

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Blackrod Anglican and Methodist Primary School

Vicarage Road West, Blackrod, Bolton BL6 5DE	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese / Methodist District [delete as appropriate]	Manchester Diocese / Bolton and Rochdale District
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Bolton
Date of inspection	6 October 2016
Date of last inspection	March 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Joint denomination VC Primary 105211
Headteacher	James Royal
Inspector's name and number	Lyn Field NS151

School context

This is a semi-rural school of average size. The majority of pupils are White British with a growing number from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is above average. The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives support funding called pupil premium is below average. A resource for 6 autistic pupils called DREAMS is part of the school. The headteacher is seconded as executive officer to the Methodist Academies & Schools Trust for up to four days a week. An extended leadership team is in place.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Blackrod as an Anglican/Methodist school are outstanding.

- The mission statement, 'Growing and learning together in God's love', is lived out in every aspect of school life and informs strategic decisions made by governors and senior leaders.
- The school is led by an inspirational headteacher who lives out the vision and values of the school at both a professional and personal level. His example transforms the work of staff at all levels.
- A core set of eight Gospel values form a direct link between the life of Jesus and aspects of the school, such as leadership, behaviour and learning. Consequently, relationships and pastoral care of all members of the school community are exceptionally strong.
- Pupils from all groups flourish and grow into mature and articulate children because of the attention given to their spiritual development throughout the curriculum.
- The impact of the headteacher's wider role with the Methodist Church is of mutual benefit to both school and church.

Areas to improve

- Continue to strive for the best opportunities and outcomes for pupils by developing a more rigorous and theologically-based procedure for self-evaluation that uses the school's vision and values as benchmarks.
- Continue to search for and embed the 'big questions' being asked about life and faith across the curriculum in order to sustain the quality of pupils' spiritual development.

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

Excellent relationships are fundamental to how the school operates. They are shaped by Christian values and lead to exceptional pastoral care of staff and pupils. Pupils respond with the most courteous and positive behaviour. The biblical basis of the Christian values is very well taught so, by the time pupils reach Year 6, they have a mature understanding for their age of how the values are relevant to contemporary society. They speak of Christian hope as 'wanting life to be better for people in Syria'.

The inspiring Christian texts displayed throughout the school building are well known to pupils, staff and parents. They are firmly regarded as a source of spiritual challenge and encouragement but it does not stop there. A Christian emphasis is deeply woven through the whole curriculum and broadens pupils' outlook on life. Teachers make astute choices about curriculum topics, for example, the books pupils study as a whole class. These decisions reveal a deep commitment to developing children's spiritual thinking and sense of social justice. Consequently, pupils have extremely positive attitudes to diversity and difference and have an impressive ability to draw on Bible stories to illustrate their views. They refer to the story of the Good Samaritan that 'teaches you never to think badly of people because of their skin colour'. Pupils' knowledge comes from the overlap between RE and collective worship and makes a major contribution to the school's Christian character. In her short time in post, the RE leader has introduced changes that have accelerated pupils' progress. They enthuse about the challenging lines of enquiry that are now a feature of lessons. In a unit on Life Journeys, pupils are sufficiently confident to raise questions such as 'Is everybody entitled to the same life journey?' Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is therefore outstanding.

Staff diligently track progress and many pupils make better than expected progress overall from low starting points. This includes disadvantaged pupils, even though their attendance is taking longer to improve. Attendance overall is better than the national average. DREAMS is highly successful not just for the achievement of pupils in this group but because of the impact on all other pupils who fully embrace them in school life, including in a residential visit that includes outdoor team building activities. Each year the school accepts pupils wanting to make a new start. These pupils flourish because they are nurtured in an atmosphere that is managed like a loving extended family. The comment 'this school has given our family its life back' is a common theme in feedback from parents and pupils talk openly about knowing God loves them.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Children and adults look forward to worship and there is a palpable sense of joy in how they concentrate and engage with each element. Its timing at the end of the day acts as a 'call to worship' that brings everyone and every aspect of school life together. The school's core Christian values are each linked to Christian festivals, so pupils relate the values directly to the life of Jesus. This means they are confident to talk about the concept of the Trinity and how they are growing in their understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit as they move through the school.

In spite of the important part worship has in each school day, monitoring by staff noted that, although times of reflection were used extremely well, there was a lack of liturgical rigour and so the purpose of worship was not made crystal clear. The project Worship Workshop was introduced and early indications are that this is having the desired outcomes.

