

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Blackburn St Gabriel's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Wilworth Crescent, Blackburn, Lancs BB1 8QN

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Blackburn
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Date of inspection	21 September 2017
Date of last inspection	February 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	VA Primary 119441
Headteacher	Belinda Haigh
Inspector's name and number	Ann Aspden 858

School context

St Gabriel's is a smaller than average sized primary school situated in a mixed socio-economic community in north-west Blackburn. The headteacher has been in post for 13 years. In recent years there has been a restructuring of staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. Pupils come from a wide range of cultural backgrounds. 57% of pupils are of Asian heritage. The number of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities is average as is the number entitled to pupil premium funding.

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

- The school is seen by staff, governors, pupils and parents as a flourishing Christian family where inclusivity and diversity are celebrated.
- All members of the school community place great value on collective worship. Its impact is wide-ranging and inspirational.
- The strong Christian vision and leadership of the headteacher are enthusiastically endorsed and supported by staff and governors, providing a corner stone for the success and excellence of the school.
- Religious education makes an outstanding contribution to the school's distinctiveness and the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural growth.
- Clear and distinctive Christian values, such as respect and forgiveness, guide all aspects of school life so that the pupils feel secure and loved in an environment where they prosper academically, spiritually and socially.

Areas to improve

- Complete the development of the school's new Mission Statement by involving the whole school family in order to further affirm the school's strong Christian distinctiveness.
- Develop RE through the implementation of the new RE curriculum so that it continues to play a major role in enhancing the Christian character of the school.

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

A clear and distinctive Christian ethos guides all aspects of school life. As a result, all pupils can flourish and feel safe and loved. They prosper academically spiritually and socially because of what the school community see as the 'golden thread of Christianity' that runs through the life of the school. From their first day in school, every pupil is welcomed as a valued and special member of the school's Christian family. Parents value the way in which their children are nurtured and appreciate the warmth that they and their children experience daily. The school's Christian character is underpinned by Christian values rooted in biblical teaching. This results in a learning environment which enhances the personal development and academic achievement of all pupils. Standards of achievement are very high with pupils making excellent progress from their starting points. The school's strong and firmly established Christian character is closely linked to this success.

Parents of different faiths make a conscious decision to choose the school and speak highly of the respect that the school has for other faiths and cultures. Pupils from different religious backgrounds talk about Christian values, such as respect and hope, as being 'what Jesus did and what we do in our own lives', as one of them put it. Relationships in the school reflect the ethos which is lived out by all members of the school family. The positive and clear links between the school, the parish and the local community, with the headteacher and the vicar to the fore, are empowered and flourish through the commitment of both communities. From an early age, pupils travel on a spiritual journey with Jesus and readily articulate the impact that learning about Him has on their lives.

Consequently, the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of pupils is of a very high standard. The pupils' understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith is clear from the vibrant displays and from one pupil's typical comment about 'people all around the world celebrate Jesus Christ, the son of God'. They are proud of the work that they have done by fund raising for a school in Guatemala through the Hope of Life Association. In particular, pupils were delighted to sing in Spanish and enjoy Mexican traditions when a family from Guatemala came to visit. One child excitedly said 'We sent a girl to school by selling chocolate!'

RE teaching is a strength of the school and is taught to a very high standard in a way that excites and inspires children. The school recognises that in order to sustain these high standards, a successful implementation of the new RE curriculum will be required. Pupils' exceptionally good behaviour and attitudes stem from their understanding of the Christian character of the school. They have a very high level of respect and understanding of diversity which is based on the Christ-centred values that drive the school. A Year 6 pupil explained about what he had learnt from Christian values in his personal testimony when he wrote 'Learning about courage has helped me to be the person I am. If you have courage you can get through anything. Just remember, don't look at the staircase, just take the first step.'

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship at St Gabriel's reflects the school's strong Christian distinctiveness and is a vital and very much-valued feature of the school's daily life. Worship themes are meticulously planned so that all members of the school community enjoy a varied, sincere and a valuable experience. As a result, they participate with energy and vigour and take away ideas and thoughts which make a significant impact on their spiritual growth and daily lives. Acts of worship are very closely linked to explicit Christian values, the teaching of Jesus Christ, the Bible and the traditions of the Church of England. A range of leaders including staff, pupils and members of St Gabriel's church are involved. All are firmly committed to ensuring that high levels of spiritual and moral reflection are an intrinsic part of every act of worship. Since the last church school inspection, the development of the school worship group 'The Beacons' has given pupils great confidence and pride in their ability to research, plan and lead acts of worship. In the future, the school plans to further extend this work through more frequent opportunities.

