

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Stephen's Church of England Primary School

Bent Spur Road
Kearsley
Bolton
BL4 8BP

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Manchester
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Bolton
Date of inspection	1 December 2016
Date of last inspection	September 2011
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided 105240
Headteacher	Tony Lasan
Inspector's name and number	Gillian Rhodes 657

School context

St Stephen's is an average sized primary school which is regularly oversubscribed. Its pupils come from a mix of socio-economic backgrounds. The percentage of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding is in line with national averages. On entry to the school most pupils' attainment is below age related expectations in most areas of learning. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is below the national average. The percentage of pupils with English as an additional language is below the national average. Attendance is above national targets. The school has achieved the Leading Parent Partnership Award and the Religious Education Quality Mark Gold.

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

- High standards of behaviour and positive relationships between all members of the school community are rooted in the Christian values of compassion, friendship and trust which are deeply embedded in all aspects of school life.
- Pupils' excellent knowledge and understanding of the beliefs and values of a range of world faiths and of various traditions within the Christian faith result in respect for diversity and difference.
- Effective links and partnerships between the school, families, partner churches and the local community have significant benefits for all groups, placing the school at the heart of the community.
- Pupils' moral and spiritual understanding is effectively demonstrated in religious education (RE) through their ability to apply higher level skills of enquiry and interpretation to questions of meaning and purpose.

Areas to improve

- Further develop the spiritual understanding of pupils by providing opportunities for them to plan and lead collective worship.
- Enhance the spiritual development of pupils through worship by providing opportunities for them to use classroom reflection areas more effectively for personal prayer and reflection.
- Ensure that more systematic monitoring and evaluation of worship by all groups in the school community provides insight into the impact of worship on the community.

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

The school's values of love, compassion, friendship and trust effectively underpin all aspects of school life. As a result, pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are excellent and relationships across the whole school community are caring and supportive. Parents particularly emphasise the impact of Christian values on their children's behaviour and attitudes, both in and out of school. Pupils understand that the values are rooted in Christian teaching and illustrated by stories from the Bible. This has a direct and positive influence on their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils understand that the Christian values of forgiveness, endurance and compassion nurture them in times of difficulty. They have the confidence to try new experiences and challenges, knowing that their efforts will be encouraged and supported. As a result, pupils make excellent progress from often low starting points. The Christian character of the school ensures that whilst excellent attendance is promoted, the needs and circumstances of vulnerable pupils and their families are understood and sympathetically addressed.

The spiritual development of pupils is strongly emphasised in collective worship and through teaching and learning in RE. High priority is given to RE and its importance in the life of this Christian school is clearly understood. Pupils respond well and are able to express their ideas about faith and its impact on believers clearly and confidently.

Experiences such as the Lenten Tree and Winter Walks, shared with local churches of different denominations, are very effective in developing pupils' spiritual and cultural understanding. This is further enhanced by the strong links St Stephen's has with a primary school whose context is very different. Pupils at St Stephen's share activities across the curriculum with pupils from a wide range of heritage and faith backgrounds. As a result they develop understanding of communities beyond their own. In addition they study Christianity and a range of world faiths in RE and as a result have excellent awareness of diversity and shared values in the church and other faiths.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Worship is central to the life of the school. Pupils and adults value coming together for praise and prayer. Themes for worship are based on values, Christian festivals and the Church's year. Collective worship regularly includes biblical material and the teachings of Jesus and pupils are able to make links between these and the school's Christian values. Pupils are able to use the language of the school's values as discussed in worship to determine behaviour and resolve conflict. A Year 6 pupil said, 'The values are how God teaches us to behave.'

The ritual and practices of worship in school and in church provide experience of Anglican tradition. The Lord's Prayer and responses to open and close worship are used. Prayer marks key points in the school day. Consequently children understand prayer as part of everyday life and are able to explain that they use prayer to talk to God. They enjoy being given the opportunity to contribute a variety of prayers to worship, particularly through the school prayer tree. Artefacts on the worship table reflect the Trinity and older children describe how they remind them of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Cloths in liturgical colours enable pupils to recognise and understand the changing seasons of the Church's year.

Worship is carefully planned and led by the headteacher and by the RE and worship co-ordinator. The regular leading of worship by the vicar in the nearby St Stephen's church broadens experiences for pupils. Shared events with the local Methodist and Catholic churches and worship at the cathedral, the parish church and nearby Schoenstatt Shrine enhance this. Classroom reflection areas display familiar prayers and Christian artefacts but do not yet provide a place for pupils' personal prayer or reflection. Increased opportunities for pupils to plan and lead worship are an aspect of development recognised by the school.

Pupils readily speak of how Christian stewardship is prompted by worship and how they contribute to a wide range of local, national and global charities. Monitoring and evaluation of worship takes place regularly but is not yet systematically planned to include all groups and thereby establish the impact of worship on the life of the school.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Pupils at St Stephen's are inspired by RE. They describe how the class RE scrapbooks 'show we learn about lots of different things'. Assessment is carried out regularly by the RE subject leader and shows that teaching and learning in RE are consistently good and often outstanding. As a result standards are at least in line with national expectations and progress from pupils' starting points is excellent.

The RE syllabus provides opportunities for pupils to learn creatively through art, music and drama. Links with school values and pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development are explicitly planned for and taught. RE very successfully encourages pupils to reflect on open-ended questions of meaning and purpose. Year 6 considered Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Messiah and the fulfilment of these through the birth of Jesus. This allowed them to develop and apply skills of enquiry and interpretation. Year 2 children thought about what angels may look like using their own imagination and examples from art and church decoration. Teachers' questioning and responses allow pupils to develop their own ideas and reflect on complex spiritual and cultural matters.

Links are made between teaching and learning in RE and with worship and Christian values. Pupils are confident to make these links. This does not yet fully extend to consistent expression of values across the whole curriculum. The study of faiths other than Christianity is planned effectively and is extremely well supported by the links with St Stephen's partner school. Consequently pupils are able to make comparisons at first hand between beliefs, practices and value systems across a range of faiths.

The experienced and dedicated RE subject leader monitors standards of teaching and learning in RE and draws up effective action plans which ensure the ongoing development of this high profile aspect of school life. The achievement of the Gold Quality Mark recognises the outstanding effectiveness of RE.

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

The headteacher and other senior leaders and staff consistently live out and promote a clear Christian vision which is a solid foundation for all aspects of school life. Self-evaluation is thorough and effectively informs strategic development priorities for the school as a distinctive Church of England school. Governors visit the school informally to take part in and help with events. They carry out more formal monitoring through discussions at governing board and effectiveness committee meetings. They explain that 'the St Stephen's way' is rooted in Christian values and permeates all school life. They are proud that pupils' conduct, courtesy and enquiring minds are regularly praised by people beyond the school family.

Parents speak of the welcome and support they receive from all staff and the emphasis the school places on their children's well-being. They enjoy social events organised at school and speak proudly of the pupils' community and charity contributions. Parents highlight the pupils' involvement in Remembrance Day commemorations and support for the local foodbank as examples of their love and compassion for others in action.

Church groups make regular use of the school building and school services take place in church. School news is included in the parish magazine and church events in school newsletters. Pupils are involved with members of local churches in uniformed organisations, messy church sessions and a 'knit and natter' group. Consequently, the school family is at the heart of the local community.

RE and worship are ably led by the deputy headteacher, supported by the headteacher. As a result they are high profile aspects of school life. Leaders articulate the importance of on-going development. Diocesan training is accessed by the deputy headteacher and shared with other staff so that the development of potential leaders of church school is encouraged at all levels.