

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Aspull Church Primary School – a joint Anglican and Methodist Foundation

Bolton Road, Aspull, Wigan WN2 1QW	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Liverpool
Methodist District	Bolton and Rochdale
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Wigan
Date/s of inspection	18 May 2017
Date of last inspection	June 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	106518
Headteacher	Jennifer Clarke
Inspector's name and number	Frank Driessen (675)

School context

Aspull Church Primary School is a smaller than average primary school. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is slightly below average. A below average proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic groups or speak English as a foreign language. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well below the national average. The RE subject leader was appointed in September 2016. The deputy headteacher supports the school worship team. The school recently achieved a Health and Wellbeing Award with one of the teachers winning the Inspirational Teaching Category.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Aspull Church Primary as a Church of England/Methodist school are outstanding

- The headteacher's strong and faithful Christian leadership leads to high expectations among all members of the school community. Consequently, the drive to achieve high academic standards is matched with pupils' spiritual development and the nurture of faith.
- Deeply rooted Christian values inspire the excellent, compassionate relationships between and amongst adults and pupils that make this such a harmonious, loving and learning community.
- The developing impact of the pupils' worship group upon the school's distinctive Christian nature is exceptional and is resulting in much useful and beneficial change.
- The strong partnership with the local Anglican and Methodist churches has been highly successful in reflecting the school's joint Anglican/Methodist foundation. This has extended the spiritual experience of the pupils, brought families into each church and provided a meaningful Christian witness at the heart of the local community.
- All governors and staff are extremely supportive of the distinctive Christian vision for the school and play a significant part in creating a unified Christian family.

Areas to improve

- Strengthen the formal evaluation of collective worship to ensure the increasing impact of Christian values upon the lives of the school community.
- Continue to involve the pupils' worship group in planning and leading their own acts of collective worship to enhance their spiritual experience and deepen their understanding of worship.

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

Succinctly summed up as 'Excellence in caring, sharing and learning', the school's philosophy of 'Treat others as you want to be treated yourself' (Matthew 12:7) is the bedrock upon which are built the deep and caring relationships between all members of the school and extended community. Because of this focus, the deeply rooted Christian values of faith, hope and love pervade the life and actions of this vibrant and happy school. Their profound effect upon all aspects of school life is evident in the pupils' outstanding behaviour. One child remarked, 'Living out our Christian values helps us to be better people.' Pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent. As a result academic achievement is above the national average, as is attendance. Pupils enjoy a broad and rich curriculum which is creative and challenging. Many learning experiences extend beyond the school day and pupils thoroughly enjoy and appreciate them. Music, singing and sport are great strengths. They excite pupils, raise their aspirations and enable them to flourish within a Christian climate of trust, respect and challenge. The school environment is enriched by attractive displays that stimulate learning. Religious education is seen by all pupils as 'hard but fun'. It has a very positive impact upon their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The roles of pupil leaders in the pupil parliament, worship, sports, eco issues, Aspull ambassadors and play leaders are highly valued. Pupils know they have a voice that will be heard and that their views are respected.

The pupils' worship group plays a significant role in promoting the school's distinctive Christian character. This is evident in the way they actively promote the use of the outdoor prayer space for Bible reading, quiet reflection and the writing of prayers. Pupils speak convincingly of the importance of making a difference in the lives of others less fortunate than themselves. They raise funds for an extensive range of local, national and international charities. These include a local food bank, Wigan and Leigh Hospice and the NSPCC. Pupils are able to link this outliving of Christian compassion to Jesus' teaching. One child remarked, 'We learn to treat those who've not got anything as we would like to be treated.' Christian signs and symbols, including the well-used prayer tree, extend and support the school's distinctiveness and deepen pupils' spiritual awareness. Classroom reflection areas link the current reflective question for collective worship and enable a deeper understanding of the theme explored during the week. Pupils have a good understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural global faith because of their fund-raising activities for international Christian charities and support for a linked Gambian school. The school provides rich opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of the lives of people of diverse communities living in this country. This includes celebrations of important religious festivals from other faiths, a recent multi-cultural day and links with a school in Bolton. A further example was the involvement of a Hindu family from school who explained about Diwali and ran workshops so that pupils understood its importance to the Hindu community. As a result, children demonstrate high levels of respect, tolerance and acceptance of people of other faiths.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship is an integral and important part of daily life at Aspull Church School and is valued by all as a special time when the whole school community comes together. Everyone enjoys worship and it provides pupils with opportunities for spiritual growth while reinforcing Christian teaching and values. The meaning and impact of Christian values illustrated through Bible stories and the teaching of Jesus is explored each week, alongside major festivals and other celebrations such as the leavers' service and Education Sunday. These occasions, together with daily rituals within school worship, enable pupils to develop a growing understanding of church tradition and also of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Pupils show genuine enthusiasm for worship with one pupil saying 'I love how we come together as a family!' The Friday celebration assembly is greatly enjoyed, particularly since parents have been invited. Pupils take great pride in nominating their peers for the caring, sharing, learning award that celebrates pupils who have lived out the meaning of a particular Christian value. On many occasions, pupils are involved through music, drama and prayer. All are keen to take part.

