

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Walmsley Church of England Primary School

Blackburn Road, Egerton, Bolton, BL7 9SA

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Diocese

Manchester

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Local authority

Bolton

Date/s of inspection

10 May 2018

Date of last inspection

June 2013

Type of school and unique reference number

Voluntary Aided 105232

Headteacher

Debra Carr

Inspector's name and number

Nigel Castledine 652

School context

The school is above average in size, with an increasing number of pupils. It serves a wide, semi-rural local area on the northern edge of the Bolton conurbation. Most pupils are of White British heritage. A low percentage of pupils are disadvantaged or have a statement of additional educational needs or disability.

The school has attained 'Communication Friendly' status to support pupils who have impeded language attainment. Staff are trained in using sign language and the school has its own speech and language therapist.

The school has beneficial links with Christ Church, which is situated adjacent to the school buildings.

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

- Senior leaders, ably led by the inspirational headteacher, promote a pervasive and inclusive Christian vision that has sustained high academic achievement as an essential outcome of the school's wide, richly creative curriculum. The resulting learning environment nurtures all pupils to aspire to personal excellence.
- The school's emphasis on meeting the individual needs of each pupil reflects the Christian teaching of the infinite value of every person, as a unique child of God.
- Religious education (RE), a core subject at this school, influences the whole curriculum and enables pupils' learning in the subject to be highly creative and excitingly challenging.
- The range and styles of collective worship support pupils of faith and those with none to develop their personal spiritually, supporting those who choose to go further towards individual experiences of the divine.

Areas to improve

- Formalise the governing board's evaluations of the impact of the school's Christian distinctiveness on standards of education and pupil nurture. Making this an integral part of the scrutiny of academic performance and pupil well-being, will ensure the Christian ethos underpins all future developments.
- Build on the successful introduction and influence of the pupils' Ethos group by encouraging pupils to independently plan, lead and evaluate collective worship leading to a deepening of their spiritual experiences and understanding.
- Celebrate the high quality of RE in all age groups by holding creative multi-faith RE learning weeks for the whole school community. This will emphasise that RE is at the heart of the school's inclusive curriculum.

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

A welcoming, distinctly Christian learning culture underpins all aspects of school life, from which the happiness and personal fulfilment of each individual pupil flows. The successes of all pupils at all levels are celebrated in school by the caring staff team, who live out the school's Christian values through their work. They provide positive role models, demonstrating thoughtful behaviour and Christian concern for others which pupils are keen to emulate. Pupils are keen to explain the impact of the school's Christian values, one stating, 'I can follow in Jesus' footsteps by showing love and care to others.' Because the strong faith ethos creates the atmosphere of a school family learning together, every person, whether pupil or adult, is respected and cared for as a valued individual. Older pupils act as influential role models, enjoying helping younger members of the school community. Disagreement and conflict is dealt with compassionately, and restorative justice is used to help resolve issues. Bullying and discriminatory behaviour, both rare occurrences, are promptly and conclusively addressed.

Because pupils find their education stimulating and exciting, they do not want to miss school. Accordingly the absence rate for the school is very low, and the school works closely with the very small percentage of pupils whose irregular attendance is a concern.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted by the school's worship and prayer that links to curricular enrichment experiences. These use creative approaches to explore the variety and meanings of life and existence. Pupils are guided towards personal experiences of awe and mystery, and growing self-confidence. This area of the curriculum also develops the pupils' appreciation, respect and understanding for contrasting beliefs, cultures and life-styles and their experiences of the diversity of the global Christian faith. Concern for others in need is focused through the pupils' charities committee which takes responsibility for choosing and promoting charitable fundraising for local and international good causes. This work encourages the whole school community to take Christian stewardship of money and resources seriously.

Whilst RE is integrated within the wider curriculum, it is taught as a discreet subject according to the Manchester diocesan syllabus 'Questful RE'. This is used in conjunction with the new 'Understanding Christianity' framework. The subject has a high profile and is inclusive in successfully engaging all pupils, irrespective of personal belief or learning styles, in meaningful learning experiences.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship at Walmsley, an inclusive and important core aspect of school life, brings the school together to share and celebrate the love of God in prayer, reflection and praise. The child-focused worship themes are based around biblical teaching, faith values, the Anglican church calendar, current events and the school's wider Christian ethos. These themes are enriched by ideas and feedback from the school community. Because the worship is carefully planned and presented, all are able to engage, listen and respond, irrespective of personal belief. Pupils enjoy contributing their views of school worship to the class scrap-books that record their opinions and ideas arising from worship, which feed into future worship and RE plans.

Daily worship is varied, with class and key stage worship enabling pupils to approach belief, prayer and reflection in age-appropriate ways, as well as whole school worship. Pupils benefit from the variety of worship leaders, who include the teaching staff, the local clergy team and occasional visitors. Worship always includes song, reflection, prayer and teaching, with many opportunities for pupils to contribute their ideas and to help with the worship's delivery. A recent innovation has been the pupil ethos group which regularly meets to discuss worship and belief as well as assisting adult worship leaders. A group member commented, 'The ethos group has helped me think about the sort of person Jesus wants me to be.' Whilst the group is providing deeper involvement in the faith life of the school, pupils do not have opportunities to independently plan, lead and evaluate all aspects of worship.

