

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Christ Church, Church of England Primary School

Highfield, Derwent Road, Lancaster LA1 3ES

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Diocese

Blackburn

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Local authority

Lancashire

Date

23 November 2017

Date of last inspection

January 2013

Type of school and unique reference number

Voluntary Aided Primary 119532

Headteacher

Lesley Brookbanks

Inspector's name and number

David Thorpe 461

School context

Christ Church serves a community to the north of Lancaster City Centre and is within walking distance of the church. It is a smaller than average sized primary school with one class per year group. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Attainment and attendance are both above average. The number of pupils for whom the school receives extra funding, due to social disadvantage, is below average as is the number of pupils with additional needs or disabilities. The deputy headteacher, as well as two other members of the senior leadership team are new to the school since the last inspection.

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

- A clear Christian vision rooted in the school's core Christian values is understood and confidently articulated by all members of the school family. This is enabling the school to be a transforming influence in the lives of the families it serves and ensures that Christ Church is a highly inclusive school.
- Religious education (RE) has a very high profile in the life of the school. Pupils enjoy the challenge to their thinking that it offers and it is most effective in enhancing the Christian character of the school.
- The inspiring Christian leadership of the headteacher, fully supported by senior leaders, governors and staff and parents, makes sure that the school is continually improving and that all pupils achieve their potential.
- The relationships of all members of this Christian school community are excellent and this results in a feeling of belonging to a very special school environment.

Areas to improve

- Develop outdoor reflection areas in the school grounds to further enrich the pupils' experience of prayer and allow them to use the natural environment in developing their spiritual awareness.

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

The school's Christian character is incredibly evident to all who enter the school or look at the school's website. The school's core Christian values of friendship, hope, perseverance, peace, love and forgiveness are succinctly summed up in the mission statement. This states, 'Have faith ... in myself, in others, in God.' This is well understood and confidently articulated by all members of the school community. All aspects of school life are shaped by this, resulting in exceptional relationships across the school and out into the wider community. One, relatively new parent, from a non-Christian background, speaks highly of how supportive the school is of her and her children. She attributes this to the fact that it is a Christian school. These positive relationships ensure that Christ Church is a place where the presence of God is felt. The living out of the core values has a significant impact on the social, moral, spiritual and cultural (SMSC) development of the pupils. Pupils talk confidently, and with great sensitivity, about how they support those who are not as fortunate as they are. This is often through practical help such as contributions to the food bank or fundraising in different ways. In addition, they also speak about how they support through prayer. Through the well-planned RE curriculum, pupils are becoming increasingly aware that Christianity is a worldwide faith. They know that Christians in other parts of the world have the same beliefs but might worship in different ways. The rich curriculum also contributes well to the pupils' SMSC development. Many and varied school trips broaden their experiences and develop individual skills and talents. The school's Christian care and commitment to every pupil, and their family, plays an important part in creating a truly inclusive place of learning. Pupils say that they enjoy being at school and this is shown in attendance rates that are above the national average. Pupils are proud of the Christian foundation of their school and the part they play in making it a safe and exciting place to learn. Consequently, their behaviour is exemplary and exclusions are very rare. The academic achievement of the children is rarely below national expectations and is often above. The school always goes the extra mile to ensure the earliest possible support is put in place for those pupils that need it. This results in a recognition from parents that the school is living out its Christian values and not just talking about them. Pupils know that this support is because they are loved. Striking displays emphasise the school's Christian character and prompt the pupils' spiritual awareness and understanding well.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is exceptionally well planned and each act of worship has an exceedingly clear structure. This provides worship leaders with a consistent but flexible pattern whilst giving the pupils a sense of liturgical structure and familiarity. Each act of worship includes The Lord's Prayer and the Grace with other prayers, including verses and responses, used when appropriate. Pupils and adults engage fully in worship. Worship is relevant, sincere and varied and makes a significant difference to the lives of the members of the school family. The variety of worship styles and leaders is a strength of the school. Weekly class worship provides an opportunity for pupils to further explore theological ideas at an appropriate level. An outstanding characteristic of worship is the highly competent pupils who are involved in planning, leading and evaluating worship. They do so with great confidence, enjoyment and sensitivity. They are exceptional role models and wonderful ambassadors for the school. They will often, independently, re-write well-known Bible stories to use in whole school worship. For example, the account of Daniel in the Lions' Den was re-written to help even the youngest of pupils see its relevance. The values of hope and love were highlighted from the story and then skilfully worked into everyday life. Bible readings, excellent singing, coupled with spontaneous prayer are all part of regular times of spiritual inspiration. The pupils have a well-developed awareness of God as Father, of Jesus as Son and of The Holy Spirit as guide.

