



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St Stephen's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Audenshaw Road
Audenshaw
Manchester
M34 5HD

Previous SIAS grade: Good

Current inspection grade: Outstanding

Diocese: Manchester

Local authority: Tameside

Date of inspection: 22 June 2016

Date of last inspection: 29 November 2010

School's unique reference number: 106246

Headteacher: Cathie Masztalerz

Inspector's name and number: Gillian Rhodes 657

School context

St Stephen's Church of England Primary school is an average sized school situated in an urban area with high levels of social deprivation. The percentage of pupils with English as an additional language has risen significantly in recent years and is now well above the national average. The proportion of pupils eligible for additional funding through pupil premium is also above average. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs or disabilities is below the national average.

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

- Distinctively Christian values are deeply embedded in every aspect of school life. Their significant impact on the lives and achievements of learners is recognised and expressed by all members of the school family.
- The Christian character of the school has a strong, positive impact on behaviour, relationships and the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of children.
- Collective worship engages learners and adults of all faiths and relates core Christian values to the lives of all members of the school community.
- Thorough self-evaluation underpins the Christian vision and the aspirational, effective action planning for benefit of the children of St Stephen's.

Areas to improve

- Apply open-ended questioning and active learning experiences across all age groups in religious education (RE) in order to inspire creativity and originality in pupils' responses.
- Establish systematic, rigorous assessment procedures in order to form accurate judgements of standards in RE over time.

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

Christian values of friendship, trust, love, forgiveness, thankfulness and truthfulness underpin the school's mission statement and all aspects of school life. School leaders, governors, staff, pupils and parents all worked together to agree these core values. The values and the symbols which were chosen to represent them are displayed throughout the school building and notably on the door to each room. As a result they are ever present in the minds of everyone in the school. This inclusive, cohesive community of many faiths and those of no faith recognises and celebrates its Christian foundation and character. God is at the heart of everything which happens at St Stephen's. 'With God's help, we love, listen and learn together to be the best that we can be.' This ambitious mission is understood and articulated across the school community. Excellent behaviour and relationships amongst adults and children are rooted in Christian values and empathy for the needs of others. Compassion is at the heart of the school's successful drive to improve attendance. Opportunities are specifically identified in the curriculum and wider aspects of school life for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. Enrichment days, visits and visitors are organised and funded by the school so that all children encounter a rich variety of experiences. Days at the beach, walks in the woods, African drumming and Hindu dancing are some of the experiences included in 'Super-learning days' which broaden the horizons of the children. From their often lower than average starting points on entry to the school, children make very good progress. School performance data shows that by the end of Key Stage 2 children attain at or above local and national standards. Children recognise the importance of RE and the significant part it plays in their personal development and the development of the school's Christian ethos. They have a high degree of respect for diversity and a strong sense of the cohesiveness of the school family. They know that Christianity is a multi-cultural world faith and are developing understanding of the very different nature of Christianity in other parts of the world such as Syria.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is central to the Christian ethos and character of St Stephen's school. Learners and adults from different faith or no faith backgrounds are engaged by worship which includes Biblical teaching, features of Christian traditions, the seasons of the Church's year and Christian festivals. Celebrations of important times and festivals of other faiths are included in the school calendar. Worship themes are carefully planned by the worship co-ordinator supported by the headteacher and the vicar of St Stephen's church who leads worship in school weekly. Worship is structured to link to the school's aim to broaden children's horizons, experiences and understanding of others. Day by day the titles of the agreed weekly worship framework encourage children to 'Look out to the world, Look up to God, Look in to ourselves, Look around at our school and Look at each others' achievements'. Central to worship experiences are the school's core Christian values and stories from the Bible which illustrate their meaning and relevance. As a result of looking out to the world and linking the values of love, friendship and thankfulness, children take part in charity projects for Water Aid and Save the Children in Syria. Projects are chosen, planned and organised by the school council. A team of pupils known as Worship Warriors are regularly responsible for planning and leading worship. Prayer punctuates the school day in collective worship, at lunchtime and at the end of the day. Each classroom has a prayer area which children use to prompt the writing of prayers and reflection on matters they wish to bring to God. Children appreciate that prayers they place in the prayer boxes are also prayed over by the worship co-ordinator. Worship starts with children bringing forward a Bible, cross and candle to represent God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The children explain that the symbol displayed to illustrate the Trinity 'looks like three separate parts but is actually all one'. Worship is monitored by leaders and governors and children reflect daily in class evaluation books on the messages and meanings of worship. Children attend school services in the nearby church each half term. Their spiritual development is enhanced by visits to church for Easter and Christmas experiences.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Standards of attainment in RE are in line with national expectations. Learners make good progress from their starting points. Accurate assessment in RE is in place but has not developed systematically over time to ensure that standards are maintained and improved. Children understand the value of the subject and are developing skills of enquiry, interpretation and reflection. Children use post-it notes in their books to note brief reflection on the impact of their learning on themselves or of religion on believers. The RE curriculum enables learners to acquire thorough knowledge of Christianity and other world religions. The inclusion of a half-term cross-faith topic each year provides excellent opportunities for children to make links and comparisons between the beliefs, traditions and values of a range of faiths. As a result, children's social, cultural and spiritual understanding is developed. Reception children consider Special Times as a cross-faith topic. Year 4 study Festivals of Light. Learning experiences in RE are differentiated to meet the needs of pupils but this is not yet consistent across all year groups and topics. Teaching in RE is good. Teachers have good subject knowledge. Whilst learning experiences include drama and art, high expectations are placed on children's written responses and English learning objectives are applied alongside objectives for RE. The Year 6 cross-faith topic Who is God? is highly effective because it includes creative response activities and open-ended questioning. This approach is not yet applied consistently across all age groups in order to inspire creativity and originality in pupils' responses. Throughout the RE curriculum opportunities are accessed to make links with the school's Christian values. The artefacts used in worship to illustrate the Trinity are also used at the start of RE lessons to emphasise the links between RE and worship. RE is monitored termly by the RE co-ordinator who brings subject expertise, dedication and ambitious vision to all aspects of the role.

