

## Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

### St Thomas' C of E Primary School, Leesfield

West Street, Lees, Oldham, OL4 5AT	
<b>Current SIAMS inspection grade</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
<b>Diocese</b>	<b>Manchester</b>
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Oldham
Date of inspection	6 April 2017
Date of last inspection	May 2011
Type of school and unique reference number	VA 105714
Headteachers	Caroline Ireland and Paula Glynn
Inspector's name and number	Gillian Rhodes 657

#### School context

St Thomas' Leesfield is an average sized primary school on the outskirts of Oldham. The majority of pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils with English as an additional language is a little below the national average but is increasing. The proportion of pupils eligible for additional pupil premium funding is above average. The percentage of pupils supported by a statement of special educational needs and disabilities is below the national average. Attendance figures for the school are above the national figures. The role of headteacher has recently changed and is carried out as a job share by two part-time headteachers.

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

- Deeply embedded distinctively Christian values underpin all policy and practice. Consequently, all groups in the school community understand and articulate the positive impact of Christian values on the development of the school and its pupils.
- Excellent behaviour and positive, caring relationships throughout the school family are rooted in Christian values of trust, compassion and friendship.
- Values-led collective worship is central to school life and nurtures the spiritual life of the community.
- High quality teaching and learning in religious education (RE) enables pupils to reflect and formulate their views on questions of meaning and purpose.

#### Areas to improve

- Extend and develop further opportunities for pupils to independently plan and lead collective worship in order to enhance their spiritual understanding and experiences.
- Continue to develop the outward-looking Christian mission of the school through partnerships with other schools, sharing good practice and expertise in the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of pupils.

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

Distinctively Christian values are deeply embedded in all aspects of life at St Thomas', Leesfield. Values of trust, compassion and friendship underpin all relationships. Staff, governors and parents articulate the positive impact of Christian values on the lives of the pupils. A teacher explained, 'I feel privileged to belong to a school family where caring, dedicated and supportive staff embody Christian teaching. Pupils are loved and respected as children of God.' The school motto 'To be the best we can in the sight of God' emphasises the aspirations of all groups in the school community. A member of staff explained, 'The essence of the school is the Christian value of hope.' Consequently pupils make good academic progress from generally below national age related starting points. They achieve in line with national expectations by the end of Key Stage 2.

Attendance at the school is excellent and consistently above national figures. Celebration and reward combine with Christian compassion and empathy in the school's pro-active approach to encouraging attendance. The work of the learning mentor is significant in building trust and supporting families so that children attend school regularly.

Pupils' SMSC development is effectively promoted through the wide range of experiences provided for them. Topics and themes in a creative curriculum include outdoor learning, visits to places of interest, visitors to school and an investigative approach. The school's SMSC policy specifically highlights the development of awe and wonder at God's creation through 'experiences that lift their spirits'.

The school sponsors the education of a child in Africa and letters exchanged develop pupils' understanding of a very different culture. Locally St Thomas' has strong links with a school with a different cultural and faith context and this develops Christian values of respect and tolerance in pupils. A celebration of Christmas around the world enabled pupils to experience the diverse, multi-cultural nature of Christianity in a lively, memorable way.

RE plays a significant role in the effective SMSC development of pupils. Open-ended questioning and creative, carefully differentiated activities ensure that RE is both exciting and challenging. For example, learning about how Jesus is known as 'the light of the world' was extended to consideration by pupils of how they could share the light of Christ.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding**

Collective worship is central to school life and is viewed as a high priority by all groups in the school family. A Year 5 pupil explained, 'I like being part of it, thinking about others and thinking about God.' Biblical material and Christian teaching are essential aspects of all worship. Pupils display excellent knowledge of Bible stories and the seasons of the Church's year. Christian festivals are celebrated in school and in St Thomas' church. Pupils are familiar with Anglican traditions through the regular use of the Lord's Prayer and experience of the Eucharist.

Worship themes are explicitly related to Christian values. In addition to the school's core values of trust, compassion, friendship and hope, worship themes effectively promote understanding of other values such as wisdom and service. When discussing service, an award was presented to pupils for quiet service done without public notice. Thinking about wisdom focussed on making wise choices and pupils taking responsibility for their actions. Charitable and social actions stem from values-led worship themes. Pupils brought harvest gifts and supported Operation Christmas Child in a spirit of thankfulness and compassion. During Downs Syndrome awareness week, pupils learnt respect and empathy.

Pupils understand prayer as a conversation with God. They explain that prayer is part of the life of the school and part of their own lives. Prayer punctuates the school day and pupils are very proud that the prayers they have written are regularly used. Worship places considerable emphasis on the centrality of Jesus Christ to Christians and particularly on Jesus as light of the world. Older pupils have some understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and this is an aspect which is being developed through worship and RE.

