

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Thomas' Church of England Aided Primary School

Poplar Drive
Kidsgrove
Stoke-on-Trent
ST7 4HT

Diocese: Lichfield

Local authority: Staffordshire

Dates of inspection: 23rd September 2011

Date of last inspection: 17th October 2008

School's unique reference number: 124380

Headteacher: Lynne Williamson

Inspector's name and number: Mrs Helen Gilbert 633

School context

St Thomas' Church of England School is smaller than average Primary School with 193 pupils on roll. There is a greater than average proportion of pupils with special needs or disabilities and specialist resource provision for three hearing impaired pupils. Most pupils are of White British heritage and there are no pupils with English as an additional language. The school has very strong links with the Anglican Church of St. Thomas which is situated about 1 mile away.

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

Strong Christian values are embedded in every aspect of the life and work of the school and have a profound impact on the self esteem, attitudes and the achievements of pupils. The way in which deputy head, staff, governors and clergy actively support the head teacher in promoting the Christian witness make this a very special school. This, together with the effective symbols and displays throughout the school and its grounds, ensures that pupils develop well spiritually and value belonging to a church school.

Established strengths

- The outstanding Christian ethos which is firmly embedded in the life and culture of the school and the evident love and respect for all children.
- The attitudes and behaviour of pupils who demonstrate mature attitudes and communicate with confidence.
- The lively and engaging worship which impacts on pupils' attitudes, their spiritual development and their understanding of the Christian faith.

Focus for development

- To develop the role of Religious Education in promoting children's understanding of other faiths and cultures
- To engage children in further developing their use of indoor and outdoor prayer areas for quiet reflection.

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

All pupils feel valued, respected and supported in everything they do. As a result, children value and respect each other and their environment. Behaviour is very good and children feel safe and confident that staff will support them as they seek to resolve any issues that may arise. This is because the vision and work of the school are based on strong Christian values which permeate every aspect of the school's life. The Christian ethos is immediately discernible as you enter the building. These values are clearly articulated through the school website, prospectus, vicar's letters, newsletters and highly imaginative banners and displays throughout the school. Pupils are proud of their achievements and are excellent advocates for their school. They value belonging to a church school and firmly believe that this makes a difference. Pupils of all ages quote the school motto, "*Learn for life with Jesus*" and the Golden Rules, "*What would Jesus do?*" as one child said, "*We know what the school expects. We do our best and we are rewarded.*" Parents are overwhelmingly positive and say the school helps their children's understanding of the Christian faith as well as providing them with a high level of support. A number of parents travel a considerable distance to bring their children to this school. Children believe that prayer is important and have opportunities for more formal prayers such as the Lord's Prayer and the Prayer of Saint Francis as well as more informal prayer during the school day. Children appreciate the opportunity to place prayers in the prayer box although some older pupils thought more should be said to encourage greater use of this. Recently this opportunity to ask for prayer has been extended to parents and carers through the use of a prayer box in the entrance hall. All children were aware of the prayer focus areas around the school and its grounds although some felt that more encouragement was needed to ensure that children used them. Children have a strong sense of social justice and relate the importance of caring for others to Christian teaching. They speak with enthusiasm of activities to support local, national and global charities including sponsoring a child in Guatemala and one child explained that in this way, "*We follow the example of Jesus.*" As a result community cohesion is good. The school has very strong links with St Thomas' Church and the vicar is a valued member of the school community who leads worship and teaches some RE modules.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

