

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St James' Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Oozebooth Terrace

Blackburn

BB1 8EN

Diocese:

Blackburn

Local authority:

Blackburn with Darwen

Dates of inspection:

12th October 2009

Date of last inspection:

28th February 2007

School's unique reference number:

119502

Headteacher:

Mr Philip Morgan

Inspector's name and number:

Mr Mike Graham (286)

School context

St James' is an above average sized school. It serves a culturally diverse area with high social and economic deprivation. There are 398 children on roll, 99% of whom are from Asian heritage families. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion having SEN is 17%. The school is located on two sites, separated by a quiet street.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St James' as a Church of England school are good

St James has a distinctive Christian ethos. Christian values and attitudes form the foundation of school life and there is a determination to further develop the school's Christian witness with sensitivity and forethought. Caring relationships within school demonstrate Christian values very well. Links with the parish church and the local community are remarkably close and are mutually beneficial.

Established strengths

- The warm and caring relationships within the family of the school
- The excellent community cohesion and co-operation between faith groups
- The Christian vision and inspiring leadership of the headteacher, supported very well by all staff and governors

Focus for development

- Increase the children's involvement in the planning and evaluation of worship
- Devise a child-friendly mission statement

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

The Christian ethos of the school has a significant impact on the children's personal development. Children say that anyone could tell that this is a church school because "...we do prayers to God in assembly" and "The display board tells about Jesus". All the children know that they are valued and special. The joyful yet respectful atmosphere around school is impressive. The children are not only aware of Christian values but strive to live by them. The many opportunities provided in and beyond the curriculum enable individuals and groups of children to assume responsibilities successfully and to develop their full potential. The school council plays an important part in helping the children to evaluate different options and make decisions. The council members display a growing maturity and have initiated fund-raising ventures, ranging from the Bethany project in Africa to supporting several local projects. A 'thank you' certificate from the North-west Council of Mosques following recent fund-raising for a Moslem charity is but one significant indicator that community cohesion is a strength of the school. The school takes a leading role in developing good relationships with the wider community and parish, based on celebration of the natural links and shared values. As the RE co-ordinator eloquently put it, priority is given to "...acceptance, rather than tolerance". The

successful efforts to encourage and develop openness, honesty and a constant willingness to listen to each other leads to excellent personal relationships. The school environment is used well to encourage spiritual development and an appreciation of God's creation. The positive atmosphere of the school is enhanced by bright and thought-provoking displays, often with RE and worship as their theme.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Children and staff join in worship with enthusiasm. The children are very positive about it and talk enthusiastically about the times spent worshipping together in church and in school. They "always" have time for reflection, and pray "for the world", for "God to keep us safe" and "for grandma to walk again". All staff attend worship regularly, and the vicar, curate, some children and other visitors, including some from other faiths, lead worship. Between them they offer a good variety of activities which support children's spiritual development well. The sense of awe and wonder in the harvest service in church, with laughter and enthusiastic singing, was a joy to see. The sensitive leadership by the vicar included some delightful interaction with the children, who are confident in their responses. The sincerity and relevance of worship ensure that both pupils and staff gain inspiration, are encouraged to grow spiritually and are personally affirmed. Church links are strong yet sensitive and the parents accept and support the church's involvement. The vicar's teaching about baptism and marriage during the 'Faith Street' project and the regular use of the greeting, "The peace of God be with you" and the response "And peace be with you" help to give the children a good understanding of Anglican faith and practice. Worship is clearly central to the life of the school and underpins the Christian ethos, although the main participants – the children – have limited involvement in planning, leading and evaluation.

The effectiveness of religious education is good

Standards in RE are good. The children make very good progress in understanding because they are successfully encouraged to examine the differences religion makes in people's lives. A good range of portfolios of children's work is in place, and regular moderation and teamwork has begun so as to ensure that the RE provision maximises achievement. In lessons children's understanding grows because they are given many opportunities to reflect on and discuss issues. They are very positive about RE and understand the value of studying Christianity and all the major world faiths. A year 5 boy said, "School isn't just about teaching your religion, but other religions too". The Faith Street project was mentioned often, with numerous comments about the thrill of visiting places of worship and welcoming visitors to school. One year 6 boy was fascinated to find that in the "Sikh temple" they had to "take off shoes, wash hands and cover our heads...just like in the Mosque". Committed teaching by Moslem and Christian members of staff inspires interest and promotes the Christian character of the school. In the lessons observed there were many excellent elements. Year 2 were studying the bible as a special book, and the teacher's gentle encouragement brought out comments about the reasons for their choices of special book such as, "(It was from my dad)... I say prayers from it". The teacher's own comment about her book, "This is my Holy Bible", and showing the inscription added impact to her very good lesson. The year 5 lesson on the story of Ruth was outstanding. The children were enthralled throughout. The teacher used a variety of approaches including drama, role-play, excellent use of a video clip and superb prompting and open questioning. This variety led to outstanding progression in learning and maximum impact. Subtle and skilful connections were made between the children's own faith values and heritage and the dilemma facing Ruth.

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

The headteacher and foundation governors promote a distinctive school vision based on Christian values with enthusiasm and understanding. The recent 'away days' for governors have helped new members to grasp the vision, with the headteacher and vicar providing inspiration. However, the mission statement is too long and inaccessible to the

children. The headteacher's Christian conviction is quietly evident in all aspects of his leadership. He summarised his vision as "Bringing the community together by faith". RE and worship feature prominently in the school improvement plan, confirming their importance. Areas for development from the previous report have been tackled thoroughly and successfully. There is a real sense that this is a team, with a united view of the Christian purpose of the school and the sensitivity needed to succeed. Potential future leaders of church schools are encouraged and nurtured. The example set by staff and wholehearted support for in-service training helps all stakeholders to understand and grasp the Christian vision. Parents are delighted with and proud of the school, and are given regular and varied opportunities for feedback. Comments from parents included, "The teachers here are great", "(The school) has a great reputation in the area" and "Moslems and Christians have so much in common".

SIAS report October 2009, St James' CE Primary, Blackburn, BB1 8EN