Pupils contribute eagerly to worship and participate in a variety of ways to the worship life of the St Thomas' community. In the school's Easter service in church, pupils led the prayers, read from the Bible and dramatized the events of Holy Week. A pupil ethos group has been formed and is beginning to take responsibility for planning and leading acts of worship. The ethos group undertakes evaluation of worship and the impact of Christian values in their daily lives. As a consequence of pupils' maturing spiritual understanding, their views on the siting of a values reflection mural were part of the decision making process.

A range of adults leads worship in school and in church. The vicar of St Thomas' church leads worship frequently, building links between the school and church congregation. Pupils experience a variety of worship traditions through visiting worship leaders such as the Groundbreakers group. As a result, pupils have good understanding of diversity in Christian worship.

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding**

Standards of achievement in RE are high with many pupils displaying excellent knowledge and higher level skills of analysis, interpretation and reflection. In a Year 3 RE lesson, pupils looked at pictures of a variety of artworks depicting Jesus Christ. Open questions asked pupils to explain their reactions to the pictures. Their responses demonstrated very mature thought. One pupil explained that a soft-focus image made him think of the risen Christ: 'his spirit is with us even if his body isn't'. This open approach to personal reflection and questions of meaning and purpose is consistent across the school.

Teaching in RE is consistently good and often outstanding. Planning is rigorous and learning activities are carefully differentiated for pupils of all abilities. The recently introduced diocesan syllabus for RE provides teachers with a rich and varied curriculum which they are implementing successfully. Opportunities for assessment are built into the syllabus and teachers use these to accurately demonstrate pupils' progress and attainment. Teaching of Christianity is excellent. Study of other world faiths is in place and pupils' learning is supported by visits from representatives of other faiths, including Islam and Judaism. Pupils make visits to Christian places of worship such as Oldham Parish Church and Manchester Cathedral and to a local mosque and the Manchester Jewish Museum. Consequently they are able to understand and make links between different faith practices and values. A Year 6 pupil said, 'In RE I like finding out about my faith and other faiths.'

The inclusion of RE as part of the school's creative curriculum ensures that the school's values and Christian character permeate not just RE but the whole curriculum. For example, Year 6 RE work on remembrance incorporated values of service, self-sacrifice and courage alongside the history of the poppy symbol and forms of commemoration. Through this integrated approach, pupils develop excellent SMSC understanding.

RE has a high profile and subject leadership is strong. The subject leader is knowledgeable and dedicated. Action plans for RE, ethos and worship identify ambitious development aims, resource provision, responsibilities and timescales. Monitoring and evaluation is carried out regularly. All teaching staff take part in shared monitoring through scrutiny of pupils' RE work. As a result, high standards of teaching and learning are consistent across the school.

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

The joint headteachers of St Thomas' demonstrate values in action through their strong, respectful and trusting partnership. They model and promote Christian values which are recognised and shared by all groups in the school community. A member of staff reflected, 'I have the chance to be a witness beyond words, in action and example.' Governors are involved in all aspects of school life, supporting and challenging the headteachers. Governors speak of how the school's Christian character creates 'a positive togetherness'. Consequently all leaders have a shared Christian vision for the academic and SMSC development of the school and its pupils.

Staff and governors feel supported and have the opportunity to continue their professional development through diocesan training opportunities. St Thomas' school is part of an informal partnership of local schools. This involvement is testimony to their outward looking Christian mission, sharing good practice with other leaders and schools and putting Christian values in action to promote SMSC development.

Links and partnerships are a strength of St Thomas' school. Parents feel very welcome in school and value the positive influence on their children of the school's Christian values. Home-school activity sheets familiarise parents with the values. Social activities such as fashion shows, discos and fairs organised by parents and school leaders are enjoyable opportunities to build strong connections. Curriculum workshops and parent consultation evenings keep parents informed about pupils' learning and progress.

The proximity of St Thomas' church to the school buildings reflects the closeness of relationships between the church and school. The school is regularly used by church groups for events and gatherings. The school uses the church for services and as an RE curriculum resource. Information is shared on the school website. The vicar is a visible presence in the school and provides pastoral support to all groups in the school family.

School links at home and abroad are testament to its Christian love and stewardship. Pupils raise money to support individuals and a school in Africa and in return gain knowledge and understanding of global communities. Pupils' understanding of local cultural and faith diversity is developed through involvement in events such as the Oldham multi-faith Festival of Light. St Thomas' is truly a Church of England school at the heart of its community.