

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Thomas Church of England (VA) Primary School

Poplar Drive, Kidsgrove, Stoke on Trent, ST7 4HT	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Lichfield
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Staffordshire
Date of inspection	10 November 2016
Date of last inspection	23 September 2011
Type of school and unique reference number	124380
Headteacher	Lynne Williamson
Inspector's name and number	Huw D Bishop 344

School context

St Thomas's Church of England Primary School is smaller than average primary school and currently has 206 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. There are a small number of children from minority ethnic groups and this proportion is now higher than it was at the time of the last inspection. A higher proportion of pupils are disadvantaged, eligible for free school meals and are supported by additional funding known as the pupil premium. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disability and are given extra help with their learning. The school was last inspected by Ofsted in January 2016 and was judged to be maintaining its good standards and described as a 'truly inclusive school'. The school has very strong links with St Thomas's parish church, and works in close partnership with The King's School, a local Church of England secondary school.

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

- The outstanding leadership of the headteacher, strongly supported by staff as they proclaim Gospel principles as the basis for distinctive and clear Christian values that guide every aspect of school life.
- The positive ways in which school leaders and governors have secured strong attainment and progress for all groups of pupils in school, meeting their academic needs well within an inclusive and caring Christian environment.
- The quality of relationships in school which are very strong and appreciated by pupils and parents alike. Pupils are happy, enthusiastic, enjoy their learning and are eager to show it.
- Worship that is joyful, warm, relevant and personalised so that every pupil has the opportunity to develop their own spirituality, supported strongly by leaders and members of the parish church.
- Governors who are passionate about the school's distinctive Christian ethos and promote its work without compromise, making sure that church and school work together in mission to the local community.

Areas to improve

- Embed the assessment process in religious education (RE) in line with the new whole school policy, to show clear and consistent evidence of progression.

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

This vibrant school community thrives within an atmosphere in which the development of the whole child is secured through a strong commitment to Christian values. The school's mission statement 'Learning for life with Jesus' is evident on all documents and there are visual reminders of this around the school. Pupils begin their learning journey in school having received a Bible in the reception class and again, when they leave in Year 6 to go on to their secondary schools. Pupils are able to talk confidently about the importance of core values in the context of the teaching and example of Jesus and the way this influences their daily life in school. The school's proclamation of these values is also evident in the outstanding relationships between all members of the school community. Pupils talk about the three 'golden rules' of truth, kindness and determination which underpin behaviour in school. This also helps them to understand the concept of the Trinity and show Christian values in action, which they describe as 'the most important thing in our school'. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) understanding is outstanding as a result of this focused Christian ethos and pastoral care. The 'difference and diversity' topics taught at Key Stage 2 ensure that pupils have a clear understanding of and respect for other faith communities and how their own local community is made up of a variety of cultures and beliefs. Academic attainment in 2016 was above the national average in headline figures for most areas and groups of pupils and the progress information for pupils in school now shows that this level of success will continue. This is because the outstanding Christian environment creates a culture in which all pupils feel secure and supported and this enables them to learn confidently. This success is also closely interwoven with the development of pupils' personal spirituality; learning and worship are interlinked and pupils can talk about their beliefs and their importance and are given many opportunities to do so in lessons as well as worship. Pupils also say that they have a voice that will be heard by leaders and that their views are respected. This is because the school's actions to improve pupils' chances are so strongly rooted in distinctive Christian values, that they make sure each pupil is known, valued and inspired to succeed. Parents, too, say that they feel part of the school's family community and this encourages them to be proactive with school. Pupils' efforts are constantly acknowledged and celebrated and, as a result, pupils want to be in school. Pupils' behaviour and attitude to learning is outstanding because they enjoy and appreciate all the learning experiences they are given. Pupils enjoy a broad and rich curriculum which is creative, interactive and weaves across subject boundaries making learning wholesome and relevant. This is enriched by attractive displays and classroom reflection areas which link subject topics to Christian values. This helps to widen pupils' knowledge and understanding. Christian signs and symbols reinforce the school's distinctiveness and support pupils' spiritual awareness and development really well. The school has a strong commitment to Christian stewardship and supports a range of national charities. Pupils are also proactive in the local community too, supporting a Food Bank and the Toy Appeal by a local supermarket. Pupils understand the importance of being effective stewards of God's creation and follow the school's 'eco code' with enthusiasm and diligence. Pupils speak convincingly of the importance of caring, kindness and showing generosity and are able to link these values to the Gospel foundation for their three golden rules.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is central to the life of the school. It is planned carefully and includes themes based on the Bible, Christian values, and festivals, as well as those of other faiths and events of national significance. Jesus is at the heart of all the school does and worship helps pupils to understand how the teaching of Jesus guides Christians in their daily lives. Worship makes a significant impact on pupils' lives and as such, pupils are very aware of its theological basis. They say that Bible stories challenge them to think about their own behaviour. Pupils lead and contribute to worship too and they enjoy these opportunities to take on responsibility and show what they believe. Prayer is given a high profile in worship and pupils participate fully in public and private prayer in school. Pupils enter and leave the hall reverently and interact and share ideas on the chosen theme with each other when given the chance, as well as reflecting silently. Pupils sing their praise with great joy. The cross is the focal point during worship and the hall is enriched with a range of banners on the walls with Bible quotations and timely links to Christian values. Worship is led by a range of leaders including all teachers and the vicar. This gives pupils experience of a range of worship styles and also helps pupils to understand the broad nature of worship including Anglican tradition and practice. There is a very active link with the parish church and a group of parents and parishioners meet regularly to pray for the school. Pupils and their parents visit church for the principal Christian festivals. Pupils know and say the grace in worship and this has developed their understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each class has a reflection area which is easily accessible to the pupils. These areas reflect differences across the age-range and provide another opportunity for pupils to nurture their personal spirituality. Opportunities for personal prayer are valued by the pupils and many speak about times in their life when prayer has been helpful to them. Pupils can place prayer requests in a prayer box and tie strands of ribbon to show how the school community is 'woven together'. The forest school is also used weekly by classes and enables pupils to learn new skills in the outdoor environment as well as appreciating the wonder of God's creation and the need to look after it. Feedback on worship is obtained from pupils, staff, parents and governors and this is evaluated, discussed and forms part of whole school

