THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND EDUCATION OFFICE

The Methodist Church

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Thomas' Moorside Church of England Primary School	
Coleridge Road, Sholver, Oldham OL1 4RL	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	**Outstanding**
Diocese	**Manchester**
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Oldham
Name of federation	Dove/Shell
Date of inspection	29 June 2017
Date of last inspection	May 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary aided 105695
Executive headteacher and head of school	Adam Laskey Alison Murray
Inspector's name and number	Nigel Castledine 652

School context

This smaller than average primary school is located in an isolated area of significant deprivation, surrounded by a more affluent district. Its increasing roll is mainly of White British heritage pupils with a smaller number from other heritages. There are an above average proportion of pupils with additional needs, and a much higher than average number of disadvantaged pupils.

Since the 2012 inspection, the school has joined with another local Church of England primary to form the Dove/Shell Federation, with one governing body and an executive headteacher. The head of school is responsible for the daily running of St Thomas'.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Thomas' Moorside as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The school's strong Christian ethos ensures that every pupil is treated as a unique and valued child of God. All pupils receive individualised nurture to enable full access to the school's inspirational curriculum.
- The dedication of the staff team and their mutual support for each other models the school's Christian values in action, for all pupils to emulate.
- The strength of the federation between the two schools has enabled both to thrive, benefitting from wide-ranging opportunities to work together in innovative ways that enrich pupils' educational experiences.
- The high quality of religious education (RE) teaching and learning ensures that it is a core subject of the school. Pupils benefit from its clear links to worship and from the use of the Philosophy for Children approach to the discussion of questions of life and belief.

Areas to improve

- Include formal evaluation of the impact of St Thomas' Christian distinctiveness within the school's assessment procedures, to ensure the ethos remains a positive influence on all aspects of school provision.
- Use the existing good practice of school council involvement in worship leadership to support other pupils in developing the necessary skills to plan, lead and evaluate collective worship, with growing independence.
- Fully embed the existing RE assessment systems in order to accurately track pupil progress and attainment through school and to enable meaningful comparison with pupil outcomes in other core subjects.

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

St Thomas' clear Christian education vision is underpinned by its influential faith ethos that is at the heart of this focused, caring school. Christian teachings support pupils to become confident, resilient learners with positive attitudes toward their classroom studies. Pupils thrive academically and want to succeed. From a starting point well below national expectations, pupil progress through school is strong, with most pupils achieving the national standards for the end of the primary phase. To make this possible, the school's pastoral support worker ensures barriers to progress are removed. This holistic approach includes professional counselling that nurtures emotional well-being. Because each pupil is known as an individual, teachers are able to precisely match learning to particular needs. The school works diligently with families to ensure good attendance reaches the expected national level.

The school has twelve chosen Christian values. They comprise: generosity, thankfulness, compassion, trust, courage, perseverance, forgiveness, justice, friendship, service, respect and truthfulness. These values form the framework for the school's rich programme of spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. Pupils know the values stem from Christ's teaching, and use them as guides for their behaviour and thinking. A Reception class pupil commented, 'Respect is being kind and nice to people even when I don't know them yet.' Pupils enjoy taking up the many opportunities to help one another in Christian service. An older pupil suggested, "I think our school council tries to help people, like Jesus said we should.' Christian stewardship is evident in the ways pupils enjoy supporting local and international charities. Gospel values also influence pupils' exemplary behaviour and attitudes towards each other. Pupils strive to earn and keep a highly-prized 'Always' badge which indicates their sustained good and thoughtful behaviour. Any rare incidents of bullying or intolerance are dealt with effectively by senior staff.

Christian values also influence the ways in which pupils new to the school are given tailored support. A warm welcome awaits all newcomers including recent arrivals to the UK, for some of whom English is a second language. A mother explained, 'We were lost and lonely, far from our old home, yet we were welcomed into this loving school.' Mutual respect ensures all pupils, regardless of culture or faith, are happy learning, worshipping, playing and socialising together at St Thomas'. This Christian value of respect has also nurtured a long-standing connection between the federation's two schools and a local school serving a predominantly Muslim community. Pupils in all three schools have built up friendships, sharing in each other's beliefs, ways of life and traditions. This clear understanding and respect for diversity of faith and culture is well supported by pupils' learning in RE.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Daily collective worship is regarded as an essential part of school life. Because worship is planned to be inclusive, all are able to benefit, irrespective of their personal belief. This careful planning is informed by regular evaluations from stakeholders. Worship for each half term follows the Anglican calendar of festivals and special seasons. This provides opportunities for developing pupils' age-appropriate understanding of the Christian teaching of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which is expanded further in RE. Each half term a Christian value becomes the focus for worship. This focus helps pupils both to understand the source of the values is the teachings of Jesus and to consider how they might follow his example. Discussion around such worship topics frequently continues in class.

Pupils experience Anglican tradition in the use of a worship table with the Christian symbols of a cross, a Bible and a lit candle on it as focal points. During worship, traditional hymns are used alongside modern worship songs, all enthusiastically sung by those present. Pupils are keen to respond to questions in worship and to join in with prayer, readings and drama. Other Anglican aspects of worship include the use of the Lord's prayer, whilst the school prayer is regularly said by all. To ensure pupils experience a range of worship styles, its leaders include local clergy and church members, senior members of staff and the pupils of the school council. However, the successful worship leadership of these pupils has not been extended to involve others wanting to follow their example.