Pupils are fully aware that their school is linked to two Christian denominations. Many pupils perceive this in terms of the individual clergy they have grown to know well. Although Methodism is specifically covered in RE, it has not broadened their appreciation of how the distinctive features of each Church convey the mission of the church in today's society. The staff understand how the distinctive features of each Church influence worship: for example, the Anglican emphasis on liturgy and the Methodist emphasis on ministry through song. This is clearly reflected in planning. However, what pupils experience is the meshing of the two traditions, so typical comments are 'singing powers me up so I don't give up' and 'saying responses together makes us feel part of something bigger'.

The Year 6 pupil chaplains have only just taken up their roles but they are clearly inspired by last year's team. They have a key role in helping other pupils to make use of the prayer room and talk with impressive maturity of how it is important to reflect on your actions when you have not behaved well. What emerges strongly is their secure understanding of biblical teaching about forgiveness. Activities in prayer areas such as trays of sand to wipe away a wrong-doing are an example of the excellent visual prompts that help pupils to grasp spiritual ideas. Consequently, pupil chaplains explain that the next stage is that 'you have to do something to redeem yourself.' Members of this team include those whose own self-esteem has been nurtured by the school and so the servant leadership seen in the adults is now developing in the children.

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

Blackrod's set of eight core values is seen as a tool in implementing the Christian vision of 'Growing and learning together in God's love'. It is widely understood that any one of these values would not be effective if used in isolation and, with this in mind, all eight have been woven together in one sentence to demonstrate exactly how the vision is lived out. Job descriptions for senior leaders are linked to these values, so they have a role in holding staff to account. The life chances of pupils matter enormously to all members of staff, whatever their role, and pupils and their parents are acutely aware of this. Careful recruitment of staff means that they are appointed for their potential to implement the Christian ethos not just their professional skills. This results in the exemplary relationships between the school and families that is regularly expressed in terms of the body of Christ. The headteacher draws a clear distinction between leadership and management and both are understood to be driven by an explicitly Christian interpretation of Christian values. This shapes the strategic direction of the school. The headteacher's national role means he is only in school for part of the week, so an extended leadership team now exists. This model of leadership works effectively because of the systems in place and the significant level of attention given to the professional development of leaders. Responsibilities are clearly delegated and understood by all staff. A four-week rotation of leadership team meetings is enhanced by an annual residential. The cycle always begins with a focus on foundational principles of leadership and how the Gospel values of humility and servant leadership modelled by Jesus are central to this. The cycle ends with a review of action plans for individual pupils which is evidence of the impact of the Christian vision. As a result, senior leaders are very competent. Their decisions are seen to be consistent and are trusted by the whole community, so new initiatives are willingly embraced. The school is growing new leaders specifically skilled in working with church schools. This reflects the brave decision of governors to agree a substantial secondment of the headteacher to the Methodist Church. This has proved to be a wise move. The headteacher offers much to his national role as a skilled practitioner and the school has been enriched by his wider perspective on leadership and the initiatives he has introduced. In a similar vein, the successful integration of DREAMS completely justifies the determination of governors to make their mission statement count through the decisions they make.

The business of governance is not devolved to committees so the school's Christian character remains at the core of its work. The three positions of foundation governor rotate between the Anglican and Methodist churches. This leads to a shared view of progress because it is a regular agenda item for both senior staff and governors. Consequently, RE and collective worship have a high profile and fully meet statutory requirements. Leaders have an ambitious vision and action is promptly taken to address any shortcomings. For example, although pupils have a good grasp of religious language, leaders considered that Christianity should be taught with greater theological rigour. There is considerable enthusiasm for adopting Understanding Christianity, a new national resource for RE. Self-evaluation is broadly accurate but the way this is recorded does not convey the insight of leaders or the excellent practice in place. Consequently, it is not a useful tool in providing clear direction for how this might be sustained in the future. One reason for this is that the school does not measure its own progress against the vision and aims it sets itself.

The school has enjoyed good relations with the local Anglican and Methodist churches over many years. Clergy have had a direct involvement in improving pupils' spiritual experience and in the much valued pastoral support of staff. Changes to both clergy teams over the last year have temporarily halted these activities. However, regular links, particularly with the Methodist lunch club, have been maintained and there is an expectation from both sides for the same level of liaison to be restored with the new appointments now in place. In the past, the combined presence of clergy and church members from both denominations has enriched the Christian character of the school beyond the individual work of each. Senior clergy acknowledge that the full potential of the relationship has never been fully explored, perhaps even at a national level. With regular meetings now planned locally, and with the national role of the headteacher, the school is in a good position to move forward with this.

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