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

Leaders, including governors, have successfully developed systematic monitoring of the school's distinctiveness and effectiveness as a church school. Their self-evaluation is honest and accurate and is rooted in the belief expressed in the mission statement that being 'the best we can be' comes 'with God's help'. Through learning walks, observations, pupil work and planning scrutinies, they are able to identify areas for development and draw up ambitious action plans which result in improved provision. Self-evaluation includes all groups in the school family. Parents respond to worship by saying, 'The message of love was loud and clear'. 'The children reminded us to be generous and unselfish with our love.' The school's Christian values are consistently lived out and modelled by all staff under the inspirational leadership of the headteacher and the deputy headteacher who is also the RE and worship co-ordinator. Parents emphasise the importance of links between home and school and value the welcome they receive in school at all times. Newsletters are timely and informative and the opportunities to share in worship and social activities are appreciated. The weekly celebration Sunshine Assembly is particularly popular and brings many parents into school. Family links are strengthened by the welcoming of new babies of school families at Sunshine Assembly. In turn, parents are willing to help with events, accompany class trips and get involved in the friends of St Stephen's group. St Stephen's church organises events for children at Easter and Christmas and Year 6 pupils join the congregation for a Eucharist Service in the summer term. Effective use is made of opportunities which arise for staff and governor development. The RE co-ordinator has attended professional development training organised by the diocese. This has then been cascaded to other staff through in-house training. Governors are an effective link between the school, its families, the church and the local community. The vicar is currently chair of governors and the link for RE and worship. His regular and frequent presence in school to support staff, pupils and their families ensures links are of mutual benefit to all members of the school community. St Stephen's school is a local school at the heart of its local community and with God at its heart.