



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Thornhill Lees Church of England (Voluntary Controlled) Infant and Nursery School

Slaithwaite Road
Thornhill Lees, Dewsbury
West Yorkshire WF12 9DL

Diocese: Wakefield

Local authority: Kirklees
Dates of inspection: 11th February 2014
Date of last inspection: 10th December 2008
School's unique reference number: 107705
Headteacher: Mrs Margaret Hissett
Inspector's name and number: Nigel Castledine (652)

School context

Thornhill Lees CE is a popular infant and nursery school serving a disadvantaged area of Dewsbury. Children make excellent progress because of outstanding teaching and exceptional care and support. A large majority of the children at the school are of Indian or Pakistani heritage, of whom 80% have English as an additional language. An increasing number of children are from Eastern European families. An above average number of children receive additional support with learning. The number of children who receive free school meals and/or Pupil Premium is average. The current headteacher has been appointed since the last SIAS inspection.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Thornhill Lees as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The outstanding leadership of the school ensures the children make the best possible educational progress
- All children and staff maintain a happy atmosphere of mutual respect and care
- The school lives and celebrates active faith in all its variety
- The exceptional outreach by the school, demonstrating Christian love and service in action, greatly assists children and families in challenging circumstances

Areas to improve

- To seek to further develop the links between the local church and the school
- To enhance feedback on the school's Assemblies by providing children with opportunities to record their views and evaluate impact
- To extend the children's involvement in music and drama within Assembly

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

A deep-rooted and inclusive faith ethos underpins the work of this school. Christian belief and witness provide the strong motivation for the exceptional ways in which the school seeks to reach out to meet the needs of every child. The school's mission statement 'Expect the Best' is clear in its successful inclusion and community partnership, excellent curriculum provision and teaching. Ofsted and Data Dashboard all verify that the school has achieved exceptional outcomes as shown by the children's progress towards age-related expectations. Because of the Christian ethos of care and nurture, the school is a place of safety, inclusion and partnership for the local community, which also uses it as a source of support regarding complex home issues. Many children enter the school with little spoken language or understanding of social interaction, and few self-care skills. From such starting points, the children become cheerful, enthusiastic and inquisitive learners, supported by their growth of self-belief and self-care. The school encourages the children to be open-minded, to get along well within the wide mix of cultures of the school and not to see themselves as separate. In these outstanding ways, the school demonstrates its Christian foundation whilst also ensuring an inclusive sensitivity of approach and terminology to matters of faith. The school has linked the predominant Muslim faith of its families with the school's Christian belief by means of its chosen faith values which are all celebrated and upheld within both religions. These include justice, hope, friendship, fairness, service, perseverance, kindness, compassion, koinonia and reverence. All the chosen faith values can also be shared as 'human' values by those of no particular faith, making for an inclusivity of purpose and vision, but are, nonetheless, owned by the school's Christian ethos. Children speak of these values with conviction, quoting examples such as 'perseverance' by a child who has finally grasped a new concept, or 'service' within the work of the School Council. This group of elected children work effectively to bring about positive change as evidenced by their recent success in providing better playtime facilities for healthy, purposeful play. The school community also has an understanding of its responsibilities towards the less fortunate, both locally and world-wide. This is shown by the excellent response to the Christmas gift shoe-box filling appeal for disadvantaged families, and fundraising for the diocesan African link with the Diocese of the Mara project to provide water supplies and goats for needy farmers. Religious Education has equal weight amongst the school's curriculum areas and is seen as an essential part of learning. High quality learning experiences ensure children have accurate knowledge of other faiths than that of the child's own family, with the aim of developing a cohesive respect for different cultures and world faiths.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Because of the school's perceived need to maintain a sensitive inclusivity towards matters of faith, worship is carefully planned so it does not offend or alienate those of both Christian and other major faiths, with its terminology being chosen judiciously. Accordingly, school collective worship is contained within what is known as Assembly, which opens up its accessibility to all, irrespective of faith background. This is a considered decision, the concept of collective worship being fully observed. The very creative and visual Assemblies allow for Biblical stories and values to be a major part of the faith value-driven message programme, balanced alongside other faiths' holy books, such as the Qu'ran. Because the school pays due respect to the key beliefs and festivals of major faiths including Islam, this has engendered a respect and almost universal acceptance for the school's celebration of Christian belief and festivals. Themes are also planned with reference to spiritual, moral, social, cultural areas, children's learning topics and faith values. During Assembly children reflect on the different aspects of God they learn about, as well as the example and wisdom of Jesus and his teachings with their relevance to the issues and inequalities of today's world. A Celebration Assembly takes place each week, in which the faith values of 'endurance' and 'kindness', for example, are celebrated with parents, governors, family members and the wider community. Clear links between Assembly themes and other areas of learning also give good opportunities for the children to perceive relevance

and reason in their classroom studies. During Assembly the whole school joins together to learn and explore in a wide range of ways, but there is scope for further opportunities to involve the children in more music and drama. The children often express their own thoughts during Assembly, which a staff member stated 'often refreshingly challenge adults to re-think their own preconceptions'. The concept of prayer is respected by the majority of children because they attend Mosque each day after school. Accordingly an integral part of each Assembly is the invitation to the children to reflect and pray about what they have heard. There is a school prayer, written by the children which is used to great effect. However prayer and reflection is not confined to Assembly as children say they feel able 'to stop and have some peace and quiet to reflect' around the school. Such opportunities are also provided within circle time, personal social and health education lessons, and story times. Adults evaluate Assembly regularly but as yet this does not involve the children. Assembly therefore amplifies the strong message of inclusivity that the school strives to promote and live out in its daily work.

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

The deeply embedded Christian faith of the school is a clear and major influence in the work of the exceptional leadership team, ably led by the outstanding headteacher. This is a school that has worked tirelessly over recent years to build up the current high levels of trust and understanding within the local community. Whilst the school's aims and objectives cannot by necessity be solely and explicitly Christian, the school openly displays its core ethos of Christian love in its outreach to all who are part of its family, irrespective of age, ethnicity or faith. This is valued greatly by the parents of pupils who commented on the enjoyment the children get from their success in learning and on the happy, inclusive, supportive and safe feel of the school. There is a well thought-out distributed leadership structure that runs throughout the school. This is supported by carefully considered continuing professional development for all staff. Governors give time to children in class as well as carrying out regular and effective 'health checks' for their areas of responsibility. Whilst foundation governors link local church and school, there is as yet no formal link with clergy. There are strong links with other agencies, including the diocese, to work together with the families of the school community with the aim of improving lives in an atmosphere of open inclusion and partnership.

SIAMS report February 2014 Thornhill Lees CE (VC) N & I School, Dewsbury, WF12 9DL