

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Thomas' Church of England Primary School

St Thomas' Road, St Anne's on Sea, Lancashire FY8 1JN	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Blackburn
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Lancashire
Date of inspection	22 June 2017
Date of last inspection	June 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided - 119552
Headteacher	Claire Gilmour
Inspector's name and number	David Thorpe 461

School context

St Thomas' is a voluntary aided primary school. It serves the coastal community of St Anne's on Sea, just south of Blackpool. It is an average sized primary school with one class per year group. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. A growing number of pupils have English as an additional language. Attainment and attendance are both above average, whilst the number for whom the school receives extra funding due to social disadvantage is slightly above average. Since the last inspection there have been significant changes in staff, including both the head and deputy headteacher who took up post in January 2017.

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

- A clear Christian vision rooted in the school's core gospel values is understood and confidently articulated by all members of the school family. This is enabling the school to be a transforming influence in the lives of the families it serves and ensures that St Thomas' is a highly inclusive school.
- The inspiring Christian leadership of the headteacher, fully supported by the deputy headteacher, governors, staff and parents, makes sure that the school is continually improving and that all pupils achieve their potential.
- Relationships across the school, based on the central value of love, are exceptional. These contribute to the overwhelming feeling of being part of a very special community.
- The governing body provides highly effective support and challenge through their commitment and appropriate expertise. This results in strong Christian leadership and accurate self-evaluation.

Areas to improve

- Provide pupils with opportunities to explore and develop their understanding of Christianity as a diverse multi-cultural world faith.

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

'Within the love of God we guide, challenge, inspire and nurture.' This is the recently revised mission statement and it is well understood by all members of the school community. A positive decision was made to put love at the centre of school life. All aspects of school life are shaped by this, resulting in exceptional relationships across the school. As one Year 6 pupil states 'Our gospel values, especially love, help us all to be friends whether we are in Year 6 or Reception class.' Every child in the school knows every other child. Parents, too, appreciate the good relationships, with one stating, 'Lots of issues get sorted out before they become problems because of the relationships we all have.' These positive relationships ensure that St Thomas' is a place where the presence of Jesus is felt. The core gospel values are based on the fruit of the Spirit found in the Bible, each class adopts one value each school year. This enables a very good grounding for each value as they are referred to regularly. These values make a significant and positive impact on the social, moral, spiritual and cultural (SMSC) development of the pupils. The school's Christian care and commitment to every pupil, and their family, plays a significant part in creating a truly inclusive place of learning. Pupils say that they enjoy being at school and this is shown in attendance rates that are above the national average. Pupils are rightly proud of the Christian foundation of their school and the part that they play in making it a safe and exciting place to learn. Consequently, their behaviour is exemplary and exclusions are very rare.

The rich curriculum and many extra activities provided, give pupils innumerable chances to grow both emotionally and spiritually and broaden their experiences of life. For example, during a forest school activity, one Reception child commented that 'God has very clever hands because he can make tiny ants.' An innovative lunch-time club 'Guardians of Ancora' encourages pupils to develop their biblical knowledge through the use of tablet technology and a specially designed app. The pupils enthusiastically rise to the challenge of solving the problems within the app. This results in them talking passionately about how God helps people overcome difficulties. Christian signs and symbols, including the well-used prayer tree in the entrance, extend and support the school's distinctiveness and help deepen pupils' spiritual awareness. Classroom reflection areas are well developed and appreciated by pupils who talk with confidence and sensitivity about how they are used and valued.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is very well planned. This has resulted in a clear format that provides worship leaders with a consistent but flexible structure. Pupils and adults engage fully with collective worship. It is central to the school's ethos and Christian witness. Worship is relevant and sincere, and makes a significant difference to the lives of the members of the school family. The variety in leadership, style and format of worship ensures that it is always engaging. Pupils are involved in planning and leading worship. They are less involved in the formal evaluation of worship, however this has been identified by the school as the next area for development. Bible readings, prayer and excellent singing, coupled with the exceptional pupils' puppetry team are all part of a rich tapestry of spiritual inspiration. The pupils and adults present are captivated, thus gaining great insights into the Christian faith. The pupils have a well-developed understanding of God as Father and Creator, of Jesus as Son and Saviour and of The Holy Spirit as Guide and Encourager. Prayer is central to worship and pupils speak of how important it is and how it helps them to be better people. 'We can talk to God whenever we need to but it's good to do it together,' commented one Year 3 pupil. Sensitive teaching within worship, and confirmation classes for those who wish to take part in them, enable pupils to reach a deep level of Christian maturity.

