



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Balshaw's Church of England High School

Church Road, Leyland
PR25 3AH

Diocese: Blackburn

Local authority: Lancashire

Dates of inspection: 24th February 2014

Date of last inspection: June 2009

School's unique reference number: 119775

Headteacher: Jo Venn

Inspector's name and number: Lyn Field NS151

School context

This is a very popular, non-selective school that has been oversubscribed for many years. It is of average size for a secondary school and the proportion of pupils speaking English as a second language is well below average. Similarly, pupils with special educational needs or those for whom the school receives extra funding is also below average. Ofsted judged the school to be outstanding in September 2013. It was also judged outstanding as a church school in 2009. The headteacher is due to retire in July after twenty years in post.

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

- The school fully achieves its mission to nurture pupils in their Christian faith, support those of other faiths and challenge those of no faith (The Way Ahead review of church schools 2001)
- The outstanding spiritual leadership of the headteacher over many years has shaped the Christian character of this school so that it influences its work at every possible level of the school and wider community.
- The attention paid to the wellbeing of staff inspires them to provide exceptional care for their pupils who achieve highly as a result.
- Governors are constantly looking ahead to ensure the Christian character of the school is sustained.
- The spiritual life of the school is sustained through the depth of its prayer life and the work of the chaplain.

Areas to improve

- To put formal systems in place whereby governors, together with senior leaders, will be able to check that the strong Christian ethos of the school is being sustained and also be able to provide clear benchmarks for future leaders.
- To monitor where a focus on religious beliefs contributes to learning across all subjects in order to share good practice and achieve consistency

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

The belief that every child is made in the image of God lies at the centre of the school's Christian vision. This affects how the staff approach every encounter they have with pupils. Their loving and non-judgemental attitudes put into action Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Pupils follow their example with excellent behaviour. Respect, acceptance and compassion are the basis of excellent relationships and there is no room for prejudice of any kind. One pupil summed up the views of them all in saying: 'We are made to feel we are always worth bothering about, no matter what'. As a result, achievement is high and continuing to rise so pupils for whom the school receives extra funding are rapidly catching up with other pupils. Their progress targets are challenging, but realistic, because teachers do more than work by numbers and take into account what they know about pupils' capacity to learn.

Balshaw's has a rich curriculum with a large number of clubs set up in response to the needs and interests of every individual. This, in itself, reflects its Christian vision but it also offers pupils the chance to take part in openly Christian activities such as the 'Y' club led by the chaplain. Pupils develop a strong social and moral conscience alongside their excellent spiritual development. Much of their extensive charity work is suggested and organised by the pupils themselves. Pupils understand the Christian significance of why much of this work is given particular focus during the Church's time of Lent. Fair Trade issues play a role both in and out of the classroom and, year after year, pupils receive Christian Leadership and Distinctiveness awards from the diocese.

Teachers in all subjects take advantage of opportunities to explore how religious beliefs have a bearing on what pupils are learning. Two striking examples among many were exploring Christian songs from different cultures and the religious background to Romeo and Juliet. These activities strengthen the Christian character of the school but they are not monitored closely enough to highlight good practice and pick up where there might be gaps or missed opportunities across the curriculum. Religious education (RE) makes a significant contribution to learning as lessons explore the Christian interpretation of the school's values and challenge pupils' misconceptions about the Bible and key religious figures. Pupils fully appreciate that Christianity is a multi-cultural world faith because they have direct contact with Christians abroad through the Bethany Project and a clinic in Malawi.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

All pupils and staff meet for worship every day. It takes a wide variety of forms but is always distinctively Christian and reflects Anglican traditions. Even pupils who do not profess a faith themselves regard this time as important because it makes Christianity accessible and opens up the activities and practices of the Church. Voluntary communion services and prayer breakfasts equally ensure that the needs of regular worshippers are met. Each pupil carries a copy of the Lord's Prayer that is used for prayer and reflection on a daily basis. All meetings and staff briefings include prayer, and voluntary groups for pupils, staff and parents are firmly established and regularly respond to requests for prayer.

The celebration of Christian festivals follows the church year and deepens pupils' knowledge of key Christian beliefs, particularly the person of Jesus and God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Worship is used to mark events that have been, and continue to be, significant in the life of the school community. These are often tragic moments involving the death of current or former pupils and staff. An award winning memorial garden, designed by the chair of governors, is used by pupils for worship in small groups and as a place of solace and quiet reflection. The open invitation to use this space is taken up year after year by many families and, therefore, is an important spiritual resource for the whole community.

The membership of the worship committee represents all groups in the school community. The name is something of a misnomer as it actually monitors the wider Christian life of the school. The group is constantly alert to how well new developments are working and sets priorities for action on an annual basis. The plan reflects the constant drive to improve. However, it does not analyse

well enough why some initiatives are successful and others are slower to have an impact. The themes for worship capture pupils' interest and frequently inspire them to be part of the school's extensive charity work. Although a basic planning structure is in place, there is plenty of flexibility for tutors to choose topics that pick up the current concerns of their pupils. This is an area where the partnership with the diocese has been especially effective in building the confidence of leaders through training and the chaplains' network. Worship always reinforces the values of the school with Biblical teaching so pupils are confident to explain how they constantly take messages from worship to use in their own lives.

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

The work of the headteacher and governors is inspired by their own personal faith. It informs decisions and shapes the way they manage situations on a daily basis. Pupils succeed here because of the unconditional love they receive that is understood in distinctively Christian terms. The exceptional spiritual leadership of the headteacher over twenty years is acknowledged well beyond the school because of the impact it has made on the lives of past pupils and their families. It is equally understood that future leaders will take different approaches but governors are determined that the Christian ethos will continue to make a significant impact on pupils' achievement and wellbeing. To this end they have made every possible effort to ensure that the responsibility for Christian leadership is successfully transferred to the new postholder. This process started eighteen months ago when governors revisited and agreed their vision for the Christian character of the school, to be used in the appointment of the new headteacher.

The governors hold senior leaders to account for how this distinctively Christian vision makes a difference to all groups in the community. What is most striking is that they focus on how it shapes future plans and decisions such as the appointment of key staff. This is in addition to retrospective feedback from the Worship (& Ethos) Committee on what has been achieved. However, there are no formal systems in place to ensure that governors routinely check that the clarity of their vision is still widely understood and how its impact is being sustained. This is particularly important at this point of transition.

Collective worship and RE are central to the Christian character of the school. They retain a high profile in the staffing structure and a significant amount of time is allocated for pupils to experience both. The school impressively meets the expectations that the National Society has set for schools in the 'Statement of Entitlement for RE'. All pupils leave the school with some form of accreditation in RE and standards at GCSE are above those in schools nationally and still improving.

The role of the chaplain has proved highly successful. It touches all groups in the school and opens up networks across church communities. The chaplain is very skilled in communicating with pupils. Her support and wise counsel is readily acknowledged as yet another strength of the school's outstanding pastoral care. Regular liaison with the diocese continues to benefit governors, staff and pupils, for example through the popular Breathe project to enhance pupils' spiritual awareness.

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