

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Thomas's Church of England Primary School			
Address	Kendal Green, Kendal, Cumbria LA9 5PP		
Date of inspection	5 December 2019	Status of school	Voluntary Aided Primary
Diocese	Carlisle	URN	112322

Overall Judgement	How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?	Grade	Excellent
Additional Judgements	The impact of collective worship	Grade	Excellent
	The effectiveness of religious education (RE)	Grade	Excellent

School context

St Thomas's is a primary school with 175 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is in line with national averages. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is in line with national averages. The school provides a 16 place nursery and wrap around care. The school was judged to be good overall when inspected by Ofsted in April 2019. Early years provision and pupils' personal development was judged to be excellent.

The school's Christian vision

St Thomas's is a safe, welcoming and caring family community where diversity is celebrated and everyone respected for being special and unique. We teach children to 'Believe, Achieve, Succeed'.

Believe in yourself to achieve in school and succeed in life.

'Teach children how they should live and they will remember it all their lives.' (Proverbs 22:6)

Key findings

- Leaders have created a fully inclusive, aspirational Christian vision. Founded on the school's well-established Christian values, the vision inspires every aspect of school development. It is fully shared across and beyond the school, ensuring that everyone is totally committed to achieving the vision and transforming pupils' lives.
- The distinctly Christian leadership of the headteacher, ably supported by outstanding senior leaders, committed staff and skilled governors, has created a vibrant, highly inclusive Christian learning environment. Every member is loved and nurtured as a unique child of God. The vulnerable and those with special needs and/or disabilities are extremely well supported so that everyone flourishes and achieves.
- Pupils' excellent spiritual and personal development results from the innovative, creative 'promises' curriculum. This supports pupils' developing belief in their own abilities, through a wealth of first-hand experiences which encourage resilience and creativity.
- Engaging, inclusive collective worship, enriched by the very strong support of the church, inspires pupils to apply Jesus' teaching about compassion, trust and forgiveness in their own lives.
- Consistently high quality teaching in RE excites and challenges pupils to think deeply about faith and belief. They make excellent progress. They develop key skills and make excellent links between and across the religions studied.

Areas for development

- Enable pupils to gain a deeper understanding of worship by independently planning, leading and evaluating worship more regularly.
- Support other church schools in their development by sharing St Thomas's excellent governance practice and curriculum development expertise.

How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?

Inspection findings

St Thomas's is an extremely vibrant place of love and learning. Leaders have created a distinctly Christian learning environment in which everyone knows they are loved and valued. The Christian vision drives all aspects of school improvement. Annual reviews engage all members of the school family, ensuring that the Christian character remains highly distinctive and provision to transform pupils' lives is sustainable. The vision and core Christian values upon which it is based are consistently referred to by pupils and adults. Leadership decisions are underpinned by the desire to follow Christ's example. As a result, everyone is nurtured and supported to make the most of their God-given talents.

Pupils thoroughly enjoy all that the school offers. They benefit from a unique, highly creative curriculum specifically designed to provide frequent first-hand learning experiences. Curriculum 'promises', such as camping and hosting community events, are achieved through frequent outdoor learning, visits and special events. Pupils explore the world and gain remarkably mature understanding of their responsibilities for conservation and the care of others. Class focused Christian values, such as compassion, are woven across the curriculum, ensuring that the vision drives curricular provision. The depth and quality of their responses is evident in the vibrant displays across the school. Evidence shows that pupils are eager, confident and increasingly reflective learners. They are aware of global concerns such as poverty and plastic pollution and readily recognise that they can be agents for change. For example, a Year 6 pupil recently donated her hair to a children's cancer charity. Pupils regularly reflect God's love through serving the community and raising funds for charities. They explain that they do this to follow Jesus' example and that everyone can do something to help others.

The calm, purposeful atmosphere, immediately felt by visitors, provides a learning environment which fosters collaboration and a strong sense of personal achievement. Pupils strive to achieve teachers' high expectations, recognising their challenge and support. All pupils make good, sometimes rapid progress from their starting points. Standards of attainment are generally above those achieved nationally. Disadvantaged pupils and those with special needs and/or disabilities are extremely well-supported so all achieve and flourish. As a result pupils become resilient, articulate learners, well prepared to take on future challenges.

