



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Blackburn St. James Church of England Primary School

Earl Street,
Blackburn,
Lancashire.
BB1 8EG

Previous SIAMS grade: Good

Diocese: Blackburn

Local authority: Blackburn with Darwen

Date of inspection: 5 February 2015

Date of last inspection: 12 October 2009

School's unique reference number: 119502

Headteacher: Philip Morgan

Inspector's name and number: Anne B. Woodcock 445

School context

The school serves a mixed socio-economic community close to the centre of Blackburn. The vast majority of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds in which English is not the first language. Most of the 371 pupils are of the Muslim faith. The school experienced a recent fall in numbers due to the opening of a Free Islamic School nearby. A significant number of children attract the Pupil Premium grant. The school is housed in two buildings separated by a narrow road. The senior leadership team has been strengthened by the appointment of two assistant headteachers in the past year.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Blackburn St. James Church of England Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding.

- Pupils' exceptionally good behaviour and attitudes are closely attributed to their understanding of the school's nine core Christian values.
- Highly effective nurturing relationships, based on Christian values, support pupils and their families. This results in consistently improving levels of attainment and outstanding progress.
- Strong, purposeful Christian leadership and the pursuit of excellence secures the highest levels of personal development for all members of the school community.
- Links with the church, community and local inter-faith groups significantly enhance the school's Christian character and pupils' learning experiences.

Areas to improve

- Develop pupils' awareness of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith to extend and deepen their understanding of diversity.
- Extend the focus on God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in collective worship so that pupils can develop their understanding.

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

Children's understanding of the school's nine core Christian values is exceptional. All speak confidently about the way in which the values are used in school. One Year 4 child explained, 'They are what everyone in our school shows all the time. Our values help us to make the right decision and make you a better person.' Children's excellent behaviour and sense of personal worth is clearly related to the school's well-embedded and explicitly expressed Christian character. Strong, nurturing relationships ably support pupils and their families, helping to overcome barriers and promote active learning. Highly effective teaching supports the needs of all learners, including those with additional needs. As a result children make rapid, often outstanding progress from their lower than average starting points. Standards of attainment are good and continue to rise. Children thoroughly enjoy their learning experiences. One Year 3 child explained, 'Our teachers provide us with fun, exciting topics, are enthusiastic and help us be the best we can be.' Pupils' personal development is outstanding. They are confident, articulate and mature. They show great respect for others and take considerable pride in their school and all its achievements. Year 5 children explain, 'We are exceptional in all we do,' so that is our new tag line. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is extremely well supported. They have many opportunities to explore God's world and to express their ideas through the arts and sciences. Children are reflective and cherish being able to respond to challenging questions. Religious education (RE) makes a very significant contribution to SMSC, both through discrete lessons and cross-curricular themes. Pupils' understanding of and respect for different faiths and cultures is remarkable and is recognised by parents as being outstanding. However, they do not yet fully recognise Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship has a very important place in the daily life of the school. It is much valued by children, one of whom said, 'We all come together as one big family.' Their ownership of collective worship is exceptional. Through the worship committee, children plan and lead worship both in school and in church. They evaluate all acts of worship and meet to discuss Christian, British and other faith values. Daily acts of worship are highly inclusive and they inspire pupils to reflect and consider the way in which they treat others and view their world. 'What we learn is good to use in your daily life,' explained one child, 'because we don't just tolerate others, we welcome them.' Worship is very well led and managed. Meticulous records are kept and planning is robust. Although firmly based on Christian values and Bible teaching, world faith festivals such as Diwali, Eid and Hanukkah, are also celebrated. As a result, children have an exceptionally good knowledge of how God is worshipped by people of faith. They know many Bible stories and can relate events in the life of Jesus. Through the use of candles, the symbolism of the Trinity is used in worship. However, children's level of understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is not yet well developed. Highly effective evaluation procedures are in place. All members of the school family evaluate worship. Following the worship lead by a year two class, attended by parents, a reception child recorded her evaluation saying, 'I enjoyed it and learned about Jesus making the blind man better. He was kind.' Time is given for prayer and personal reflection. Pupils write and use their own prayers, many of which are displayed in the well-used classroom reflection areas. The church supports the planning and delivery of worship effectively. Parents value and attend the special services held in church at Easter and Christmas, reflecting the growing level of community cohesion and understanding.

The effectiveness of the religious education (RE) is outstanding

RE makes an outstanding contribution to the school's distinctiveness and to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural growth. Children are excited by their learning and they consider the subject to be important. Extremely good, often outstanding teaching ensures that children are

fully engaged. Lessons are very well-planned, making effective use of a range of different learning styles and activities which meet the needs of all learners. Children are challenged to extend their thinking. They work together very well, sharing ideas openly and honestly. In one Year 6 lesson, children had linked the Jewish festival of Pesach to the Last Supper and Eucharist. They used their own memories and reflected upon different aspects of the Eucharist, sharing thoughts such as, 'I ask for forgiveness and I feel better because my sins will be washed away.' All pupils make excellent progress and standards of attainment in RE are very high. Rigorous assessment procedures are used to inform future planning and highlight any gaps in learning. The high quality of pupils' work is reflected in the comprehensive class scrapbooks and portfolios of evidence as well as in their work and displays. Pupils know how to improve their work because marking and feedback provide them with next steps information. They are involved in assessing their own work, using 'I Can' statements as well as their learning objectives. A highly appropriate balance of the study of Christianity and other world faiths is achieved. As one parent commented, 'What they learn about their own religion (Islam) in RE is outstanding.' Children talk knowledgeably about holy books and faith traditions, identifying the many similarities between Christianity, Islam and Judaism. The balance achieved between learning about and learning from religion is excellent.

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

The school is exceptionally well-led by senior leaders whose commitment to the pursuit of excellence is tangible and profound. They inspire and support all members of the school family, ensuring that the school's shared core Christian values are 'lived daily'. Extremely rigorous self-evaluation processes actively involve all members of the school community. As a result, the school has a very accurate knowledge of the impact its Christian character has on pupils. Governors challenge and support the work of the school effectively. Monitoring of RE and collective worship is very thorough. All issues raised by the previous report have been fully addressed. Governors have secured high quality Christian leadership at all levels. The leadership of RE and collective worship is excellent. Governors focus strongly on continued improvement. They ensure that the curriculum and other provision, such as that of a Family Support worker, meets the needs of all children, raises aspirations and leads to rising levels of attainment. Partnerships with the diocese and other local schools make a significant contribution to the school's distinctiveness and to pupil achievement. Staff and governors benefit from purposeful professional development which supports all aspects of school improvement. The pupil voice is exceptionally strong. Pupils accept responsibilities eagerly and are extremely proud of their achievements. They explain how they raise funds for Muslim and national charities because God wants them to show love and concern for the less fortunate. Older children are acutely aware of global issues such as poverty and war. The school works hard to support community cohesion. Links with the church and local faith communities are strong. Parents are highly supportive of the work of the school. They explain that the open and transparent way in which the school communicates has a very positive impact on their children's personal achievement. One parent explained, 'This school fits in every way; in terms of faith, leadership and access. We couldn't be happier with our choice of school.'