

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St James Church of England Primary School, Farnworth	
Hillside Avenue, Farnworth, Bolton, Lancashire BL4 9QB	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Manchester
Previous SIAS inspection grade (as a Church of England voluntary controlled primary school)	Good
Date of academy conversion	August 2016
Name of multi-academy trust	Bolton and Farnworth Church of England Primary Multi-Academy Trust
Date of inspection	9 March 2017
Date of last inspection	March 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Academy 142944
Principal	Lisa Belfield
Executive Principal	Jill Pilling
Inspector's name and number	Nigel Castledine 652

School context

St James is a larger than average primary school, situated within an urban community of significant deprivation. Most pupils are White British, with the proportions from minority ethnic groups and with English as an additional language slightly above average. The proportion of pupils supported in school by pupil premium is high. The proportion of vulnerable pupils and those with special educational needs or disability is higher than average. Also above average is the number of pupils who join and leave the school mid-year. Since the last inspection the school has become an academy with significant changes to the senior leadership team.

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

- The life and work of the school is underpinned by vibrant Christian values that enhance and inform its pervasive Christian distinctiveness.
- The care and nurture provided for pupils and their families by the school demonstrates transformative Christian love and service in action, and celebrates the God-given value of every child.
- Mutually supportive relationships among pupils and staff create a happy atmosphere of respect and care, which engenders good behaviour and a commitment to learning.
- The inclusive ethos enables pupils of faith and those of none to find inspirational purpose and positive challenge within their school lives.

Areas to improve

- Refine the assessment of pupil's progress and attainment in religious education (RE) in order to inform their next steps in learning and provide accurate comparisons with data for other core subjects.
- To aid pupils' deeper understanding about the faiths they study in RE, provide opportunities for learning from adults and children who profess these faiths and visits to their places of worship.
- Extend the evaluation of worship to ensure the views and suggestions of a wide range of pupils inform future plans.

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

This school is well underway on an improvement journey which is underpinned by the rediscovery and celebration of its Christian distinctiveness. There is a strong determination to help all pupils to live up to the school's strap-line of 'Dream, Believe, Learn, Achieve'. Supported by six core Christian values comprising peace, trust, friendship, forgiveness, hope and thankfulness, the school emphasises the importance of Christian values in all aspects of school life. These values serve as a uniting link between faiths. A Muslim pupil stated his respect for this inclusivity, 'I know these values can be found in the teachings of the Qu'ran so they are special for me too.'

Through religious education (RE) and worship, pupils learn how the values are linked to biblical teaching and how they can influence their thinking and actions. One significant outcome is the pupils' exemplary behaviour. Fulfilling the Christian value of forgiveness each day in school is a fresh start for every pupil. Bullying happens rarely and is swiftly dealt with by the staff. This emphasis on caring, thoughtful behaviour is a key factor in maintaining the improving standards of pupil achievement. Younger pupils in Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 are making good progress and achieving national expectations from a low starting point. However, past under-achievement is a reason for the oldest pupils not yet reaching national expectations in all subjects. Attendance at school has improved significantly in the last two years, with persistent absence closely monitored and acted upon by the learning mentors. Pupils' appropriate classroom behaviour enables them to work hard and experience satisfaction in achieving and exceeding their learning goals. A Year 6 pupil used the Christian value of hope to explain her thinking and commitment to her work, 'God helps us reach our hopes and dreams.'

St James promotes a strong moral purpose which encourages pupils to do the right thing for the right reasons. The strengths of the staff team in working purposefully and harmoniously together provide pupils with a clear role model of commitment and dedication to work. The range of pupil responsibilities willingly carried out and the enjoyment of additional club activities widen pupils' horizons as well as providing opportunities for Christian service and charitable giving. They enable pupils to develop personal identity and to grow in self-worth as they experience the biblical concept of 'life in all its fullness'. Spiritual development comes from pupils growing in faith, empathy, insight and through imaginative responses to awe, wonder, beauty and the 'big' questions of life.

The minority of pupils with differing home languages, faiths and customs, and the contrasting styles of Christian worship of international new arrivals enable all pupils to benefit from the rich variety of multi-cultural and multi-faith learning opportunities they provide. Partnership through the multi-academy learning trust (MAT) with Bishop Bridgeman Primary further expands the opportunities for pupils of differing beliefs and cultures to learn together. Pupils from both schools meet together to explore the similarities and differences between beliefs and life-styles as they build up shared values and respect for the diverse society in which they live. Such experiences and the learning that flows from them have ensured that racial incidents are a very rare occurrence in school.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

The development of collective worship has been at the heart of the school's reinvigorated faith focus. Great care is given to ensuring worship is inclusive in its appeal to pupils of faith or none, with each half term focusing on themes from the chosen Christian value. Added impact stems from pupil faith challenges that extend through the week, giving wider opportunities to reflect on the messages of worship. Parents comment that pupils are keen to share these engaging challenges with their families.

The principal and a senior teacher plan worship and also supervise its evaluation from a limited group of pupils and staff. This is insufficient to give a wide enough range of views to fully inform future worship plans. In order to give worship freshness and added appeal, it is led by a variety of leaders that include members of staff, pupils, visitors and local clergy. This involvement of the local clergy team and their use of Anglican tradition within school worship compensates for the difficulty in using the local church regularly, due to its excessive walking distance.

