



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

### **Garstang St Thomas' Church of England (Voluntary Aided) Primary School**

Kepple Lane  
Garstang  
Preston  
PR3 1PB

**Diocese: Blackburn**

Local authority: Lancashire

Dates of inspection: 26<sup>th</sup> June 2014

Date of last inspection: 18<sup>th</sup> May 2009

School's unique reference number: 119528

Headteacher: Mrs Helen Iffe

Inspector's name and number: Gail Fullbrook 530

#### **School context**

Garstang St Thomas' is a smaller than average primary school with a below average number of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium but with an average number of pupils who receive additional support for special educational needs. A well-above average proportion of pupils join and leave the school other than at the normal time. A large proportion of pupils joining the school have additional and often complex needs.

#### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Garstang St Thomas' as a Church of England school are outstanding**

- The vision and drive of the headteacher, supported by the staff team, have embedded explicit Christian values and a distinctive Christian ethos at the centre of the life of the school.
- Imaginative spirit led worship is central to the school day.
- The school's holistic care for children and their families is exemplary.

#### **Areas to improve**

- In order to deepen the school's understanding of the impact of its Christian distinctiveness and worship, seek ways of involving parents and children in self-evaluation.

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

The school, through its focus on pupils as individuals, ensures that every child is valued and cared for as a member of God's family. The well-developed Christian ethos of the school is observable in the detail of support offered. A parent spoke of the school as being, 'very good at practical things, no matter how small.' Parents value the holistic approach of teachers, who know their pupils well and make equally good provision for academic achievement and for personal development and well-being. Children have a strong sense of their own worth and

abilities and as a result, academic standards are good and pupils make good progress. Christian values lie at the heart of all aspects of school life and are illustrated in the care, support and kindness shown between all members of the school family, including between the children themselves. Parents speak of the wrap-around care given to their children and families and of the thoughtfulness shown when crises occur. One parent commented that the school is prepared to compromise to make a difference, particularly when working with disadvantaged families. Reflection spaces in each classroom and around the school reflect current religious education (RE) themes and encourage personal reflection and spiritual development. Relationships are strong and parents welcome the school's open door policy whereby a member of the senior leadership team is always available for them to talk to. They value the ways in which members of staff, and particularly the headteacher, live out the school's Christian ethos to the extent of noticing when children 'aren't quite themselves' and being prepared to go the extra mile to address an individual child's needs. Pupils are encouraged, where possible, to resolve issues of conflict for themselves and talked of learning from the way their peers approach the resolution of issues. The school curriculum is rich and underpinned by the school's core Christian values. Children have a good understanding of diversity and talk about the ways in which links with schools overseas, their Fair Trade status and multi-faith learning in RE support and develop this. RE has a high profile in the life of the school and children are encouraged to develop their understanding of the ways in which faith is lived out in the lives of believers. Children develop a mature spiritual language and a member of staff commented that, 'it often feels as if we bring them to the brink of faith.'

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

Distinctively Christian collective worship is the central pivot around which the life of this Christian school revolves. From the moment when candles are lit and a greeting given, children and adults are attentive and engaged. The presence of the Holy Spirit is movingly invoked as a soloist sings. Children clearly acknowledge and respect this special time. Worship is well structured and follows a liturgical pattern. Themes often have a focus on a 'Big Question' such as, 'What is love?' and teachers continue to explore the questions through class worship and RE teaching. Story is linked to scripture, examples of Christian values are highlighted, and prayers are relevant to the life of the school and to world issues. During the worship observed, a group of year 6 children left to take part in a town event carrying placards telling the stories of men killed in WWI. This link, between an act of school worship following the theme of love, a town celebration and the courage of soldiers was a powerful reminder to all who were there of the nature of God and was referred to by several children later in the day. School worship follows the pattern of the Church's year, children are familiar with the stories each season represents. Parents enjoy sharing worship, both within school and in church, and children talk of worship that has had particular impact on them. For example a child talked of a time he had to show courage and related this to the story of Daniel. Children value worship as an important aspect of school life. One child commented that, 'Some schools just have assemblies but we get time to worship.' Music and singing are important aspects of worship and children enjoy and learn from the well-chosen songs they sing. Older children become familiar with the significance of the Communion service and are encouraged towards Confirmation. Opportunities are given for children to pray for people and situations. Sam's Garden is a special and beautiful place, built in memory of a pupil who died, where children go to think and to do 'quiet things'. Children recognise the Trinity as a way of telling of 'all the ways that God is' and older children confidently share their understanding of each part. Whole school worship is planned and led by a number of different people including staff, the vicar, the curate and a foundation governor. Children plan class worship on a given theme each week. Regular opportunities for children to participate in worship are given and are much enjoyed. Worship is evaluated informally through discussion with children and formally by those who have led worship. A future development would be to involve children more fully in the evaluation process.

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding**

RE is taught effectively and creatively and is a favourite subject of many children. They achieve high standards at least in line with, and on occasions exceeding, standards in other subject areas. RE is well planned and assessment is used regularly to identify children who may need support in their learning and children who would benefit from additional challenge. Children welcome the range of experiences given in lessons to deepen their understanding of the subject, with drama and art being particular favourites. Understanding of the school's core Christian values is developed within RE and the curriculum taught is rich and varied. Children are encouraged to make links between themes studied, their own lives and the ways in which themes are reflected in the wider world. Older children are able to extend these links and to consider their application on the beliefs of those of faiths other than Christianity. Teachers ask open questions and encourage children to think deeply. Year 5 children showed great maturity when discussing the cycle of life and some children, after reading prayers from the funeral service, wrote their own appropriate and moving prayers. Year 1 children, exploring the miracle stories, acted out the story of changing water into wine at the wedding, and deepened their understanding of the story through a reflection how onlookers would have felt watching the miracle take place. The effective RE coordinator regularly monitors teaching and learning through lesson observations and scrutiny of work books. Judgements are discussed with staff and actions drawn up to further develop the subject. Both the headteacher and coordinator attend diocesan briefings to keep their knowledge and understanding up to date. Opportunities for teaching staff to access such professional development are not yet in place. Governors are informed of developments in RE through an annual report to governors given by the coordinator. This report also includes actions planned for the next school year.

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

The school's Christian vision articulated with passion by the headteacher, the staff team, governors and parents is key to the success of this vibrant and exciting Christian school. Children know they are fortunate to learn here and are proud of all that their school offers. Attention to detail at all levels impacts on academic standards achieved by the children and upon the well-being of all who learn and work there. A teacher spoke movingly of the importance of prayer offered by the school community during a recent illness and a parent spoke of the school's support during a time of personal tragedy. Both incidents reflect the way in which the school's mission statement is lived out day by day. That people come first, be they child or adult, is a fundamental building block of the school's success. Governors are well informed about the school's Christian distinctiveness through termly headteacher's reports and through their frequent contact with the school. Governors are encouraged to play a part in the life of the school and a recent day focusing on the school's core values whereby children and governors worked together was highly successful and deepened governor's awareness and understanding of the work of the school. Self-evaluation of the school as a church school is carried out in partnership with staff and governors, although currently the views of parents on the school as a church school are not routinely sought. The school has put in place procedures whereby members of staff who could lead and manage church schools in the future are identified and appropriate professional development is offered. The school has strong partnerships with its parent church and children clearly view the church as being 'theirs'. Children's work is regularly displayed in church and they always feel welcomed. Through its partnership with the school a midweek service has been established for parents and carers of pre-school children, and an increasing number of parents of children already in the school attend with younger siblings. A number of members of the congregation regularly work with the children in a range of activities. The arrangements for RE and collective worship meet statutory requirements.