



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

### St Matthew's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Kentford Road,  
Bolton,  
BL1 2JL

Diocese: **Manchester**

**Previous inspection grade: Good**

**Present inspection grade: Outstanding**

Local authority: Bolton

Dates of inspection: 15 October 2015

Date of last inspection: July 2010

School's unique reference number: 105205

Headteacher: Mark Hamblett

Inspector's name and number: Mike Graham 286

#### School context

The school is above average size serving a socially and culturally diverse community. Over half the children are of Indian or Pakistani heritage, with large minorities being white British, African and Hungarian. An above average proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for the pupil premium. The proportion of pupils supported at school action is above average, but the proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average. The headteacher took up post in September 2015.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Matthew's Primary as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The headteacher leads with a vibrant Christian vision and the wholehearted support of staff and governors. As a result, children's spiritual development and academic progress are outstanding.
- Relationships in and beyond the school demonstrate Christian values excellently so that it is a beacon of Christian love and care in the community.
- Worship is central in the school's life and makes a significant impact on the spiritual development of the whole school family.
- The inclusive and welcoming Christian ethos enables all to feel warmly accepted.

#### Areas to improve

- Extend teaching about the Holy Spirit to improve children's understanding of this aspect of God in the Christian faith.
- Expand spontaneous prayer with the children, in conjunction with the development of an outdoor worship and reflection area, to deepen their spirituality.

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

The school lavishes Christian love and care on the children and their families. This distinctive ethos has established a secure and joyful context within which the children are enabled to give of their best. The school has adopted love, respect, friendship and creativity as its core Christian values. They are exemplified and taught by the staff and lived by all, including the children. As a result the children are enthusiastic learners and this leads to their outstanding academic progress and personal development. Data shows that the rate of progress for children of all abilities is excellent. A significant contributory factor is the way in which the Christian character of the school supports the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all the children. Understanding of and respect for other cultures and faiths is diligently fostered by visits to different places of worship and excellent teaching in Religious Education (RE). Children speak over 20 different languages, and the headteacher and his staff see this diversity as an opportunity rather than a difficulty. Children and adults of various faiths share their lives and experiences. This is used sensitively and well to widen and deepen the children's understanding. The Christian ethos extends to the attractive and often interactive displays and outdoor quiet areas and gardens, which stimulate faith and prayer. Children and adults are polite and respectful, yet full of life and joy in learning. The children's behaviour is impeccable, attendance is improving and relationships amongst all members of the school community are outstanding. They readily attribute this to the Christian values at the heart of the school's life, respect being particularly relevant to many. One parent commented, 'All school staff lead by example in showing respect to parent and child.' The acceptance of every child with respect and loving care, regardless of their background, is exceptional. RE makes an outstanding contribution to the spiritual development of the children and to the Christian character of the school.

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

Worship is central in the life of the school. The variety in content and leadership styles supports a vibrant, relevant and engaging mix of worship experiences. Christian values, Bible stories and readings, reflection, prayer, drama, humour and excellent singing all contribute to these occasions, enriching the lives of everyone present. The teachings and life of Jesus form the basis for all the Christian values taught. A Year 6 boy commented that the values can be seen and experienced at school 'in real life!' Personal spiritual development is enhanced further through a strong focus on reflection and prayer. A prayer tree in the entrance hall is prominent and well used. Both this and class worship encourage children to write their own prayers, many of which are used in whole school worship. An example is the reading of their own relevant and moving prayers by a Year 5 girl and boy during a worship time on using and being thankful for our talents. Spontaneous prayer is beginning to be encouraged but is not yet widely developed. The children's understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is impressive in its maturity due to the teaching in worship and RE. They have a sense of the awe and wonder of God the Creator and Father and Jesus the Saviour and Son, but are less sure about the person and work of the Holy Spirit. However, a Year 6 girl described the Holy Spirit as One who 'comes and watches over you'. Worship brings the whole community together at key points in the church calendar. The Mothering Sunday service, held in St Paul's church, had a major impact in sustaining the close partnership between parish and school. Worship also adds significantly to the spiritual dimension of school and community life. The local clergy lead worship weekly and make valuable contributions in RE lessons. Baptism is taught in St Thomas' church for example. As a result, children, staff and parents have a deeper knowledge of Anglican belief and tradition. Members of staff and children plan, lead and evaluate worship which develops their understanding. The children, through their ethos team, play an effective role in evaluating and improving worship. Governors and parents also regularly attend worship and provide constructive feedback to develop it further.

