



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

### Higham St John's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Higham  
Burnley  
BB12 9EU

**Previous SIAS grade: Outstanding**

**Current inspection grade: Outstanding**

**Diocese: Blackburn**

Local authority: Lancashire

Date of inspection: 26 May 2016

Date of last inspection: December 2010

School's unique reference number: 119387

Headteacher: Gareth Hollinghurst

Inspector's name and number: Mike Graham 286

#### School context

The school is below average in size. It serves a socially diverse community. Whilst it is set in a rural area, the majority of the children travel from the nearby towns of Nelson, Padiham and Burnley. Approximately 25% of the children attend from the village. The majority of the children are White British, but there is a growing number from other ethnic groups. An average proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for additional government funding to support their learning. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is below average.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St John's CofE Primary as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The headteacher's leadership is vibrant and inspired by a dynamic Christian vision. The staff and governors give enthusiastic support. As a result, children's spiritual development and academic progress are outstanding.
- Christian values are lived, not simply taught. Staff and governors lead by example and the children respond in exemplary fashion. Consequently the school is a shining example of Christian love and care.
- Worship is central in the school's life. It sets the school's Christian values in their biblical context and makes a significant impact on the spiritual development of the whole school family.
- The inclusive and welcoming Christian ethos enables all to feel warmly accepted.

#### Areas to improve

- Expand teaching on the Holy Spirit, including a gentle encouragement of spontaneous prayer so as to deepen the children's spiritual lives.

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

The school lavishes Christian love and care on the children and their families. The distinctive ethos thus created has established a secure and joyful context within which the children are enabled to give of their best. There is no fear of failure here. The school has adopted some key Christian values including forgiveness, respect, responsibility, hope, faithfulness and love. All are clearly rooted in Jesus' teachings. These values are exemplified and taught by the staff and lived by all members of the school family, creating a trusting and respectful atmosphere. As a result the children are enthusiastic and secure learners. This leads to their good to outstanding academic progress and excellent personal development. Data shows that the rate of progress for children of all abilities is excellent. A significant factor is the way in which the Christian character of the school supports the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all the children. Excellent teaching in religious education (RE), visitors, including parents of other faiths, and visits to places of worship foster understanding and respect. The children's behaviour is impeccable, attendance is good and relationships amongst all members of the school community are outstanding. They readily attribute this to the Christian values at the heart of the school's life. The chair of governors commented that there is a 'pastoral relationship with God that runs through the staff to the children and back again'. The warm welcome and loving care given to all children, regardless of their background, is exceptional. RE makes an outstanding contribution to the spiritual development of the children. Teaching of Christianity is inventive and deep. Encouragement and sensitive prompting verbally and through the positive marking system contributes significantly to the outstanding progress through all year groups. RE enhances the Christian character of the school. It places the values in their biblical context and emphasises that Christ is the source and example of love as the motive for Christian living. A Year 5 boy said that Jesus 'showed people the right way'. There is clear evidence of a Godly presence in work, relationships and attitudes throughout school.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding**

Worship is a vital part of school life. The variety in content and leadership styles supports an engaging mix of worship experiences. Clear links to the Bible, including Jesus and His teachings, are made in a context of joy and respect. A child said worship is 'memorable and fun, with lively 'jumpy' songs, but respectful'. Christian values, Bible stories and readings, drama, humour and excellent singing all contribute to these occasions, enriching the lives of everyone present. A school council member said, 'Inside all the Bible stories we learn lessons, like being kind and honest and making the right decisions'. Personal spiritual development is enhanced further through a strong focus on reflection and prayer. Reflection areas in every classroom and the interactive prayer display and resource in the entrance hall encourage children to write their own prayers, many of which are used in whole school worship. Spontaneous prayer is occasionally evident, and a Year 4 boy speaking eloquently about his silent prayers said 'When we pray you can feel that He's talking back to you, in your head!' The children have a sound grasp of the concept of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are remarkably well aware of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. In a Year 1 lesson a question about Jesus, and what He brings as the Light of the World, elicited the response from a boy, 'He brings the Holy Spirit!' It was evident during discussions that older children understand the impact made by the Spirit at Pentecost, 'when the fire came and gave the disciples power and confidence', as a Year 6 girl said. Worship brings the whole community together at key points in the church calendar. For example the Harvest and annual Education Sunday services, held in St John's church, have a major impact in sustaining the close partnership between parish and school. The vicar leads these services and regularly leads worship in school and is instrumental in teaching the key traditions of Anglican worship, particularly the Eucharist. As a result of these strong links, a high proportion of children are confirmed. Members of staff and children, plan, lead and evaluate worship, which develops understanding and leads to improvements. The role of the worship team in planning and

leading worship in Key Stage 1 is particularly striking. Two girls from Year 6 were confident, sensitive and showed maturity and deep understanding when leading on the story of Mary and Martha. Their gentle encouragement of the younger children when questioning and involving them was most impressive. The impact of these exceptional role models is significant and potentially far-reaching.

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

The headteacher, leadership team, staff, governors and, notably, children are united in striving to realise the Christian vision for the school. The headteacher's Christian faith shines through in every aspect of his work. He bases his leadership and vision on the example of Jesus, and inspires the whole school family through his positive, open and loving approach. Success has been achieved through exemplary teamwork, with every member of staff living out Christian values to guide, support and inspire the children. Children of all faiths and of none are fully involved in planning and leading the school's approach to Christianity and other religions. The governors are adamant that the curriculum must be balanced, with the aim of developing the whole child. They regularly review the school's Christian distinctiveness and bring challenge and encouragement to the staff, thus promoting development. Governors are fully involved in the school's work and activities, sharing and helping with designated subjects and building close relationships with the children. Their visits enhance governors' knowledge and expertise through a first-hand experience of the work being done to build the spiritual understanding and academic progress of the children. The Christian values have been promoted rigorously, yet with sensitivity. The areas to improve from the last report have been thoroughly addressed. Leaders prepare for future leadership in this and other church schools through excellent in-service training, teamwork and coaching. Partnerships and deep friendships with the local parish, diocese and the wider community are strong and mutually beneficial, and include prayerful support for each other. The school council leads the way in raising money for Christian charities, acknowledging that this is a practical example of compassion for those in need. The parents are very appreciative of the Christian care shown. They know that, for the staff, the wellbeing of every child and every family is paramount. Parents are immensely proud of their school, giving excellent support and input. Their comments included 'The teachers all care about the children', 'In this school, faith really matters. It builds discipline and teaches respect' and simply, 'It's perfect!'.

SIAMS report May 2016, St John's Higham CofE VC Primary, Higham, Burnley, BB12 9EU