The school has created an enthusiastic pupils' worship group whose members are elected by each class. The group meets weekly for faith-related activities and helps regularly with worship. Its members also support worship leaders through their consideration of the impact of Christian values and in assessing the spirituality of worship areas. Each half term, the worship group independently plans and leads collective worship for the whole school.

The experiences of Anglican tradition in worship for the pupils focus through the clergy in the content and style of its liturgy and the use of a worship table covered with cloths in colours that remind pupils of the Anglican liturgical calendar. Its cross, lit candle and bible are a daily reminder for Christians of the teaching of the Holy Trinity. A Reception class boy, playing with a construction toy tube, described what it resembled for him. He explained, 'This is a candle. It's because Jesus is the light of the world.' Pupils' responses during worship follow Anglican practice with the enthusiastic singing of worship songs, the use of traditional prayers including the Lord's Prayer and a concluding responsorial Grace. Pupils have recently written a new school prayer which incorporates the school strap-line. All present show great respect for worship and are keen to respond in reflection, prayer and praise.

The pupils' prayer group members are powerful advocates for the importance of spirituality and prayer within

school life. The group is supported by staff and local clergy in regular inspirational activities, prayer and reflection times for pupils of all ages. They ensure prayer is part of daily school life and check that each classroom's worship area provides a spiritual haven. Whilst formal prayer takes place during the school day and at home-time, a young member of the group commented, 'Anyone can pray at our school at any time, anywhere.'

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

The school has recently adopted the diocesan 'Questful RE' syllabus through school which has already led to an improved and deeper understanding of the subject. Pupils now value their RE learning and have grown in respect for the faiths they study. A pupil stated, 'We are all a big family so we should respect each other.'

Class educational visits to the local Anglican church are a useful learning resource for RE. However, pupils do not yet have the opportunity to discuss belief with a range of people who practice a faith in their lives, and visits to the places of worship of other beliefs do not take place.

All teachers ensure that pupils learn about religions through enquiry and investigation, but equally important they learn from religions through questioning, reflecting and interpreting in the light of their own experiences of life to make insightful links. A Year 2 class exemplified exciting learning from religion in their lively discussion and vivid role play as they considered their reactions to the biblical story of Peter being accused of being a disciple after Jesus' arrest.

Christian values and other worship themes are often followed up in RE lessons, with imaginative and interactive displays capturing pupils' imagination and interest. A Year 5 boy commented, 'I don't have a belief in God, but I really like learning about those who do. It makes me think about my own life.'

An assessment system for RE is being trialled to give a clear indication of pupils' progress and achievement through the year and through school. Early indications show that RE data is at least comparable to other core subjects but further work is needed to ensure the consistency of assessment procedures for pupil progress and attainment.

The RE subject leader monitors the work, outcomes and effective delivery of the subject in every class. This information is fed into the school's strategic development plan. Along with the principal, she keeps staff well informed of developments in the subject and in maintaining its high profile in school. Working with senior staff from Bishop Bridgeman Primary has been beneficial in the setting up of joint training sessions. Staff have also been helped to grow in understanding of spirituality so there is due recognition for 'awe and wonder' across the curriculum. RE is well-resourced and has a high profile as a core subject of the school. Whilst remaining a discrete subject, RE is approached in a cross-curricular way with learning outcomes captured in a variety of media and formats. For many pupils of all abilities, RE is now a highlight of the school week.

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

Since the last inspection, the school has undergone a very significant period of change and renewal, including the appointment of a school principal who has a clear over-arching Christian perspective on education. This ensures St James is an inclusive, engaging Christian learning community where all are welcomed and respected. Under her leadership, the school has revitalised its Christian vision to ensure its strengths drive and enrich the quality of education and nurture offered to all pupils. In this ongoing work, the school's principal is skilfully supported by the vision and wisdom of the outstanding executive principal, aided by senior staff from the MAT.

As part of the drive to uplift the quality of teaching and learning, the school uses its learning mentors to remove potential blocks to learning and has enriched the curriculum to inspire pupils to excel. School evaluation is thorough and ongoing in all areas. A strategic development plan gives a clear overview of development in all areas of the school whilst ensuring Christian distinctiveness, worship and RE are carefully monitored, and developed.

The local governing board support the senior staff leaders and hold them to account for Christian distinctiveness remaining the lifeblood of the school. Their meetings include presentations from staff and pupils, including the elected Junior Leadership Team, which has a pivotal role in school decision making and policy implementation.

Although there is no longer a nearby church, the school has strong church links. Clergy are actively involved and offer pastoral care to the school community. Visits from local bishops have also helped to widen and enrich diocesan links and Year 6 pupils attend the annual leavers' service in Manchester cathedral.

The school's continuing professional development is geared to ensuring that all staff and governors benefit from appropriate courses and development opportunities. Rich opportunities for further development are gained from the partnership within the MAT and Christian leadership and RE courses are underway for key staff.

Parents and carers benefit from the open door policy of the school, the help they receive and the easy, friendly access to the staff. They praise the strong faith ethos of the school and its inclusivity for all faiths and those of none. One mother emphasised, 'There's no divide at St James. All are welcome, no matter what they believe.'