

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Cronton Church of England Primary School

Smithy Lane, Cronton, Widnes, WA8 5D	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Liverpool
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Date of academy conversion	1 October 2017
Name of multi-academy trust	Liverpool Diocesan Schools Trust
Date of inspection	4 July 2018
Date of last inspection,	March 2013
Type of academy and unique reference number	Primary Voluntary Aided Academy 104449
Headteacher	Sylvia Thomson
Inspector's name and number	Mike Graham 286

School context

The school is of average size and serves the village of Cronton, and the immediate surrounding area. There are currently 210 pupils on roll. They come from a range of backgrounds, and the majority are White British. The percentages generating pupil premium funding and with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are below average. There are very few pupils from minority ethnic groups. The school recently gained its second Diocese of Liverpool Church and School Partnership Award. The school building serves as a mission church for Cronton.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Cronton CofE as a Church of England school are outstanding

- Exemplary Christian leadership from the headteacher is supported wholeheartedly by the senior leadership team, staff and governors. They live out the vision of the school, ensuring that the school embraces all families with care and loving support.
- Clear Christian values, which are rooted in the teachings of the Bible, are deeply embedded and exemplified by all members of the school. This has created a caring, warm, inclusive and respectful learning community.
- Varied and inspiring worship, supported by outstanding religious education (RE) teaching and learning, nurtures the pupils' exceptional spiritual, moral and social maturity.
- The clergy and the lay reader, who is also the local missional leader, foster exceptionally close church-school links. Their leadership and ministry provide sensitive and inspiring expertise in teaching and pastoral support and strengthen the seamless relationship between the two communities.

Areas to improve

- Build on the already outstanding RE by fully integrating the new diocesan syllabus and aspects of the Understanding Christianity materials, so as to further deepen the pupils' understanding of faith.
- Develop a new vision statement, involving the whole school family, to clarify the Biblical basis for the Christian values that drive and inspire the school's work.

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

Every aspect of the school exemplifies a spirit of Christian love and care. The Christian vision is summed up by the excellent child-friendly motto 'BEST', 'Believe, Enjoy, Succeed, Together'. This is being consistently demonstrated in the everyday life of the school, with pupils, families and staff all joining in the journey of learning and growing together. The creative and well-planned curriculum leads to outstanding achievement for all pupils, both academically and in their wider life skills. There is a refreshing enthusiasm in the way in which they approach their learning. The security they feel banishes any fear of failure and enables and allows them to give of their best. Their excellent levels of achievement are clearly shown in both national and school assessment data.

The few but slowly increasing number of families from other cultures or faiths feel welcomed and valued. It is clear that difference is embraced and celebrated. Consequently the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of all pupils is supported and enhanced, regardless of their faith background. As part of RE, invitations to visitors from several different faiths and studies of places of worship, including a mosque and synagogue, broaden pupils' cultural and spiritual understanding. The overall contribution of RE to the Christian character of the school is highly significant. Children see RE as an adventure and an opportunity to explore life's 'big questions'. The introduction of the new syllabus, including elements of the recently published Understanding Christianity programme, is already beginning to add greater challenge to the teaching and learning. Staff and pupils are excited by the new approach, and there is scope for development in an already excellent programme. The subject is given a high priority in school and links well with the worship planning so that these two key areas of school life complement each other.

Relationships between all members of the school family show Christian values in action. Mutual respect and a natural kindness and sensitivity are constantly evident, and are consciously linked to the teachings and example of Jesus. Pupils' overall behaviour, in response to the Christian character exemplified by staff, is outstanding.

The displays within school and in the grounds, many of which are interactive and include worship and RE themes, are of exceptional quality. The whole area speaks of care and pride, giving a visual demonstration of awe and wonder at God's creation. Social and Christian responsibilities, including giving financial and material support to the 'Arise' school in Tanzania and to local charities, are fostered through the ethos and council groups.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship at Cronton school is sincere, varied and vibrant, engaging everyone fully and ensuring that Christian values remain central to school life. Leaders, including pupils, use personal examples of difficulties faced and solutions that are available through faith. This makes worship and faith relevant and practical to those involved. Cronton Mission Church has the school as its home, and the missional leader and clergy from St Luke's Farnworth are frequently involved in leading worship in school and in church. The seamless link thus established has a natural unifying effect, enabling the two communities to work together as one. Pupils, especially those who are members of the ethos group, are frequently involved in planning, leading and evaluating worship. The sense of ownership and togetherness generated by this involvement leads to an impressive spiritual maturity. As the missional leader put it, 'They have a wonderful understanding, and are growing their faith.' The use of drama, joyful singing, humour, quiet reflection and prayer, Bible readings and stories all enhance times of worship. In an excellent collective worship led by Year 2, songs full of humour and joy were followed by a time for silence and quiet contemplation, the impact of which on all present, including parents and carers, was striking. The message, based on the story of Zaccheus, led to reflections on the change that Jesus can make in the lives of those who meet him. The pupils recognised that the Christian value of forgiveness was prominent in the story. Forgiveness, said one pupil, means 'not holding a grudge'.