Prayer is central to worship and pupils speak of how important it is and how it helps them to be better people. They value the classroom reflection areas and are able to explain that these support them spiritually and help them to pray. They comment that they would like similar opportunities to be available outside which is acknowledged by the school. Regular whole school opportunities for prayer are planned and appreciated. Each year two prayer space events are held for the whole school community. One child wrote a prayer on the theme of peace asking for God to 'give your peace to the people of Israel'. Another prayed for their ill granddad that he might 'receive peace at Christmas.' The vicar or curate lead worship in school every week. Throughout the year there are several planned opportunities for the pupils, staff and parents to worship together in the church building. Such occasions help the pupils gain further insight into some Anglican traditions. These worship times unquestionably play their part in strengthening the links between school and church.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

The importance of RE in the life of this school is demonstrated by its high priority as a core curriculum subject. A minimum of 5% curriculum time is dedicated to RE and often exceeds this. It is carefully planned and resourced and forms a central part of the school improvement process. The subject leader is an excellent example of subject leadership. Standards in RE are at least in line with other core subjects and often above. The pupils' overall achievement is excellent. As a result of the school investing in RE, as well as some excellent teaching, RE makes an outstanding contribution to the Christian character of the school. An impressive example of this is when a Year 5 pupil, when talking about RE, said that she had learned that 'Truth is always victorious.' Pupils are genuinely enthusiastic about the subject. A Year 6 boy stated that he enjoys RE because, 'Every question is important ... as long as I can justify my opinion it's OK.' A Year 1 pupil, in response to what the feeding of the five thousand teaches us about Jesus answered, 'It shows that he's the real God.'

Pupils are self-assured when talking about the Christian faith or indeed other faiths. The school works hard to ensure that pupils understand and appreciate non-Christian faiths. As a result of this, the pupils display excellent knowledge of other faiths. The school's multi-faith week is a highlight in the school calendar for pupils. The weekly timetable is put to one side as each class studies a faith other than Christianity. This culminates in the whole school celebrating the many similarities and sharing what they have learned. A Year 6 pupil, after studying Sikhism, talked confidently about how the Sikh faith grew from Hinduism. Parents appreciate this aspect of school life as they can see how it is preparing their children for life in modern society.

RE teaching is never less than good and is often outstanding. Staff are confident with their subject knowledge and as a result will correct misunderstandings. For example, in a Year 1 RE lesson the teacher very skilfully and sensitively corrected the answer that 'Jesus is magic' by asking the other children, 'Is that what we say?' The response was 'No, Jesus is powerful.' RE work is thoroughly marked and this helps pupils understand what they need to think about next in order to improve. The school enthusiastically uses the diocesan RE syllabus and appreciates its flexibility.

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

The headteacher leads by example, living out the school's Christian values for all to see. School leaders at all levels, including pupils, are confident when talking about the Christian vision of the school. Staff are excellent role models and as a result parents cannot speak highly enough of the school. 'It's just a fantastic place and it's full of amazing teachers' is the comment of one parent but echoed by others. Parents recognise the school's distinctive Christian ethos and support it with enthusiasm and passion because of the impact it has upon their children's lives.

The school's success has been achieved through exemplary teamwork, built on outstanding relationships. Senior leaders are very clear about their role and this provides the confidence to be innovative. Governors ensure that all statutory arrangements for both RE and collective worship are in place and fully met. They are regular visitors to school and consequently know the school very well. They are well-informed, resulting in them being in a good position to both support and challenge. Acting as critical friends, they help set the strategic Christian direction for the school.

School leaders, by modelling the core values of the school, ensure that Christ Church is a happy and nurturing place to learn and work. The most vulnerable children are extremely well-supported through the active promotion of the school's core Christian values. The school uses and appreciates diocesan support and positively and actively prepares staff for future leadership roles within church schools. One former member of staff is now the headteacher in another diocesan school.

The school regularly raises money for a wide variety of charities both Christian and secular. This results in children who know that this is a demonstration of Christian care in action. The Christian character of the school is central to school improvement and is an explicit thread running through the school's development plan. Detailed action plans for RE and worship are included in the whole school development plan and are reviewed regularly. These plans set challenging targets and strategies for continual school improvement.

SIAMS report November 2017, Christ Church CE Primary, Highfield, Derwent Road, Lancaster LA1 3ES