development. A significant number of parents attend the Friday worship in school as well as other formal occasions.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

The school has a strong commitment to developing all aspects of teaching and learning in RE and progress and attainment compare well to national expectations. This is achieved through strong and varied teaching and the good use of a range of appropriate resources. RE is taught in a creative way with a very strong emphasis on the development of Christian values. Pupils are enthusiastic and inspired by the creative experiences offered through lessons and enjoy learning about all religions. There is a clear balance between learning about religion and the opportunities that pupils are given to think more deeply about what their learning means to them. Pupils are enthusiastic and say that they enjoy a variety of written activities, discussion, drama and art in RE. Secure knowledge and thinking skills were shown in a lesson about Diwali. Pupils used their prior learning and responded confidently when answering questions and when asked to express their opinions. This careful consideration of ideas made a strong contribution to the development of their personal spirituality. Similarly in another lesson where effective learning was taking place, pupils were considering light and darkness and comparisons were demonstrated through visual stimuli and a practical game. This led to the teaching of Jesus as the Light of the world. Pupils were able to see how the theological idea was supported by everyday things that they were used to, to distinguish light from dark. The high level of enjoyment shown by pupils and the way they responded to the teacher's guidance meant that they were all making good progress in their learning. The RE coordinator and the headteacher monitor the effectiveness of teaching and learning in RE. Book scrutiny and learning walks are two strategies employed by leaders to ensure that standards of learning remain high and pupils love to talk about their work and explain its importance. School documents evidence the work done and the impact of the coordinator's effective leadership since the last inspection. The school works in collaboration with The King's School for both curriculum and worship events and this has a positive impact on securing the continuity of pupils' academic progress and their personal spirituality within a distinctive Church of England ethos as they move on to secondary education. The RE coordinator has undertaken training for the new 'Understanding Christianity' resources and this programme is being rolled out to all classes in 2017. There are strong links between the programmes of study used in RE and the themes explored in worship. The school benefits from support in RE given by diocesan advisers. Although a learning dialogue is established between teachers and their pupils through marking in pupils' books, the formal assessment process needs to be embedded so that it shows clear evidence of pupils' progression in the subject.

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

The headteacher, senior leaders and governors are highly effective in articulating the school's distinctive Christian vision and ethos and in promoting that ethos throughout the school to support effective learning. They are committed to sustaining an outstanding Christian environment in which all aspects of pupils' development and wellbeing are fostered and promoted through biblical teaching and Christian values. This contributes strongly to the good outcomes that all groups of pupils now enjoy. The headteacher's own Christian faith is very evident in all aspects of her leadership in school and she attributes pupils' successful learning to their ability to draw on an understanding of the Christian way of life. Pupils and parents agree with this and this is made clear through the school's mission statement 'Learning for life with Jesus'. Foundation governors are knowledgeable, experienced and passionate about their school and have a clear understanding of their role. They are highly committed and support the school in a number of ways, including regular visits to school. Action plans for RE and worship are included in the school's improvement planning and are discussed at governors' meetings. Leaders seek the views of parents and pupils in reviewing the school's Christian distinctiveness and use every opportunity to challenge, monitor and evaluate the school's work. School leaders and governors are successful in ensuring that the academic, pastoral and spiritual needs of all groups of pupils are met. Issues raised at the last inspection have been fully addressed. RE and collective worship are led with commitment and there is a genuine desire to find ways to improve still further. Governors are totally committed to the professional development of all staff in school and this includes succession planning for future models of Church school leadership and development in the local area. Parents appreciate the dedicated work of staff in supporting their children's personal and spiritual development as well as their academic success. The school's own evaluation of its work is accurate - 'There is a passion to bring glory to God in all that we do and to never settle for anything less...' St Thomas's Church of England School is an outstanding example of church and school working hand in hand in a Christian ministry of learning and service to pupils, their parents and the local community.

SIAMS report November 2016 St Thomas's CE (VA) Primary School, Kidsgrove ST7 4HT