All pupils say they enjoy worship and all shared very positive responses about its impact. One pupil described worship as, “*an exciting way to find out about the Bible.*” Worship is well led by the Head Teacher, Vicar and by the Deputy who is also the Worship co-ordinator. The worship programme is planned for the whole year, based around core themes and the church calendar. There is a simple system in place for evaluating worship which involves pupils ascertaining the views of their peers. This term the questions used have been refined to encourage pupils to think more deeply about the impact of worship. Variety is achieved through a balance of whole school and classroom worship and a range of worship leaders. Excellent use is made of technology to enhance worship and there are plans to develop this further. Modern songs are used in which Jesus is central and which encourage children’s participation through actions as well as words. The act of worship seen was lively, engaging, energetic and fun. It also taught children a story from the Bible, about God’s love for each individual and their response to others, and provided opportunity for quieter reflection and prayer. Friday worship is attended by a good number of parents and grandparents who evidently enjoy participating in the worship songs and times of reflection. Many remain for coffee afterwards which affords opportunity for relationship building between parents, governors and the vicar and enhances the sense of welcome that parents have in the school. Parents say that worship gives children an understanding of the Christian Faith, the importance of prayer and a sense of God. Pupils value their many opportunities to take part in daily worship by providing music, dance, readings, and prayers. Each class prepares and leads an act of Worship throughout the year and on occasions pupils visit other schools to lead worship and share their excellent practice. Pupils value corporate prayer and time for reflection and sense that it influences attitudes and relationships throughout the school. Visits to the church during the year, together with weekly worship give children an understanding of a range of Anglican traditions. They are familiar with the different colours used throughout the year and with Anglican practices such as infant baptism and the eucharist.

The effectiveness of Religious Education is good

Standards in Religious Education are good. Teaching in the three lessons observed was good and practical tasks ensured that pupils were engaged and enthusiastic. Older pupils provided thoughtful answers to some difficult questions. RE has a high profile in the school and all classrooms contain stimulating displays relating to the current RE topics. The RE plan for the year draws primarily from the Lichfield Diocesan framework but also includes some additional topics including one entitled ‘Big Questions’ for Year 6. The vicar makes a valuable contribution to RE by teaching a number of topics throughout the school including Advent, the Parables, Communion, Rites of Passage and the Christingle. Pupils’ understanding of Anglican traditions is enhanced by visits to the church where they also learn about ‘a day in the life of the vicar’! Assessment in RE is carried out at the end of each topic. The co-ordinator also monitors progress through talking to pupils and monitoring books. The majority of pupils believe that RE, together with Worship, has a positive impact on both their attitudes and their knowledge and understanding, particularly of the Christian faith. Pupils are developing a good understanding of Bible stories and the basic tenets of the Christian faith and also of a range of Anglican traditions and practices. They can talk confidently about a range of New Testament stories and can link the teachings and example of Jesus to their own code for living. Whilst pupils learn about Judaism and Islam, older pupils said they found the teaching of other faiths less interesting and at times ‘*confusing*’ and this is an area identified for development.

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

Leadership is very effective at all levels throughout the school. The Head Teacher has a very clear Christian vision and gives a strong lead in building on the work of her predecessor to ensure that St Thomas' is an outstanding church school. She is extremely well supported in this by the Deputy Head, Staff, Vicar and Governors who also display excellent leadership. All governors have a very clear idea of what they want their church school to be and this has driven the appointment process for the head teacher. Christian values are explicit in the Mission Statement and underpin all aspects of the life and work of the school. All stakeholders celebrate the school's commitment to nurturing the sense of family at St. Thomas'. The school council take their role very seriously and are excellent advocates for their school. The process for electing the school council is very rigorous and ensures that those elected are committed to improving their school and can articulate their ideas clearly. They value their regular meetings and can cite numerous examples of ways in which they have influenced changes and initiated fund raising activities to support a range of charities. As part of ongoing CPD staff and governors participate in an away day at Shallowford House. This has enabled them to take an active role in shaping the school's direction and in using the Toolkit to carry out a robust evaluation of the distinctive Christian character and effectiveness of the school as a church school. RE and Worship are in the School Improvement Plan and are well led and managed by the Deputy Head. There are very strong links with the local church that benefit both church and school. The vicar is highly committed to the school and is clear that *'the church knows what it wants for the school.'* There are strong links with the diocese and the school appreciates the advice and support received from the diocesan adviser. Roles and responsibilities are clear. As one pupil said, *'Mrs Williamson is the boss, but she's not the boss of the world, because Jesus is.'*

SIAS report September 2011 St Thomas' Church of England Aided Primary School,
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