

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Mary's Church of England Primary School High Crompton	
Rushcroft Road, Shaw, Oldham, OL2 7PP	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Manchester
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Oldham
Date of inspection	22 June 2017
Date of last inspection	April 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided 105711
Headteacher	Pamela Hartley
Inspector's name and number	Gail Fullbrook 530

School context

St Mary's CE is a one form entry primary school on the outskirts of Oldham. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs or disability or who have an education health care plan is below the national average. The vast majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds and very few pupils speak English as an additional language.

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

- The highly effective and distinctively Christian leadership of the headteacher and senior leaders ensures that Christian values are deeply embedded in the life and actions of the school. As a result Christian values give excellent support to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development.
- The role of the ethos group in developing pupils' excellent understanding of Christian values and actively promoting them is inspiring. Consequently, pupils have a thorough understanding of the importance of the values in the life of the school.
- Prayer and reflection are at the heart of this thoughtful and prayerful school. Pupils show considerable maturity in their understanding of the nature of both corporate and personal prayer.
- The impact of the school's Christian vision of 'believing and belonging' is observable in the outstanding behaviour of pupils and their relationships with one another.
- As a result of very good teaching and learning in religious education (RE), pupils' responses show a highly creative and thoughtful understanding of themes studied.

Areas to improve

- Extend pupils' experience of difference and diversity in a global context so that they have a broader understanding of the lives of children across the world.
- Review methods of recording in RE so that the wide range of pupils' thoughtful and creative responses is routinely recorded. This will support the school in fully evidencing achievement and understanding in RE.

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

The Christian character of this outstanding school is immediately obvious upon entering the building. Visitors are warmly welcomed. Pupils are courteous and friendly. Eye catching and inspirational displays illustrate aspects of the school's Christian distinctiveness. The relevance of Christian values to all members of the school community is apparent by the frequency with which they are referred to. Parents appreciate the contribution they make to their children's moral and spiritual development. Links with biblical teaching are deep rooted and well understood. The school's ethos group plays a significant and important role in promoting and reinforcing understanding of Christian values. Members of the group often take their chatterboxes, a game promoting discussion around the values, out onto the playground to encourage pupils to engage in thoughtful reflection. When learning about religions other than Christianity, pupils identify those values which are shared and discuss with interest those which are different. The well-being and personal development of pupils is nurtured through a wide range of carefully planned activities and experiences that allow all pupils to shine. Consequently, pupils believe in themselves and know that they are loved by God. This self-belief, along with a secure understanding of Christian values and excellent SMSC development, makes a significant contribution to very good achievement and progress. Attendance is high because pupils are eager to be in school.

The school's curriculum, including extra-curricular activities, is carefully planned to involve a range of experiences that prioritise and nurture SMSC development. Pupils show an excellent sense of purpose in their approach to learning. The school's Christian character is evident across all aspects of school life and staff rightly identify the Christian faith as the 'glue that holds the school together'.

Confident and respectful relationships underpin this cohesive and overtly Christian school community. Pupils' behaviour is exceptional and is exemplified in their attitudes to learning and to one another. When discussing the guidance Christian values give to the choices they make, one pupil commented that the school helps them to 'think really deeply about how we should live our lives'.

Pupils show clarity of thought when talking about the importance of the church locally and nationally. Their understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith is strengthened by a display of photographs of churches pupils have visited on holidays across the world. Pupils enjoy meeting their friends at a link school in Oldham where pupils are predominantly of Asian heritage. One pupil commented, 'It's interesting to know how similar we all are.' Pupils are well informed about the international projects for which they raise funds. However, their understanding of global diversity is sometimes focussed on poverty and need and does not always recognise aspects of richness in the lives of those who live in poorer countries.

The impact of highly effective RE education extends far beyond subject boundaries. Pupils are able to apply an exemplary knowledge of Biblical story and Christian teaching to a wide range of everyday occurrences.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship at St Mary's is a spiritually rich and inspiring time each day when the school community comes together to learn, pray and to sing with joy. Pupils have a deepening awareness of the presence of God in their lives and are developing insight in to the ways in which they can live life well. The school's vision of 'believing and belonging' is nurtured through Christian teaching and times of prayerful reflection. The story of Jesus, told through the festivals and celebrations of the Church year, is understood through drama, art and first hand experiences. Pupils are given opportunities to immerse themselves in each festival and to consider the impact each had at the time and has now. For example, following a dramatic staging of the Easter story, pupils reflect on times of betrayal and times when Jesus was followed by his believers.

Opportunities for prayer and reflection punctuate the school day. Strategically placed reflection areas and spaces where prayers can be placed are of quality and well used. Pupils talk with ease about the nature and purpose of prayer. Times of silence are welcomed and there is a palpable sense of reverence as pupils pray and reflect together. Pupils show spiritual maturity in their commitment to praying for people and situations within the UK and around the world. Playground buddies recognise that in helping pupils to sort out playground problems they become the hearts and hands of Jesus. The ethos group actively promotes classroom prayer spaces.