Pupils gain deeper insights into the significance of the major festivals of the Anglican year from the worship held on these occasions. This takes place in the nearby parish church at Harvest, Christmas, Easter and the end of the school year. Christ Church is also the setting for the school's weekly child-centred Eucharist. Many pupils aspire to being old enough to consider the option of studying with the local clergy to become a confirmed church member in Year 6. Such pupils receive the communion bread and wine with great reverence and clear understanding of its significance. School and church combine to present the annual 'Experience Easter' event. Its varied activities enable pupils to grow in age-appropriate understanding of the Christian belief of the resurrection of Jesus.

Opportunities for pupils to choose to pray or reflect in school are supported by classroom reflection areas, and in the provision of quieter spaces within outdoor play areas. Pupils are also invited to contribute prayers for use in worship. Time for group prayer and reflection is provided at lunchtime and at the end of the school day. Those of other world faiths are also provided with a quiet room for personal prayer and given support during times of fasting.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Whilst Christianity is the predominant areas of study in RE, the school ensures that pupils also study the other major world faiths of Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism. Pupils enjoy their RE learning and are comfortable in expressing their own views, whilst respecting the contrasting opinions of others.

The RE teaching styles used at Walmsley ensure that pupils not only learn about religions, but that they are also able to consider what can be learned from the beliefs they are studying. An older pupil remarked, 'When we were learning what Muslims believe, we realised our school's Christian values are all Muslim values too. I think that's good!' Pupils' understanding of key Christian concepts such as the Holy Trinity is developed in age-appropriate ways through study in RE. This is supported within collective worship themes, particularly at Christian festivals.

By adopting the diocesan RE syllabus, now augmented by the new Understanding Christianity framework, the school has successfully met the action point from the last inspection. These approaches ensure the school uses a collaborative learning approach that engenders creative, practical and imaginative discussion and investigation. This enables pupils of all abilities to find fulfilment through their achievement in the subject. Whilst school RE assessment methodology is still being refined, it already shows that pupils are achieving national age-related expectations with a significant number moving to greater depth of learning.

In order to support and develop the quality of RE teaching and learning, the RE lead teachers have regularly monitored classroom standards with learning walks to investigate classroom practice. They have supported teachers well in using the new approaches to RE, whilst still providing sufficient challenge to ensure the highest standards of learning. Collaborative working between teachers has ensured that excellent RE practice continues to be shared and developed. Governors' monitoring of RE standards is carried out through their regular review of policy within the school's annual improvement plan.

The RE subject leaders benefit from regular attendance in the local RE hub meetings, at which teachers come together to share good practice and to investigate new ways of developing RE in their schools. Diocesan training events have also been influential, particularly in the introduction and support for the new approaches to teaching RE.

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

The pervasive Christian vision of the school is keenly promoted by the headteacher, senior leadership team and governing board. This transformational, gospel-inspired vision underpins the promotion of the highest academic standards and the well-being of all members of the school community. Spiritual development is offered to all the staff team, particularly those new to the school, through focused training that enriches understanding of and support for the school's Christian vision. Its ultimate aim is to ensure the Christian ethos is the foundation of a learning environment in which every pupil can benefit from a life-long love of learning and an understanding of faith in action.

Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is generally in line with or above national expectations. Through its provision for pupils with difficulties in communication, language and literacy, the school works to remove resulting barriers to learning through specialist teaching and structured support. From these starting points, all pupils progress towards meeting or exceeding ambitious targets. By the end of Year 6, almost all pupils achieve at or above national expectations. This high level of achievement, whilst influenced by the particular characteristics of pupil cohorts, has been sustained over a significant period of time.

Senior school staff carry out ongoing rigorous assessments of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This enables them to have a clear vision for further development of the school. This is communicated effectively to the governing board, which uses this information in their role of evaluating the impact of the school's teaching standards and pupil achievement. Governors also undertake learning walks to evaluate school life and ethos, they take part in the worship and regularly attend school events. However their evaluations of the impact of Christian distinctiveness on academic standards and pupil nurture are not formally recorded.

All staff benefit from ongoing professional development, with many joint training events being held with other local schools or higher education providers. The school also recognises its responsibilities towards preparing future church school leaders by enabling a senior member of staff to undertake the course leading to the Church of England school leadership qualification.

Strong and mutually-supportive links between Christ Church and Walmsley school enhance their outreach within the wider local community. The school prioritises its work with parents, keeping them well informed about their children's progress. School staff are always available for advice when it is requested. The positive influence of the school's caring and committed Christian ethos on their children is well understood and appreciated by parents. A parent observed, 'Academically pupils thrive, spiritually they grow, pastorally they all receive superb care.'