Prayer and reflection are encouraged and are flourishing in every classroom and in various other places within the school building and outdoors. The ethos group have recently set up a worship zone on the school field, where pupils write prayers, read the Bible and study other faiths. A governor said of the ethos group, 'They inspire us!' Impressively, spontaneous prayer is beginning to develop as part of class worship, and is also becoming part of RE when appropriate. Prayers written by pupils are used in whole school and church worship, thereby enhancing their confidence and bringing freshness to worship.

The Christian concept of God as Trinity is taught well. Pupils have a sound, age-appropriate understanding of God the Father as creator and Jesus as Son and Saviour, and the Holy Spirit as a driving force in the lives of Christians. A Year 5 pupil said 'Life gets happier with the Holy Spirit'. Links with the church are naturally very close. Parents gather with the school at special church services at Christmas, Easter and at the end of each school year, and eagerly accept the invitation to attend worship led by the classes. One said, 'At class worships parents come and learn about the values!' The team vicar from the East Widnes clergy team regularly meets with the ethos group and the headteacher. Their passion for worship is clearly making a significant impact on the spiritual lives of pupils and adults. Evaluation by children, staff and governors leads to informed and careful improvements in worship.

The effectiveness of religious education is outstanding

Outstanding teaching in RE is evident throughout the school, leading to outstanding learning. The teaching staff are confident in their understanding of spirituality and use the skills required to foster its development in the pupils. The curriculum is effective and wide-ranging, and its delivery is varied and inventive. As a result progress is excellent, aided by stimulating and searching assessment by staff both verbally and in writing.

In a Year 5 class for example, pupils were engrossed as they studied abstract Christian artwork. The level of challenge was exceptional, and the response from one pupil demonstrates the depth of understanding being achieved. He said, of a picture of Jesus' face following His crucifixion, 'These are the marks and blood from the crown of thorns, but there is a hint of the joy of the resurrection in the brighter part of the picture'.

In a reception class lesson on the 10 Commandments, they focussed for a while on the command to love one another. One pupil's response was immediate and heartfelt: 'I will help my friends when they have failed!' The teaching on these 'rules for life' was entirely age-appropriate, impressive and is making a difference to pupils' attitudes and behaviour.

A Year 1 class compared Muslim welcoming ceremonies with Christian baptism. Their involvement was total and their discussions fascinating. As a result there were several spontaneous prayers at the close of the lesson from pupils who volunteered gladly and prayed with relevance and conviction.

The clergy from church contribute regularly in RE, covering subjects such as baptism, the Eucharist and confirmation. Staff and pupils value their input, and also the excellent teaching about non-Christian faiths. One pupil said 'We will be able to talk with them more easily because we understand them better.'

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

The headteacher and her team are inspirational. They exemplify Christian living to the best of their abilities to outstanding effect, setting examples that the pupils acknowledge and follow. As a result, the loving and caring ethos is clear as soon as one enters the school. They have also increased the school family's awareness of the values and, significantly, the Christian source of them. A parent commented, 'The Christian values do help. There is genuine love and care'.

The vision, as summarised by the motto, BEST, and the biblically based Christian values that underpin it, are very well understood. The clergy and leadership team are clear about the theological basis of this vision. They are, however, aware that there is no vision statement to set out succinctly the source of the school's Christian distinctiveness. The values are crucial in providing security and empowering the pupils to realise their full potential, in SMSC development as well as academic achievement. The governors support with enthusiasm and skill and are involved regularly through both class and subject based links. When appropriate, they are also ready to challenge robustly and effectively, and are encouraged to do so by the headteacher. This means that there is no danger of complacency. They have ensured that the areas for development from the previous report have been dealt with successfully. They have ready access to the senior leaders' strategic plans for the school, and are impressed by the openness of the headteacher's approach. They work with her on many aspects of future planning and present issues to excellent effect.

The openness and welcoming nature of the church, its people and worship services, is a vital factor in the joint success of school and church in giving a Christian heart to the wider community. The contributions by clergy and lay members to RE teaching, including work on Pentecost and the Ascension, enable the church to support for the pupils' spiritual education.

Religious education and worship are given high priority, demonstrate outstanding practice, and arrangements for both meet statutory requirements. The exceptionally gifted and passionate RE leader is given excellent support by the whole senior leadership team and all staff appreciate the help and high quality resources available to them. Preparation for future leadership in church schools is excellent. It includes high quality in-service training, links with other local schools through the fast-growing Liverpool Diocesan Schools Trust and diocesan training. Outstanding teamwork, delegation and coaching within the school family all contribute to this process. Parents and carers are immensely proud of their school, and feel involved and included. A typical comment is 'I couldn't wish for a better school'.

Church and school together provide a beacon of hope and love for the whole area. The school is in an excellent position to continue the growth and development of this warm and united Christian family.

SIAMS report, July 2018, Cronton Church of England (VA) Primary Academy, Widnes, WA8 5D