

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Lower Darwen St. James Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School	
Off Stopes Brow, Lower Darwen, Darwen, Lancashire, BB3 0QP	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Blackburn
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Date of inspection	23 February 2017
Date of last inspection	November 2011
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided 119503
Headteacher	Daniel Theobalds
Inspector's name and number	Anne B. Woodcock 445

School context

This smaller than average-sized primary school serves an urban community in Lower Darwen. Most of the 205 pupils are of White British heritage. They come from mixed socio-economic backgrounds within a community which includes some areas of high deprivation. The proportion of pupils for whom additional funding is received due to social disadvantage is well above the national average. The school supports an average proportion of pupils with additional needs. The headteacher was appointed in October 2015, having been acting headteacher for a time prior to that date. The deputy headteacher has been in post since September 2016.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Lower Darwen St. James as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The excellent Christian leadership of the headteacher and deputy headteacher, ably supported by governors and dedicated staff, direct and inspire all aspects of school improvement.
- Pupils' excellent behaviour and very positive attitudes to life and learning are founded on their understanding and use of the school's core Christian values which include love, forgiveness and compassion.
- The exceptionally strong, dynamic relationship between the school and the church makes a very substantial contribution to the school's Christian character and to the spiritual growth of all members of the school community.

Areas to improve

- Extend pupils' knowledge of diverse cultures and faiths, including addressing the multi-cultural nature of Christianity so that they can more fully understand and respect differences.

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

Christian values inform every aspect of school life. They are clearly demonstrated by all members of the school family. 'We all try to follow our school values. We forgive, tell the truth and help each other because that is what Jesus taught us to do,' stated a Year 6 pupil. As a result, behaviour is excellent and pupils' attitudes are extremely positive.

As a clear expression of the school's Christian foundation, children are eager, confident and independent learners. They are excited and challenged by their learning, explaining that teachers make lessons fun and help them to understand and improve. Although many pupils enter with skills at levels below the national average, they make rapid and sustained progress from their individual starting points. They strive to achieve the aspirational and high standards set for them, working collaboratively and sharing ideas openly within an atmosphere of trust and acceptance. Standards of attainment are therefore consistently good and they continue to rise. Those pupils with additional needs are supported very well, so all can achieve and make progress. Year 5 and 6 pupils explain, 'Teachers want us all to be the very best we can be, in our learning and our lives.'

Parents are confident that their children are safe, happy and nurtured within a distinctly Christian environment which includes everyone. The school's declared aim, 'that all should know who Jesus is and know that they are loved and valued,' is recognised and fulfilled. As one parent explained, 'The school cares for our children's well-being. The instilled values stay with them for the rest of their lives.'

Pupils' spiritual growth is promoted extremely well through worship, the curriculum and the excellent links with the church. The ability of older pupils to reflect and explain their ideas both orally and creatively is impressive. This is evident in lessons and through discussions with, for example, members of the worship team and school council. Pupils make effective use of the interactive classroom prayer and reflective spaces. These promote and support pupils' deepening understanding of spiritual and moral issues in an age-appropriate way.

The increasing use of the school's outdoor learning environment supports pupils' experiential learning. They explore God's world through science and art and recognise their responsibilities for caring for creation. Pupils benefit from a range of extra-curricular activities which support their personal and social development. Religious education (RE) makes a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development and to the school's distinctive Christian character. Pupils respect the beliefs of others, recognising that people worship God in many different ways.

The extremely strong link with the church enhances children's awareness of community service. The school rightly recognises that their understanding of global and wider world issues need to be improved, so they are strengthening links with Christian communities in Africa.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is a much valued and integral feature of the daily life of the school. Pupils' attitudes are extremely positive because they feel included and involved. They especially enjoy the in-class worship because the intimate setting gives them the chance to talk about personal ideas and beliefs.

Worship is imaginatively planned around creative themes which explore faith and belief based on Bible teaching and Christian values. Pupils have a very good knowledge of the life and teaching of Jesus. They make effective links between parables, Christian values and their own actions. For example, they explain clearly that the story of Zaccheus shows how people can change and that helping those less fortunate is important because Jesus showed this through the parable of the Good Samaritan. 'We should help other people like refugees, no matter what race or colour,' stated a Year 6 pupil.

Pupils have an impressive understanding of the nature of God. The youngest pupils talk of God as 'loving us and knowing what we need'. Older pupils talk confidently about the Christian concept of the Trinity. 'God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the power of God inside us,' stated a Year 5 pupil.

