



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St Thomas' Church of England (Voluntary Aided) Primary School

Wellington Road

Heaton Chapel

Stockport

SK4 4QC

Diocese: Manchester

Local authority: Stockport

Dates of inspection: 7 March 2014

Date of last inspection: March 2009

School's unique reference number: 106128

Headteacher: Karen Morris

Inspector's name and number: Ruth Wall (548)

School context

This average-sized school serves the parish of St Thomas' and the surrounding district of Heaton Chapel. Children also travel from other areas of Stockport and Manchester because it is a popular school. The proportion of children entitled to free school meals is below the national average as is the proportion of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Around a quarter of pupils come from minority ethnic groups which is higher than the national picture. Since the previous inspection a new headteacher has been appointed and there has been a reshaping of the senior leadership team.

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

- A clear Christian vision is at the heart of all that St Thomas' does. The conviction with which this vision is promoted by senior leaders and shared by all members of the school community, ensures the school's success in meeting the academic and spiritual needs of all children.
- The Christian understanding of everyone as a uniquely valuable member of the community promotes excellent relationships within the school family.
- The highly effective partnership between the school and St Thomas' Church is mutually beneficial.

Areas to improve

- Develop the moderation of levelled work in religious education (RE) in order to improve teachers' understanding of the levels and help them plan work that enables children to make progress.
- Ensure that children are made fully aware that Christianity is a multi-cultural world faith.

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

The school's motto 'Learning and growing in the sight of God' is evident on all documents and around the school. This, together with the school's mission statement, shapes the thinking of the school and is understood and embraced by all members of the school community. One child explained succinctly, 'God made us as individuals and everyone has a value.' There are areas 'For thinking' in all classrooms and children's pictures and comments on 'What God means to us', reflect the school's Christian foundation. The Christian character of the school is clearly defined and effectively promoted so as to make a significant impact on the personal development and academic needs of the children. Parents agree that, 'Christian values follow through at home.' These strengths within the school's Christian character have been the foundation for its academic success. It is also at the heart of all relationships. Behaviour is outstanding and, despite the considerable upheaval of on-going building work, there is a calm and purposeful atmosphere throughout the school. Effective strategies have been introduced, including responsible children acting as play buddies and play leaders, to care for and engage younger children at playtimes. Children's outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development arises from the whole school ethos and the commitment shown by each member of staff. Children are encouraged to show concern for world issues as part of the school's Christian service. They support a number of charities, some initiated by the children. As a result, there is a high level of understanding of what it means to be part of a church school. The school is both distinctive in its Christian character and inclusive in its approach to diversity. This is a highly cohesive community in which all feel valued regardless of differences.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Children recognise that distinctively Christian worship is at the heart of the school. Children understand the place of Jesus within the Christian faith and of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Worship is well planned by the coordinator and the headteacher, with input from the vicar. Worship covers Christian themes with a strong emphasis on Christian values and on important Christian festivals. This enables children to have a very good understanding of the nature of worship, the Christian faith and Anglican traditions and practice. All classes take their turn in planning and presenting worship on the current theme for the half term. In the worship observed, children demonstrated their understanding of the Easter story through the words of songs. Under the direction of the gifted music teacher the whole school sang with impressive enthusiasm. The quality of the singing was outstanding and together with prayers and a time for reflection provided a rich experience of worship for the school community. Children clearly enjoy worship, are engaged and talk enthusiastically about these occasions. The school appreciates the input from both the vicar and a Christian leader who lead worship each week. Teachers say, 'They are always age-appropriate' and children say they enjoy taking part in the activities. Special services take place in church and are enjoyed by the whole school community. Prayer holds a prominent place in school life. Children say formal prayers but also respond to opportunities to prepare and express their own personal prayers. The unique prayer box, made and beautifully decorated by a teaching assistant, is valued and well used by the children. The vicar and church community add these to their prayers. Evaluation of worship is thorough and very effective with children's ideas and requests implemented. Teachers are present in worship following comments from children including, '...they can do follow-up work with us in class', and, 'It's like we are all together.'

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Monitoring and evaluation shows that the quality of teaching is generally good and often outstanding. This enables children to have a sound understanding of the Christian faith and of other faiths represented within the wider community. On-going scrutiny of work provides evidence that most children attain the expected level in RE with many children exceeding them by the end of Key Stage 2. RE makes a very good contribution to the children's understanding of Christian values and to the learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The

coordinator, with the support of the headteacher, demonstrates outstanding commitment and a clear sense of direction in leading initiatives to raise standards of attainment. Teachers have a shared commitment to improving standards and recognise RE as a core subject. Focused school development action has led to children not only learning about religion but from religion. Marking gives children a clear indication of how their work can be improved and they respond effectively in the time given to do this. New systems for monitoring have been developed, strengthening leaders' views of the school's standards and highlighting where improvements need to be made. Leaders acknowledge the need for teachers to moderate children's work together to give them a clearer understanding of all the attainment levels. Children speak very positively about their enjoyment of RE. One child explained that learning about different faiths 'helps us understand better.' In the Key Stage 2 lesson observed, children demonstrated their developing analytical skills on the subject of how temptation can lead to making the wrong choices. Children are encouraged to ask challenging questions and they understand that there isn't always an answer. There are opportunities for learners to experience other cultures through planned themed weeks and input from parents of different faiths. Leaders acknowledge that the RE programme needs to address Christianity as a global religion.

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

The headteacher is a highly effective leader with a strong personal faith and a clear vision for the development of the school. She is supported well by the school community. Leaders and managers have, as a foundation governor explained, 'Robustly looked at the impact of the Christian faith on the life of the school.' New governors have benefitted from training with the diocese. One of them is using her expertise in the field of education to challenge the way the school looks at integrating Christian values and faith across the curriculum. Through thorough self-evaluation the school knows itself well. Leaders and governors take time to listen to the views of the staff, children and parents and to make an appropriate response. They are aware of the school's strengths and areas for development as a church school. Monitoring and evaluation strategies are well developed and effective. All issues raised at the previous inspection have been fully addressed. Leaders and governors have been successful in ensuring that the academic needs of the children are met. In doing so they have recognised the importance of the school's strong Christian character in creating an ethos which supports effective learning. The strong links with the local church enable children to have positive views of the role of the Christian church within the community. Leaders recognise that knowledge of the church in a global sense is not so well developed. Through links with other schools, staff are involved in a range of collaborative activities, training and sharing of best practice. Children value their role in decision making through the school council. They say they feel comfortable in expressing their views and are confident that their suggestions are valued. The school is committed to the professional development of the staff. A school focus has been on the professional development of 'Middle Leaders' and those looking to take on senior leadership posts in church schools. RE and collective worship are both led with commitment and a genuine desire to continue to seek ways to improve further. The school is clearly demonstrating success in providing a Christian framework for teaching and learning. In the words of a parent, 'We come from a long distance because there is no discrimination, just peace and joy here.'

SIAMS report March 2014 St. Thomas' C.E. Primary School, Heaton Chapel, Stockport SK4 4QC

