders.
- Pupils' positive attitude and very good behaviour.
- Pupils' personal development.
- The strong focus on creative arts which supports and enhances pupils' spiritual development very effectively.

Focus for development

- Engage parents in regular reviews of the school as a church school.
- Strengthen the links with the church.

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

Pupils are happy, safe and valued in school. They are eager to learn and attend very well. Pupils' behaviour is good. It is based on well-understood 'golden rules' which reflect the Christian values of trust, love and respect. Children are confident and articulate, expressing their ideas and opinions in a calm and trusting atmosphere. They work together very well, supporting and encouraging each other. "St. Thomas' is a family and we're good at working together," they explain, "and we never give up." Pupils have great trust in and respect for their teachers. One pupil explained, "Our teachers are kind, they know what they're doing and are

always there to help you. They're the best!" Pupils with additional needs are very well-supported through a range of intervention strategies designed to meet their emotional, social and academic needs. Teaching is good and pupils make good progress. High expectations, together with a well-designed creative curriculum, inspire pupils to achieve their potential. The strong focus on the creative arts supports and enhances pupils' spiritual and cultural development very effectively. The quality of pupils' work in art is outstanding and is reflected in stunning displays throughout the school. Exotic birds, butterflies and other creatures demonstrate children's use of technique as well as the study of natural forms. The wide range of extra-curricular clubs provided are well-attended and make a positive contribution to pupils' personal development. For example, the 'Lego team' travelled to Germany to compete in an international competition. Religious Education (RE) makes a positive contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development. Pupils have a sound knowledge of the Bible and other holy books and they talk with confidence about their own faith and the beliefs of others. They explain, "You don't just learn about your own religion, but learn about and respect the way other people live and worship God." Pupils have a developing understanding of their place in God's world and their responsibility for its care and conservation. The eco-council leads the school's work on biodiversity, fair-trade and recycling, and the school council organises a range of fund raising activities to support charitable giving. Members of the school council explain that they do this because, "We want to help people get better lives."

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

Pupils enjoy worship saying, "It's good nearly every time because you learn something different." The very significant changes introduced since the last inspection are having a positive impact on the quality and breadth of collective worship. All members of the school family are included and affirmed by their worship experiences. Worship is very well-planned and recorded. Themes are based on Christian values, the Bible and the celebration of Christian and other major festivals such as Eid and Diwali. The close link with Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) themes ensures that children develop their thinking further through planned discussion in the classroom. Pupils plan, lead and evaluate worship regularly. The eco-council, school council and other groups lead worship for both key stages. One pupil wrote, "Now we planned it, I know how other people feel and I pay more attention." Worship is led by teachers and support staff as well as the vicar and other people of faith from the local community. It is thoroughly monitored and evaluated by staff, pupils and governors. Governors are effective in ensuring that collective worship is an important and integral feature of the daily life of the school. One governor attended the training provided for staff. This training has resulted in the much improved quality and variety of worship welcomed by pupils. Although the church is not used for services, classes use the church at special times of the year, such as Christmas and Easter. The celebration assembly worship held each Friday is much valued by pupils and their parents. Classes lead this worship in which pupils share their achievements. Prayer is a key feature of the school's worship life. Pupils write and use their own prayers. For example, the lunchtime prayer and end of the day prayer were both written by pupils. The results of a prayer competition are collected in a beautiful book kept in the worship area in the hall, and prayer trees are used in all classrooms. Children have a developing understanding of the nature and purpose of prayer. This was demonstrated when two pupils volunteered to say a prayer at the end of the worship. Reflection features in each act of worship. Images and music are used effectively to encourage stillness and promote thought. Pupils value and use the reflection areas around school. The improvements made in collective worship provide the school with the capacity to become outstanding in this area.

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

The headteacher, senior leaders and governors have a distinct Christian vision for the school, which is clearly articulated, shared and agreed by dedicated staff and governors. The significant changes introduced since the last inspection have had considerable impact on the school's Christian distinctiveness. All issues raised in the last inspection have been fully addressed. The focus on continuous improvement involves all staff and governors, which is demonstrated in the recently reviewed and renewed mission and vision statements. Staff and governors worked together to develop the new statements. Pupil involvement is reflected in the way they recognise ownership of the statement, which is now displayed around the

school. However, parents have not yet been actively engaged in reviewing the school as a church school, which is a focus for development. Governors have a clear understanding of their role. They support and challenge the work of the school. The monitoring of collective worship and RE is thorough and purposeful. Governors visit the school regularly, acting as willing helpers and accompanying school visits. They are pro-active in meeting the needs of pupils and their families, which is demonstrated in the recent appointment of a well-being officer. Pupils are confident that their voice is heard and valued. They are proud of their fund-raising achievements for charities such as Comic Relief. Parents are supportive of the school, saying that teachers are always approachable and that they are kept well-informed. "It feels like home," said one parent, "safe, friendly and approachable." Parents value the workshops arranged to help them understand how their children learn. Links with the church are supportive and purposeful. The vicar is a regular visitor and he supports worship and learning in RE. However, ways could be found to strengthen these links. Effective use is made of a range of partnerships such as those with schools in Cockermouth and Haslingdon. These partnerships support and enhance pupils' cultural, social and personal development. The school plays an important part in the local community. Relationships with the mosque are positive and the school hosts weekly parent and toddler groups.

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