



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Methodist Voluntary Controlled Junior, Infant and Nursery School; with Communication resource

Field Lane
Thornes
Wakefield
WF2 7RU

Previous SIAMS grade: Good

Current inspection grade: Outstanding

District: Leeds Circuit: Aire and Calder

Local authority: Wakefield

Dates of inspection: 19 March 2015

Date of last inspection: March 2010

School's unique reference number: 108252

Headteacher: Darren Dickinson

Inspector's name and number: Lyn Field 151

School context

The school is an average-sized primary school. It is situated on the edge of Wakefield city centre and almost all pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils who count for extra pupil premium funding is lower than most schools. The proportion with special educational needs supported through school action plus is above average. The school has a ten place Communication Resource for pupils with autism and speech, language and communication disorders who struggle to access mainstream school. The headteacher has been in post since September 2014.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Wakefield Methodist as a Methodist school are outstanding

- The clear Christian vision of the new headteacher has brought a more strategic approach to the development of the school.
- The inclusive Christian ethos creates a harmonious community and enables pupils with special needs to flourish.
- The contribution of Methodist ministers and foundation governors ensures the school's Methodist character is secure and sustainable for the future.
- Pupils develop a strong sense of responsibility for their community and compassion for others as a result of the many partnerships the school enjoys.

Areas to improve

- To embed the more strategic approach to self-evaluation in order to ensure there is complete cohesion between the curriculum offered to all pupils, governance and the distinctive Methodist character of the school
- To ensure pupils have a secure understanding of Christian festivals throughout the church year to avoid any gaps in their knowledge of key Christian beliefs

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

Parents are clear from the start of their children's education that this is a Methodist school and regard the Christian ethos of welcome and acceptance as its most distinctive feature. It is the key to how the school successfully integrates pupils with deep-seated special needs and creates a harmonious community even when their behaviour is challenging. The staff are continually improving their systems for tracking pupils' progress and this reflects the school's focus on each child as a unique individual in the eyes of God. The school is well ahead in adapting its assessment to forthcoming changes in the national curriculum and RE has been given priority with the core subjects in this work. The achievement of pupils overall is on an upward trend and disadvantaged pupils progress as quickly as their peers. They enjoy school and attendance remains stable at slightly above average.

Pupils are keen and confident to explain the importance of the school's core values, particularly forgiveness and working together. They have a secure knowledge of Bible stories and do not hesitate to give examples of why the values are distinctively Christian. The behaviour of the vast majority of pupils is exemplary. This is because they apply the Christian values to the way they conduct themselves and visitors regularly comment on their courteous and compassionate attitudes to others. They enthuse about having the Communication Resource on site and see beyond the very special needs of individual children. A typical comment was 'they're part of everything we do, it's like the love of God spreading'.

RE makes a strong contribution to the school's Christian and Methodist character. Lessons challenge pupils in how they think of the person of Jesus and his teaching about how we judge others. They quote specific Bible stories to explain why any form of bullying and prejudice is wrong and this plays a big part in the harmonious relationships and atmosphere in the school. Year on year pupils gain a deeper understanding of Methodism using RE resources commissioned by the Methodist Church. This starts with John Wesley and leads to work on the Covenant in Year 6. This now has extra meaning for them with the visit of members of a Methodist school in Naples with which the school is building a partnership.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. The day Year 6 spend reflecting on 'Moving on' has a huge impact on everyone involved whilst the school grounds are used exceptionally well to support this area of the curriculum. The design of the reflective garden includes carvings of Christian values as well as trails to follow. The Forest School initiative is part of an important move for staff across the main school and the Communication Resource to share practice from which all pupils benefit.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

There have been significant changes to worship this year that are popular with adults and children alike. The speed of these developments has been possible because there was already a well-established pattern of worship in place. Parents appreciate the extra opportunities they now have to attend. The new features have reignited pupils' enjoyment of worship and highlight features of Methodist worship. A new school song, based around John Wesley's Rule, has attracted much attention and is set to be used in local churches. Worship is regularly monitored using pupils' views and this leads directly to improvements. Bible stories, for example, have come to life with a story-telling technique called 'Whoosh'. Senior leaders have now reached a stage where they are using efficient and sharply focused methods to check specific points about how well pupils respond to worship.

This year, for the first time, Year 5 pupils are performing the story of Easter, a musical written by a visiting teacher who worked with them on the school song. In addition to the excitement this has prompted, pupils are talking about Bible characters they 'didn't know existed' and 'have discovered that Jesus had an angry side'. They have gained a far greater understanding of the events of Holy week and realise how stories they have known for years fit into the timescale of Jesus' life. This has strengthened their existing knowledge about the central place of Jesus in the Christian faith and has also revealed possible gaps in what they know about other Christian festivals.

Prayer is a key part of worship but it also extends into the rest of the school day. Each class has its own take on how this happens. One class, for example, stands at home time to pray and to reflect on what they are proud of, or perhaps not so proud of, in their day. The prayer tree is well positioned to offer a quiet space for pupils to write down their thoughts and prayers. They understand the purpose of prayer through their work in RE. They are confident to write prayers for both public and private use but are uncertain about where in school they might place a more personal prayer to God.

The creation of a worship team of staff and students has provided a useful vehicle for introducing and monitoring new initiatives. This group regularly lead acts of worship that capture the interest of pupils. There is an excitement about how worship is evolving in the school, particularly the high profile of Methodist tradition with more visits to church and this is deepening the relationship between church and school.

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

The distinctive Christian character of the school has been well established over a number of years and the new headteacher has brought a valuable and fresh perspective to its work. He has given the Christian vision a new energy and urgency to ensure that even the most vulnerable of pupils are given the best chance of success. Leadership is increasingly being devolved to all members of staff. Where these opportunities are grasped, they are enriching what pupils experience and are making a greater contribution to the life of the whole community. The Year 5 teacher, for example, masterminded the commemoration of Remembrance Day. This left a deep impression on children and adults alike. There are extensive links with the community, many developed by a governor with a special interest in environmental education. In the same way as the partnership with the Methodist church, these links are of mutual benefit and raise pupils' awareness of how they can contribute to making society better. This is one of the Ten Principles of Methodist Education and shows that they are lived out in the life of the school.

The headteacher and governors are engaging with the Methodist Church at a national as well as local level and this is sharpening their focus on making sure there is the best possible provision for all pupils in their care. There is a strong Methodist presence on the governing body and care has been taken to maintain this as the membership changes. Regular meetings with the headteacher provide firm support but now hold the school to account for measures taken to improve practice. This is managed separately from the excellent work of the chaplain in worship and pastoral support and of a second Methodist minister in supporting the curriculum.

Consequently, the pastoral and educational support for the school is not compromised when more strategic decisions are made. In recent months the school's evaluation of itself has become far more insightful under the guidance of the new headteacher. Discussions have moved beyond a piecemeal approach to evaluating individual aspects of the school's Christian character to making crucial links between its Methodist character and the decisions made by governors. This is enabling leaders to articulate the difference this makes to pupils' achievement and wellbeing but has yet to be embedded in the regular systems for reviewing management and the curriculum.

The staff make maximum use of training in aspects of church school leadership. A national RE course on teaching about Methodism and collective worship training with the Anglican diocesan adviser have had a prompt and direct impact on pupils. Time is not lost in implementing ideas so the high profile of RE and worship is sustained through good working practices.

Consequently, the school is well placed to contribute to new education initiatives in the Methodist Church.