Another outstanding characteristic of worship is the highly competent and enthusiastic Year 6 pupils who regularly plan and lead worship for Reception pupils. Using 'Jack in the Box' resources Year 6 pupils led worship on the theme of telling the truth. They referred to Peter letting Jesus down by not telling the truth. This worship was led clearly, expressively, confidently and with great sensitivity. The Reception children were enthralled and engaged superbly well. They answered questions impressively and with child-like honesty. Year 6 pupils are excellent role-models. Parents and carers join with the school and the church community at key points in the church calendar to worship in church together. The school community attends the monthly family service and there is a midweek monthly service in church for the school. The pupils play important roles in leading such services. Education Sunday is always celebrated. These occasions unquestionably play their part in maintaining and strengthening the bonds between school and church. The vicar provides appropriate experiences of Anglican traditions in worship and brings theological insights to the pupils and staff. A pertinent example being the recent worship times on The Trinity. The vicar led one but also gave advice on its theological significance to other worship leaders.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

The importance of religious education (RE) in the life of this Christian school is demonstrated by its high priority as a core curriculum subject. It is carefully planned and resourced and forms a central part of the school improvement process. Standards in RE are above national expectations and pupils' overall achievement is excellent. As a result of exemplary teaching, pupils make very good progress in RE throughout the school. Both their acquisition of knowledge and their ability to apply that knowledge to explore deeper meanings of faith and belief are outstanding. This is a result of the subject being well led, managed and resourced. Pupils speak of their learning in RE with great enthusiasm and impressive levels of understanding. A Year 6 pupil stated that 'All RE is fun, it makes us think.' RE undoubtedly challenges the pupils' thinking. When speaking of their work they found it difficult to choose their favourite piece as they 'like them all' and they explain that that's because the teachers 'teach it really well'. One boy spoke with great understanding about why Easter is a time of victory, what victory is and how 'Jesus is the greatest victor of all time'. A Year 6 pupil spoke about the various titles given to Jesus and how Jairus might possibly describe Jesus as 'a prince of generosity, because he brought peace to his family after raising his daughter to life'. Pupils are self-assured when talking about the Christian faith and display excellent knowledge. They are less confident when speaking of Christianity as a world faith. The school works hard to ensure that pupils understand and appreciate non-Christian faiths. The study of other faiths is carefully planned into the RE curriculum and the use of the supplementary units in the syllabus is very effective. As a result RE makes an outstanding contribution to the school's Christian character and to the pupils' appreciation of difference and diversity.

RE work is meticulously marked and this helps pupils understand what they need to think about next in order to improve. Staff follow the diocesan syllabus with enthusiasm and use its flexibility to enrich what is offered to the pupils. In an RE lesson looking at the Holy Spirit, the teacher very skilfully incorporated times of reflection. Pausing at appropriate times in the lesson allowed pupils time to think about the characteristics of the Holy Spirit. As a result pupils talk about what they have learned and how it helps them in their own life. There is a clear and impressive focus on applying faith to everyday life. The monitoring of RE is highly effective. The subject leader leads termly whole school moderation of work. As a result staff are confident when assessing RE and talk with certainty about the attainment and progress of each pupil. Access to appropriate diocesan training has resulted in RE being very successful in its contribution to the Christian nature of the school.

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

The headteacher leads with a strong Christian conviction and by example. Since taking up her post in January (after a period of being co-head for two days a week) staff and governors follow her lead in showering the children with love and care so as to bring out their best qualities. This care, with outstanding sensitivity, has also been prominent in the way in which leaders have led the school through a time of transition. Success has been achieved through exemplary teamwork. Leaders at all levels are very clear about their role and this provides the freedom to be innovative. Parents recognise the school's distinctive Christian ethos and support it with enthusiasm and passion because of the impact it has upon their children's lives. Governors ensure that arrangements for RE and collective worship meet statutory requirements. As a result of their regular visits to school they know the school well. They are in a well-informed position to support school leaders in the continual development of the school's distinctive Christian nature. They act as critical friends who set the school's strategic direction through challenging questions and enlightened discussion. As a result of their emphasis upon achievement being grounded in love, governors and senior leaders ensure that the school is a happy and nurturing place to both learn and work. The most vulnerable and disadvantaged children are very well supported through the active promotion of Christian values.

The outstanding leadership of the headteacher is the result of highly effective succession planning at St Thomas' over the last two years. The partnerships with St Thomas' church, the wider community and the parents are strong and mutually supportive. One excellent example being the recent support for Christian Aid's 'Big Brekkie.'

Congregation and school worked together seamlessly to support the event both financially and through prayer. The school regularly raises money for a wide variety of charities both Christian and secular. This results in children who know that this is a demonstration of Christian compassion and care in action. The Christian character of the school is central to school improvement and is an explicit thread running through the school's development plan.