

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Overton St Helen's Church of England Primary School	
Lancaster Road, Overton, Morecambe, LA3 3EZ	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Blackburn
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Lancashire
Date of inspection	15 June 2017
Date of last inspection	November 2011
Type of school and unique reference number	VA 119539
Headteacher	Joanne Easthope
Inspector's name and number	Gail Fullbrook 530

School context

St Helen's is a smaller than average primary school. Just over half the pupils attending are from the village of Overton with the remaining pupils drawn from the surrounding area. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs or disability or with an education healthcare plan is well below the national average. The majority of pupils are from White British families. The leadership of the school has undergone significant change in the last two years with the headteacher being appointed in September 2016 and two other senior leaders appointed since 2015. Following a period of interregnum the Curate in Charge of St Helen's Church has recently joined the parish.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Overton St Helen's as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The strong and passionate Christian leadership of the headteacher and senior leaders ensures that Christian values are deeply embedded and widely understood by pupils and school community.
- Collective worship (CW) is central to the life of the school and has significant impact upon pupils' attitudes, behaviour and relationships.
- The outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of pupils is demonstrated in the clarity of their understanding of and empathy with the needs of others.
- As a result of rigorous and robust self-evaluation of the Christian character of the school, senior leaders and governors know the school well and are aspirational for its future.

Areas to improve

- Extend the use of challenging questions in religious education (RE) to encourage pupils to think deeply about the ways in which faith affects the lives of believers.
- Review the focus for the evaluation of worship so that feedback gained will support future developments and improvement.

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

At the heart of this outstanding and distinctively Christian school lies the vision of 'developing the hearts and minds of our children'. It is widely known and understood and has a significant impact on pupils' personal development, well-being and achievements. Almost all pupils, including those with additional needs or who are vulnerable, make good, and frequently very good progress. This is because of the importance the school places on pupils' right to thrive and achieve their potential as a child of God. Pupils are excited by the school's engaging and stimulating curriculum and are enthused by their learning. As a result, pupil attendance is well above the national average. In the very small minority of instances where attendance is a cause of concern the school shows compassion and understanding in their response.

Pupils have a thorough understanding of a significant number of Christian values and of the Biblical teaching that underpins them. Christian values are deeply embedded within the life of the school. Pupils readily apply them to their attitudes to learning and relationships as well as to their approach to charitable giving and the importance they place on prayer.

A wealth of opportunities supports pupils' SMSC development. Pupils are particularly enthused by the opportunities offered in Forest School. There they learn to appreciate the wonder of creation, to work collaboratively together and to respond creatively to challenges set by staff. Pupils behave very well and say that their understanding of Christian values helps them to make good choices. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on issues of significance to their local community as well as those of national and international importance. During the inspection pupils were keen to share their understanding and opinions about recent tragedies in Manchester and London. Older pupils express a mature concern for people affected by poverty and violence in the world.

The Christian commitment of the school to developing the hearts and minds of pupils is illustrated in the quality of relationships amongst all members of the school family. Priority is given to allowing time for pupils and adults to talk about things important to them in a safe environment of mutual respect. As a result, pupils, parents and staff feel valued and cared for. Pupils understand the importance of St Helen's Church to the community of Overton both pastorally and spiritually. They have a clear understanding of all that Christians have in common and recognise that Christians within the UK and across the world, worship in many different ways. Links with Ghana, Brazil and Egypt support pupils' understanding of Christianity as a multicultural world faith. Through contact with people of other faiths and cultures, both locally and internationally, pupils develop a curiosity about and interest in the ways in which people of other faiths and cultures live, dress and worship. RE is a very popular subject. It provides outstanding support to pupils' understanding of the significance of Christian values and their SMSC development.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is a valued and important time at St Helen's when the school community comes together to offer praise and prayer. All pupils, regardless of their faith background, talk of the impact worship has upon them personally and upon the life of the school. Scripture that supports the choices pupils make in their lives is easily recalled in conversation. For example, when discussing the importance of charitable giving, a pupil referred to the story of the widow's mite saying that people should give what they can, no matter how small that might be. Music, song, drama and times of reflection contribute to pupils' excellent understanding of Christian teaching.

Developing understanding of the Christian vision of the school and of Christian values are key features of worship. Pupils are encouraged to think deeply about their response to worship themes and consequently the contribution of worship to pupils' SMSC development is outstanding. For example, following discussion around the value of koinonia, pupils explored ways in which they can use their gifts and skills to support the school and wider village community. Worship reflects the Church year and pupils have a clear understanding of the ways in which key festivals tell the story of Jesus' life. Worship opens with a Christian greeting and the lighting of the Trinity candles. Pupils say that this reminds them that they are there to reflect and to learn more about the teaching of Jesus. A number of older pupils choose to be admitted to Communion. As a result, all pupils gain understanding and insight into the importance of Communion to Christians, and pupils who receive Communion develop a personal understanding of its meaning.