St Gabriel's is a school where music is a key feature of every act of worship. Pupils play their ukuleles and sing with great enthusiasm. The high quality acts of worship which include children's own prayers and class hymns effectively promote the secure Christian ethos and have a strong focus on the life of Jesus. One pupil commented on the class hymns by saying 'They tell the Jesus story from the time when he was born in Bethlehem to when he died and rose again. We follow that journey as we go through the school.' Consequently, the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of pupils is of a very high standard as was demonstrated during the St Gabriel's spirituality week when they explored their own spirituality. They successfully developed greater confidence to express their thoughts and beliefs through creative activities including art, music, sculpture and nature. Pupils of different faiths speak confidently about the central role that Jesus Christ plays in worship, the Christian faith and their own lives. At the same time, they speak with clarity about God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Classroom reflection areas contribute greatly to the development of the pupils' own personal faith journey. They use them spontaneously to write their own prayers and as places where they can reflect and pray.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Religious education is seen as a core subject and has a very high profile. It is led with ambition, expertise and passion. This results in excellent standards of achievement with pupils making very good progress. A highly effective system of monitoring, evaluating and assessment has been successfully developed and is firmly embedded which clearly demonstrates pupils' progress. A creative and imaginative approach to RE teaching results in lessons which pupils say are fun and challenging. They use higher level skills to great effect as was the case in a key stage 2 lesson when pupils explored the meaning of faith through art and music. In this lesson, a piece of art work, 'The Tree of Life' by Mary Fleeson, prompted children to reflect openly on their own faith. They spontaneously joined in with the song 'The Awesome God You Are' and one said 'I joined in because I know it is true that God is awesome.' Another pupil said that 'RE is my favourite subject because I can look at the deep meanings in the Bible. Now I feel I understand how Jesus sacrificed himself just for us and for the forgiveness of our sins'. Lessons are very well differentiated and carefully planned using a questful approach through the Blackburn Diocesan syllabus. The syllabus reflects the Christian foundation of the school as well as giving due weight to other world faiths. As a result of RE teaching that is often outstanding, pupils have an impressive understanding of the key aspects of Christianity and other faiths. This is demonstrated through the class RE displays, working walls, pupils' books and class scrap books which provide evidence of the depth of pupils' understanding and the quality of teaching. The diversity within the school is recognised and celebrated as was the case during the diversity afternoon. Pupils of other cultures shared their traditions with their peers with a focus on the title 'We are all loved, but how are we different and what makes us the same?' Pupils talk knowledgeably about holy books and faith traditions, identifying many similarities between Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. The balance achieved between learning about and learning from religion is excellent. The teaching of RE goes hand in hand with the teaching of Christian values and pupils talk about the difference it makes in their lives. One pupil said 'In RE I have learnt how Jesus changed people's lives, taught them to be good and to care for one another. This is how we should live our lives, too.'

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

Strong and purposeful Christian leadership and the pursuit of excellence secure the highest levels of personal development for all members of the school community. Senior leaders successfully promote the school's distinctively Christian character within a culturally diverse community. Their tireless drive ensures that the school's Christian distinctiveness is strong and bold and that the entire curriculum is firmly based on a distinctive Christian ethos. Senior leaders have a thorough understanding of the school's performance based on effective and insightful self-evaluation and can speak with great confidence about standards. They are committed to driving the school forward with energy and enthusiasm. The work that they have started in renewing the school's mission statement demonstrates their commitment to their school as Christ centred where pupils grow and learn with God. As part of this work, their comparison of the school to a cairn has resulted in spiritual reflection on the hopes and intentions of the school community. The school plans to involve parents and members of the community in order to complete this work.

Leadership of RE and collective worship is excellent and results in highly effective practice throughout the school. Professional development is a key feature of school life and as a result high quality Christian leadership has been secured at all levels. Teamwork, coaching and excellent in-service training prepare staff well for current and future leadership roles in church schools. Some members of staff have progressed in their careers as a result of professional development provided by the diocese. Senior leaders are ambitious for the school and are eager to share their expertise and experiences with other schools.

There are positive and effective links between the school, the church and local and global communities. These frequently result in very successful improvement projects linked to pupils' progress and the needs of all learners. Examples of this include the transformation of the worship environment in the hall, the support the school gives to the local food bank and the Friends of St Gabriel's playground project. The wellbeing of both adults and pupils is of an extremely high priority with leaders living out the school's vision in a practical and hands-on way. Leaders ensure that the needs of their families are taken into account so that there are effective channels of communication. Parents comment on the strength of the school's Christian message in a multi-faith community. Families and members of staff comment on the frequent acts of kindness and compassion shown by the headteacher and other leaders. One new parent said 'Nothing is too much for the teachers here. I can't get over how much love and care they show. That's why I chose St Gabriel's.'