Pupils are comfortable in sharing their own prayers in school and each classroom has a worship area for private times of quiet reflection. Focused prayer, enhancing the school's atmosphere of spirituality, also takes place during the school day to thank God for food during lunchtime and also at home-time. Parents recognise the impact of school prayers, one commenting, 'My child likes to use school prayers at bedtime or before meals.' Pupils are also supported to grow in spirituality through use of the 'forest school' approach to outdoor learning. This provides them with inspirational first-hand experiences within the awe and wonder of God's created world.

School worship also takes place in St Thomas' church each half term, providing opportunities for pupils to experience Anglican tradition in a Christian setting. The impact of this is apparent in the comment of a Reception-aged pupil, 'I can feel Jesus with me in our church. That makes me feel happy.' The range of Anglican church worship includes a school eucharist each Easter, with all present invited to receive a blessing at the altar. Parents and families join their children for worship in church, irrespective of their own personal beliefs, commenting on how they are made to feel welcome and included.

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The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

RE is a key component in the curriculum of the school, positively influencing pupils to think deeply about belief in clear, structured ways. The school's use of the Philosophy for Children approach enables open, disciplined discussion to support the seeking of answers to significant faith questions for which there is no easy solution. An example of exceptional practice seen was the way in which Year 6 pupils used this technique in their discussion of the meaning of Dali's painting of Christ crucified. Many points of view were respectfully discussed in order to reach an agreed conclusion. This lesson is typical of the school's high quality of cross-curricular RE that ensures pupils are stimulated by the teaching of the subject, making good progress because they enjoy their learning.

This level of theological debate develops from its inspirational beginnings in the school's early years foundation stage. In the Reception class, pupils were helped to develop their descriptive language as they used their senses of touch, sight and smell to express their reactions to fresh flowers. Evocative imagery was expressed by the pupils, who delighted in the variety and beauty of the learning materials. This was linked in meaningful age-appropriate ways to the consideration of the beauty of God's world and how flowers are used to express love and caring.

The head of school is the lead teacher for RE which indicates the high status of the subject. She has used the introduction of the new diocesan RE scheme as the catalyst for a successful programme of staff development that ensures all RE teaching is of a high standard. The carefully monitored outcomes show that, across the school, RE motivates pupils to want to learn about religion and their personal learning from faiths is effectively stimulated. Pupils' books show the range and quality of work covered. Whole class RE books show the breadth of learning, stemming from pupils' investigations of Christianity and other world faiths. This approach is often cross-referenced to the school's gospel values and it provides rich opportunities for pupils to consider Christianity as a multi-cultural global faith. The topics in collective worship also touch on these RE themes and give them added relevance.

Assessment of the new RE scheme has been recently developed to ensure that pupils' attainment in RE is recorded. However this is not yet fully embedded so that meaningful comparisons cannot be made between progress and attainment in RE with that of other core subjects. School documentation indicates that this need has already been recognised, to ensure accurate assessments can be made.

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

The dedicated executive headteacher works with the head of school to combine their considerable leadership skills in harnessing Christian distinctiveness as the God-given inspiration that continually develops St Thomas'. Their emphasis is on using this strong Christian ethos to drive forward the highest standards in all aspects of school life. Senior school leaders and governors also strongly promote the school's distinctly Christian philosophy. This ensures that every aspect of school provision marks out St Thomas' as a centre of educational excellence. At this school, biblical teaching is followed in each pupil being nurtured as an individual, made in God's image.

The establishment of the effective Dove/Shell federation between the two local Church of England schools has been a powerfully positive force for continuous improvement. It strongly supports St Thomas' exceptional standards and enhances its Christian distinctiveness and values. This is underpinned by an effective management structure that ensures methodical analysis and evaluation of the school's performance by all stakeholders. Timely action can therefore be taken to put in place necessary improvements as the need arises.

The federation's joint governing board is involved in the ongoing scrutiny of St Thomas' and its members are well informed about its effectiveness in terms of curriculum delivery and its outcomes. Many of the governors visit the schools regularly and carry out informal scrutiny of Christian distinctiveness. However, school leaders and governors have no formal system of monitoring the impact of the Christian ethos of St Thomas' in supporting and enriching all aspects of school life. This hampers necessary timely action being taken to support any area where the Christian ethos might not be sufficiently effective.

School questionnaire analysis shows that parents consider the school effectively meets the needs of their children and many comment positively on the vibrant Christian ethos at St Thomas'. A mother stated, 'My child is loved and valued at this church school, appreciated for who he is and what he is learning to do - he matters.'

The school has productive links with the local diocese that support its onward development. The diocesan director has regularly visited the school to meet pupils, to meet with the governing board and to join in the worship.

The Dove/Shell federation provides innovative ways of utilising the skills of staff with regular transfers of personnel between the two schools. This interchange provides contrasting experiences of teaching and supporting learning in both schools. It also enhances the ongoing professional development of all staff and governors. The school also benefits from its collaboration within the East Oldham cluster that enables St Thomas' to work collaboratively with other local schools.

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