Pupils value times of prayer and reflection. They are confident that prayer can make a difference to the lives of others but understand too, that prayer and reflection help them to become better people. Opportunities for prayer occur within worship as well as during the school day. All classrooms have prayer spaces. One pupil commented that, 'Even if I don't actually go to the prayer space, I know it's there and that helps me sometimes.' Pupils' prayers are reflective and show a depth of empathy and understanding of the lives of others. On a prayer tree in one classroom a pupil pointed out a prayer for the people of Haiti saying, 'I haven't forgotten them'. The school has recently introduced a time of intercessional prayer to Monday worship where the needs of the school and community are brought before God. This is giving excellent support to pupils' spiritual development and is encouraging them to notice and reflect on the needs of their own community. Pupils talk freely of times when they offer personal prayer in addition to the set times of prayer during the school day. On the day of the inspection

pupils were encouraged to pray for people whose lives had been affected by a recent tragedy in London. A small candle was lit, pupils were given time for prayer and were then encouraged to continue to pray for the people affected. Many pupils referred to the tragedy during the day, a clear indication that this encouragement had had impact.

Pupils have a secure understanding of key Christian theological concepts. They have an age appropriate understanding of the Trinity and know that the Bible contains stories about God's people and Jesus' teaching. Worship is led by a number of people from within the school community, the church and the local area, including those from other Christian traditions. The worship council, a group of pupils with a particular interest in worship, talk with enthusiasm about worship they have led and their future plans. Additionally pupils play an active role in daily worship, leading prayers, acting out stories and sharing their responses to the worship theme. The headteacher, pupils, staff and governors are all involved in the monitoring and evaluation of worship. However, evaluation sometimes lacks focus and as a result, is not always effective in leading to improvement.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

As a result of good and sometimes very good teaching, pupils make good progress through the school. By the end of Key Stage 2 they achieve standards that are at least in line with national expectations and sometimes higher. The balance of learning about religion and learning from religion is excellent and pupils have frequent opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills important within RE. Some lessons however, do not give more able pupils sufficient opportunity to make personal responses in creative and original ways and this has impact upon the depth of some pupils' understanding and responses. Lessons are well planned and understanding of Christian values is carefully woven through the curriculum. Discussion with pupils and a review of pupil workbooks illustrates the breadth of activities and teaching styles used. These actively encourage personal reflection and contribute to pupils' SMSC development. Pupils are confident when sharing their responses to themes studied. In Class 4, during a lesson about prayer and the Lord's Prayer, pupils spent time reflecting on each line of the Lord's Prayer and then recording their personal responses. One girl shared her view that, 'Not all people are working to build God's kingdom. We know that because of what happened in London and Manchester.' Another spoke of the importance of the reciprocity of forgiveness, sharing her view that, 'It's as important that we forgive others as it is that they forgive us. One without the other doesn't work.' Many older pupils enjoy taking part in the Bishop's Bible Challenge which encourages pupils to read the Gospel of Luke and to understand and respond to its teaching. Pupils learn about a number of religions other than Christianity and demonstrate respect in the questions they ask and in their responses.

An appropriate and well respected RE syllabus supports teachers in ensuring that RE encompasses and develops the necessary knowledge and skills to support pupils' learning. Achievement is in line with comparable subjects and sometimes better.

The RE subject leader, new to post in September 2016, has a good understanding of current developments in the teaching and learning of RE. Robust monitoring procedures ensure that she recognises current strengths and has correctly identified areas for future development. Assessment, although in place, is not yet sufficiently robust to ensure that learners develop the depth of thought and individual response that will lead to the effectiveness of teaching and learning in RE being outstanding.

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

The Christian vision of this highly effective church school is apparent in all aspects of the life of the school. The clarity of the vision statement, developing the hearts and minds of the children, ensures that it is deeply embedded within school life. The tangible and profound personal faith of school leaders makes a significant contribution to the school's commitment to excellence as a distinctively Christian school. This in turn, contributes to pupils' outstanding SMSC development and to the breadth of their knowledge and understanding of key Christian teaching. Rigorous and insightful evaluation procedures engage all members of the school community and lead to the ongoing improvement of the distinctiveness of the school. Governors are well informed about school life and are robust in the ways in which they hold school leaders to account for the school's effectiveness as a church school. The school demonstrates commitment to the ongoing professional development of staff for their work in a church school, including those who have the potential to become future school leaders or who lead the key subject areas of RE and worship. Parents are highly supportive of the school and recognise the outstanding quality of provision for their children. They speak of the excellent support given to pupils and to their families and of the compassionate ways in which the school helps pupils with specific needs. Links with the church have remained effective and strong during the interregnum and the newly appointed curate is keen to develop further links with the school.