Worship is inclusive and supports the excellent links with Aspull Methodist Church and St. Elizabeth's CE Church very effectively. Parents attend services in both churches with great enthusiasm. Key festivals in the church year are shared between both churches. These help reinforce pupils' understanding of key aspects of Anglican and Methodist distinctiveness. In addition, both ministers lead worship in school and help pupils understand the role of church leaders and types of worship set in different contexts. In the worship observed, led by Reverend Simon and the headteacher, the outstanding and joyous nature of the singing set a spiritual atmosphere for worship that embraced everyone. The calm atmosphere during the period of prayer and reflection that followed showed how pupils use this time to be alone with their own thoughts. Pupils write their own prayers during their reflective time in class and in the prayer shed during the lunchtime. Class worship allows pupils the opportunity to deepen their own responses to the weekly theme using a series of questions for reflection. At such times they demonstrate a remarkable ability to explore challenging questions such as 'How can we show others that God's Spirit is still in us and guiding our lives?' The impact these opportunities have on pupils' spiritual lives is quite profound. One

Reception pupil, for example, answered, 'We could be kind and helpful and not be mean to anyone who looks different.' Pupils' responses are written on post-it notes and collected at the end of each week so the headteacher can evaluate the impact of that week's collective worship theme.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

The importance of RE in the life of this Christian school is demonstrated by its high priority as a core curriculum subject. It is carefully planned and resourced and forms part of the school improvement process. Standards in RE are significantly above national expectations and pupils' overall achievement is excellent. Children make very good progress throughout the school both in their acquisition of knowledge and in their ability to apply that knowledge to explore deeper meanings of faith and belief. One pupil stated, 'We think deeply about Jesus and this makes us think quite a lot about how we live.' The quality of teaching observed during the inspection was consistently good with significant examples of outstanding teaching and learning across the whole school. RE very successfully enables pupils to ask and reflect on open-ended questions of meaning and purpose in their own lives. 'We are taught to think outside the box,' declared one pupil. 'And our teachers push us for deeper and more detailed answers,' imparted another. The study of Pentecost gave Year 6 pupils the opportunity to develop and apply skills of enquiry, reflection and interpretation as they explored the life journey the Holy Spirit might be calling them to make. Attitudes towards RE are outstanding. Pupils are very responsive and enthusiastic and show a real joy in learning. Lessons are well planned with careful differentiation that ensures that all abilities can make progress. Effective cross-curricular links ensure that RE is an integral part of children's learning and development. Very good use is made of the outdoor environment to enhance learning. Year 1 pupils, for example, used the outdoor prayer area to paint prayers on pebbles. Regular end of unit assessment of pupil progress ensures that teachers have a good grasp of pupil achievement.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make excellent progress as a result of the lively and creative approach to RE that has a sharp focus on active learning. For example, a class of young pupils used the outdoor area to enact the story of Jesus calming the storm using drama and role play. This was an excellent way to encourage them to empathise with different characters in the story and also to develop their understanding of the varied emotions of those who experienced this event. The effective teaching of other religions enhances pupils' awareness of diversity very well. In a discussion about why they studied other faiths one child observed, 'It helps us realise that despite our different religions underneath we are all the same.' A Hindu child added, 'We are all part of the same big family.' The enthusiastic subject leader's clear and effective monitoring of RE gives a good picture of the overall quality of provision as well as pupils' good progress within learning about and learning from religion.

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

The strong Christian leadership of the headteacher has a significant impact upon the success of this inspirational church school. Christian values are consistently lived out in its daily life reinforcing Reverend Simon's belief that 'Values are not meant to be left on a wall'. The impact of this is seen through the outstanding quality of relationships between all members of the school community and the strength of the pastoral support. Teamwork is a very strong feature, with everyone living out the school philosophy of 'moving forward together in the light of Jesus'. Parents recognise this distinctive Christian ethos and support it with enthusiasm and passion because of the impact it has upon their children's lives. Governors are in a well-informed position to support senior leadership in the continual development of the school's distinctive Christian nature. They act as critical friends who set the school's strategic direction through challenging questions and enlightened discussion. Because of their emphasis upon achievement being underpinned by nurture and care, governors help make the school a happy and caring community which pupils eagerly attend and learn. The most vulnerable and disadvantaged children are nurtured and supported through the active promotion of Christian values. This approach ensures complex barriers to learning are broken down. An innovative and informative governors' newsletter and talk station in the school yard ensures a consistent and beneficial dialogue between parents and school leaders.

RE and collective worship are expertly led, have a high profile and requirements regarding their provision are met. The area for development from the previous inspection has been fully addressed. Effective training through the diocese for both staff and governors ensures that future leaders' needs are met. This has helped strengthen the development of the school's distinctive nature. The strong and dynamic links with the local Anglican and Methodist churches demonstrate the partnership that has formed as a result of the clear, shared Christian vision of the headteacher, clergy and the governors. These links include joint services, school items in the parish magazine, prayer support and involvement in the annual Walking Day. This close and productive relationship has clearly placed the school's outworking of its distinctive Christian identity in the heart of the community it serves so faithfully.