### **The effectiveness of Religious Education at St Matthew's is outstanding**

The overall progress made by the children in RE is excellent. The evidence in workbooks and from conversations with groups of children is conclusive and impressive. There is a welcome emphasis on the impact of faith on a believer, leading to deep spiritual understanding. The reflective approach used stimulates lively and wide-ranging debate and exploration of faith. The leadership and management of RE are outstanding. Planning, teamwork, assessment and training are all directed and guided with diligence,

enthusiasm and a high level of expertise. The impact of RE on the children is clear and highly significant. One Year 5 girl said, 'No matter what religion we are we all follow Christian values'. Another added thoughtfully, 'Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims never turn their backs on the Holy Book'. This is a result of good and outstanding teaching. Staff and children are confident yet sensitive to others when expressing their views about faith and its impact on their lives. RE sessions are lively and progressive, with teamwork, impressive use of technology, drama, role-play and well-guided discussion. There is sensitive use of open questions and gentle support when needed. In EYFS the sense of God's love and excitement in learning about God and His world through the exploration of creation was striking. At appropriate moments the children were encouraged by the teacher to 'Let the quiet grow.' Ingenious sleight of hand when introducing a book made for the lesson on creation, whereby pictures appeared on the pages as if by magic, elicited the response from a Year R girl, 'How did that even happen!' Year 1 children experiencing the escape from Egypt by the Israelites were fully involved in the drama. Excellent teamwork by staff brought the story vividly to life. The school's Christian values were used tellingly as the children loudly agreed that Pharaoh had shown 'No love, no respect, and no friendship!' An exceptional Year 6 lesson on the character of Jesus was full of pace, inventive teaching, excitement and thirst for understanding. One girl, debating the validity of Jesus' healing of a leper, said that Jesus' critics were right in saying that only God could forgive sin but added, 'He was God's Son, doing God's work!' Lesson observations and constructive marking of children's work mean that they know the steps to further progression. Children's understanding of Christianity is excellent. During a brief discussion about the Holy Spirit, a Year 6 girl said that 'In hardest times He's always there for you'. Teaching about non-Christian faiths is thorough and effective, making maximum use of the rich diversity of faiths present within the school family to enhance children's knowledge and understanding.

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

The headteacher, leadership team, staff and governors are united in striving to realise the Christian vision for the school. The headteacher's Christian faith shines through in every aspect of his leadership. He feels that 'It is a privilege to lead this vibrant community'. He does so with confidence and by example, being ready to give support with prayer whenever it is appropriate and helpful. Success has been achieved through exemplary teamwork, with every member of staff living out Christian values to guide, support and inspire the children. The children's ethos team add their notable and effective support in promoting the values amongst their peers. The governors regularly review the school's Christian distinctiveness and bring challenge and encouragement to the staff, thus promoting development. Governors and clergy are fully involved in the school's work and activities, sharing and helping with designated classes and building close relationships with the children. Their learning walks in RE enhance governors' knowledge and expertise through a first-hand experience of the work being done to build the spiritual understanding and academic progress of the children. Christian values have been promoted vigorously, yet with sensitivity. Systematic and thorough reviews of the school's work and Christian distinctiveness create a passionate drive for constant improvement. The areas to improve from the last report have been thoroughly addressed. Leaders prepare for future leadership in this and other church schools through excellent in-service training, teamwork, delegation and coaching. Partnerships and deep friendships with the local parish, diocese and the wider community are strong and mutually beneficial. During World Culture Day, parents and friends of the school from a wide variety of cultures and faiths share foods and customs from their country of origin and religion. This has made a significant impact on the shared understanding of Christianity worldwide and of the other world faiths and cultures represented. The school council leads the way in raising money for local, national and international charities, demonstrating Christian compassion in action. The parents are very appreciative of the Christian care shown. They know that, for the staff, the wellbeing of every child and every family is paramount. Parents are immensely proud of their school, give excellent support and input. Their comments included 'They treat each child as an individual', 'The focus on Christianity is really good' and 'The new head has made a fantastic start!' Such remarks reflect how parents' confidence and involvement in the school are being increased yet further.