The exceedingly close relationship between the school and the church makes a powerful contribution to the spiritual growth of all members of the school community. The vicar, who is a member of the worship team, is a very regular visitor and leader of worship. School and church members regularly worship together within the established 'one site' partnership. Pupils are familiar with aspects of traditional Anglican practice and the celebration of Christian festivals throughout the year.

Prayer and reflection are key features of worship. Prayer trees around school reflect children's confidence in writing and using prayers. They demonstrate their understanding of the purpose of prayer for both public and

private use. Prayer is used at different times of the day and pupils are familiar with traditional prayers and graces, such as the Lord's Prayer.

Worship is a participatory experience for staff and pupils. The extent to which pupils are engaged in planning, leading and evaluating collective worship is impressive. The well-established worship team, which includes staff, clergy and pupils, takes responsibility for planning themes and delivering or evaluating worship on a daily basis. Pupils meet with governors, inform parents of themes and provide regular feedback. This contributes significantly to the monitoring and evaluation process. Feedback from all members of the school community ensures that the impact of worship is clearly identified. As a result, collective worship continues to evolve and inspire all members of the school family.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Pupils' attitudes are extremely positive because they enjoy and are inspired by their lessons. Activities across the RE curriculum encourage pupils to investigate key questions and concepts and thus ensures that the needs of all learners are met. A variety of approaches are used to develop essential skills such as reflection and analysis. A very good balance is achieved between learning which focuses on knowledge and understanding and that which encourages reflection and application of religious beliefs and practices.

Pupils are challenged to consider and to exchange views openly and respectfully. 'We think deeply about very important questions and you learn more about yourself,' explained a Year 6 pupil. This was evidenced during a very effective Year 6 lesson, in which pupils were exploring 'Can we believe in something if we are unable to see it?' One pupil explained, 'God is a bit like a guide dog to a blind person. A blind person trusts the dog even though he hasn't seen it. He knows it is always there. We trust that God is there.'

Consistently high quality teaching ensures that standards of attainment are at least equal to those achieved in subjects such as literacy and mathematics. Pupils make very good progress from their starting points and a significant number achieve higher than nationally expected levels. The high quality of pupils' work is reflected in their books and class scrapbooks. Marking supports and extends learning and forms part of the assessment and tracking process. This is currently being refined to more fully reflect ongoing attainment and progress in line with the whole school tracking process.

RE supports pupils' SMSC development very well. They study Christianity and major world faiths such as Islam and Judaism. However, their knowledge and understanding of key facts, similarities and differences is not secure. They have limited first-hand experiences of, for example, places of worship. As a result this aspect of their learning is less well-developed.

The subject leader has ensured that staff are well-resourced and supported. RE has a very high profile within school so features consistently within curriculum and staff development. Effective monitoring and evaluation by senior leaders and governors leads to improvements in teaching and learning which impact strongly on pupils' attitudes and achievement. The development planning focus indicates that the subject is well-placed to become exemplary in the future.

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

The very strong focus on agreed Christian values and principles inspires and drives all aspects of school improvement. The headteacher and governors have developed the school's Christian distinctiveness, providing a vibrant, dynamic Christian learning community in which all can flourish and achieve. All members of the school family feel valued and they are very well-supported. As a result, staff morale is high and all work collaboratively to achieve shared goals.

Governors challenge and support the work of the school very effectively. Robust monitoring and evaluation processes engage all members of the school community. The involvement of pupils is exemplary. The pupil voice is exceptionally strong, particularly through the worship team and school council. Church school issues are clearly and accurately identified and prioritised within whole school improvement planning. Parental engagement in church school self-evaluation has been developed, fully addressing the issue from the previous denominational inspection. They know that their opinions are valued because suggestions they make, such as the timings of Friday worship, are trialled.

Governors have secured highly effective leadership for both RE and collective worship. Both are well-resourced and supported and they meet all statutory regulations. The school curriculum has been re-vitalised to ensure the maximum enjoyment and engagement of all pupils. This has resulted in improving attendance as well as raising standards of achievement and levels of pupil progress.

Highly effective use is made of productive partnerships with the Diocese and, more recently, with two neighbouring church schools. The Diocese has been instrumental in improvements in aspects of governance, teaching and professional development. Strategic development is highly effective and the future leadership of the school at all levels is secure.

SIAMS report (February 2011) Lower Darwen St. James CE Primary School, Lower Darwen, Lancashire BB3 0QP