Leaders have created a harmonious staff team. Morale is extremely high because all recognise that they are valued and very well supported professionally and personally. The bold financial decisions made by leaders to support pupils' needs are also reflected in the high level of professional development and training received by staff. Highly effective use is made of partnerships with the diocese and Kendal Collaborative Partnership. Diocesan training makes a substantial impact on implementing the vision through RE and collective worship. Middle leadership courses have been instrumental in developing and enriching the school's unique curriculum. The highly effective partnership with a school in Halifax continues to support pupils' awareness and experience of diverse cultures.

Governors know the school extremely well. Regular visits and meetings with staff and pupils inform the rigorous monitoring process which ensures that achieving the vision remains a priority within school development planning. Their excellent practice ensures that the needs of all pupils are being met through the innovative and highly effective use of human and financial resources. Funding a pastoral support manager has been transformative for many pupils. Highly valued by parents, the school provides a 'hub of support' within the community and significantly reduces barriers to learning. Parents are overwhelmingly appreciative of the school because they know that their children are loved and nurtured at all times. The consistent focus on emotional health and wellbeing effectively supports staff and pupils. Governors have secured excellent leadership for RE and collective worship. Both make very substantial contributions to achieving the vision. Development areas from the last denominational inspection have moved the school forward. The school is extremely well placed to share expertise and its excellent practice more widely to support other church schools on their journey.

The strengthened support of the local church enriches the school's worship life and contributes significantly to pupils' spiritual growth. Collective worship is a much valued part of school life. Themes explore Christian values and Bible teaching. The use of topical news, always linked to Christian values, provides repeated opportunities for pupils to consider their own beliefs, respond to big questions and find ways to do something practical to make a difference. Pupils talk confidently about the life and teaching of Jesus. Many explain that they try to serve others as Jesus did. Pupils' attitudes are extremely positive because they feel included and involved. They take active roles in worship, responding willingly and acting out Bible stories. Older pupils and the worship group take responsibility for aspects of worship. They are eager to take full responsibility for planning and leading worship more regularly. Clergy and church workers are frequent visitors, leading worship and providing spiritual guidance. Collective worship takes place in church regularly and pupils enjoy fellowship with members of the church. For example, Year 6 pupils share lunch with church members following the Remembrance service. Prayer and reflection are key elements of daily worship. Pupils write prayers and they very much value the 'place of peace' and outdoor prayer spaces they have created. Feedback from pupils, staff and governors informs the effective evaluation process. As a result, worship continues to evolve. The impact can be seen in pupils' excellent behaviour, their knowledge of the life and teaching of Jesus and use of Christian values in their own lives.

RE makes a very significant contribution to pupils' spiritual growth. Pupils are inspired and challenged by RE. For example, nursery pupils talked excitedly about Baby Jesus and Year 5 debated if it was possible to put Christ back into Christmas. RE provides a safe space in which pupils explore ideas about belief. They debate opinions, learning to disagree well. Careful questioning deepens pupils' thinking as they explore and reflect on the expression of belief. The depth of their responses and the extent of challenge is reflected in the high quality of pupils' individual workbooks. Assessment processes are rigorous and marking supports learning very effectively. Pupils' knowledge of Christian belief and concepts is thorough. Their understanding of religious and cultural differences is good due to the study of world faiths, visits to places of worship and meeting with Muslim pupils from the partner school in Halifax. Effective assessment and monitoring procedures ensure that pupils learn and apply key skills.



The effectiveness of RE is Excellent

Consistently high quality teaching challenges and supports pupils' exploration of religious belief and practices. This results from excellent leadership and the commitment to ensuring that all staff are equipped with strong subject knowledge and skills. Strong assessment practices supports teachers' understanding of progression and attainment. Consequently many pupils, including the vulnerable groups, make rapid progress. Standards of attainment are high. They compare favourably with other core subjects.

Headteacher

Maggie Cole

Inspector's name and number

Anne B. Woodcock 445