Worship is Biblically based and develops understanding of key theological concepts. Clergy spend time each week responding to searching questions posed by pupils about, for example, the whereabouts of heaven and why wars are allowed to happen. Each week a class meets with Father Alan for a meditative journey through a Biblical story. This is followed by a time of reflection and discussion. These experiences, along with high quality daily worship, contribute to pupils' excellent spiritual development. Comments such as 'anything's possible if you believe' and 'believing is important but so is acting on it' illustrate pupils' commitment to living out their faith. Pupils have an age appropriate understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and show clarity of thought when discussing each form.

Worship plans are developed in consultation with senior leaders and members of the church community. The Thoughtful Thinking book includes the responses of pupils and parents to worship. Occasional surveys provide

worship leaders with useful feedback which informs future planning. Pupils value the variety of worship styles they experience and the different people, including the ethos group, who lead their worship. Church organised Experience days and Ground Breakers, who visit the school to lead worship each half term, are particularly valued because of the creative ways in which pupils are encouraged to respond.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Teachers show a high level of creativity in the activities used within RE lessons to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding. Consequently, pupils enjoy RE with many referring to it as their favourite subject. Pupils make very good progress and the standards attained by the vast majority of pupils are at least in line with national expectations. A significant proportion of pupils exceed those expectations.

Teaching is frequently outstanding and never less than good. Lessons are relevant to pupils' lives and provide appropriate challenge. Pupils develop expertise in a range of skills including enquiry and interpretation and show particular strength in the skill of evaluative reflection. Year 4 pupils, following discussion about the purpose of church noticeboards, developed personal noticeboards illustrating the ways in which they live out Christian values. Encouragement to consider the values they had left out led, as one pupil put it, 'to some serious soul searching'. As well as discrete RE lessons, RE is often taught within other curriculum subjects. For example, when learning about the geography and history of Mexico, Year 2 pupils also learn about its religious practices. As a result, the curriculum time allocated to RE exceeds that allocated in many schools.

RE makes an outstanding contribution to the school's Christian distinctiveness and to pupils' SMSC development. Attainment and progress in RE are monitored rigorously and carefully tracked. Pupils have a secure knowledge of themes studied and a clear understanding of the ways in which people's beliefs influence their lives. However, evidence of the creative and exciting lessons which pupils are keen to share because they inspire and encourage them, is not routinely recorded in RE workbooks.

Pupils confidently discuss religious themes and skilfully reflect on the contribution RE makes to their own lives and to the Christian distinctiveness of their school. They have a good knowledge of the beliefs and practices of the faiths they learn about and draw out themes that are common to all people of faith. For example, a Year 6 pupil recognised that justice is important to all people of faith, but went on to comment that, 'it doesn't mean exactly the same thing to us all'.

Curriculum leadership of RE is highly effective. Senior leaders are committed to the professional development of all staff teaching RE and ensure that teaching, learning and monitoring are well resourced and appropriately supported. This is evident in the depth of pupils' knowledge and understanding of RE and their enthusiasm for the subject.

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

The school is exceptionally well-led by leaders whose personal faith and commitment to the pursuit of excellence and confident church school distinctiveness are tangible and profound. As a result, the impact of the school's Christian vision is observable in every aspect of school life. Pupils understand the importance of believing and belonging. They are proud of the school's Christian foundation and show considerable commitment to the family of the school. Staff affirm that, 'faith holds our school together' and talk with pride of the school as a family.

Governors and senior leaders tailor the curriculum, and sometimes the school building, to ensure that all pupils feel accepted, have full access to the curriculum and can succeed. The example of alterations made to the school building to accommodate the needs of two pupils illustrates the way in which the school's commitment is lived out. Priority is consistently given to the well-being and personal development of each and every pupil.

Robust and accurate evaluation of the school as a church school, involving staff, pupils and parents, enables school leaders to prioritise key areas for improvement. Christian values underpin school policies. Governors are highly effective in holding the school to account for its distinctiveness and monitor school practice and provision rigorously.

The school's commitment to its Christian distinctiveness is evident in the priority given to the professional development of staff. Senior leaders are supported in developing the expertise and experience that will equip them for their current roles and for the future.

Excellent partnerships with parents, the church and the local community make a significant contribution to the success of the school. The welcome sometimes extended to elderly members of the community to worship with the school enriches the school's Christian identity and extends the spiritual experience of pupils. The partnership between the church and the school is seamless and highly effective. Engagement with Manchester Diocese is strong and the attendance of diocesan staff at the school's recent ethos day illustrates a mutually beneficial relationship. Parents are highly supportive of the school because they know that their children are supported and challenged, nurtured and loved.