

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Thurgoland Church of England (Voluntary Controlled) Primary School

Halifax Road
Thurgoland
Sheffield
S35 7AL

Diocese: Sheffield

Local authority: Barnsley
Date of inspection: 14 March 2013
Date of last inspection: 8 May 2008
School's unique reference number: 106626
Headteacher: Mrs R. Davies
Inspector's name and number: Mr Malcolm Price (627)

School context

Thurgoland Primary School is a medium sized school, situated in attractive countryside close to the centre of this village between Sheffield and Barnsley. There are currently 209 pupils on roll, the overwhelming majority of whom are from a white UK background. The parish church is within walking distance. The headteacher was in post at the time of the previous inspection.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of the school as a Church of England school are outstanding.

The Christian character of the school is fundamental to its activities and its daily life. It is demonstrated in the confidence and maturity with which children speak of spiritual matters and relate their actions to Christian values. Strong leadership and teamwork have created a thriving community, marked by positive and caring relationships. Collective worship and religious education (RE) support this distinctiveness. School leaders have created a learning environment which is highly successful and which is a pleasure to experience. Along with church leaders, they have been effective in building a vibrant partnership.

Established strengths

- The strong Christian character and caring ethos of the school, demonstrated through exemplary relationships
- Strong, supportive links with the local church
- Effective leadership linked to a clear vision for the school's development

Focus areas for development

- Monitor the impact of collective worship using a range of approaches, including the contribution of children to planning and evaluation activities
- Build on the successes of local community involvement by providing more opportunities for children to learn about the culture and faith of other UK communities

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

Even a short time spent in this welcoming, busy school leaves no doubt that its distinctive Christian character is central to its life and that it places a high priority on children's spiritual development. This character is most evident in the ease and readiness with which children speak of spiritual matters and articulate Christian values - they express the importance of respect, trust, hope and friendship. Their understanding is reflected in mature attitudes and excellent behaviour; children are noticeably considerate towards each other and one indication of this is their support and care for a girl with long term illness. Children articulate the significance of the Christian ethos, stating that at school 'you can feel close to God'; they also recognise the impact that it has on their attitudes - 'if you want to say or do something you shouldn't, the Christian values help.' Each classroom has a 'prayer stop' and children understand the role of prayer, as when suggesting that if you have a problem 'you can pray about it and it makes you feel you have God and the whole school on your side.' Children

understand that they belong to a church school and enjoy their visits to the church for special occasions; they also appreciate the regular visits to school from the vicar and other church members. Religious education contributes to the distinctive character; children enjoy these lessons – they recall the story of Moses and discuss the need to have rules to live by; they also enjoy re-enacting the events of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem when learning about Palm Sunday. All members of the school community benefit from its core Christian values; parents are universally supportive of the school and have a high degree of involvement. The school clearly lives out its aim of 'learning together in faith and joy' and as a result children, especially the most vulnerable, make very good progress.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good.

Collective worship, in a variety of formats, is a key point in each school day. Children are fully engaged and respect this special time – they sing confidently, listen attentively and are sensitive to times of reflection. They are encouraged to relate key messages to their own lives and faith, for example in learning to trust God and people they are close to. Parents comment that children talk about times of worship and sometimes have 'conversations about God and Jesus on the way to school.' Children understand the particular significance of the candle, explaining that 'God is the light that shows us the way', and also of the colours that represent special times in the church calendar – for instance, the purple cloth to represent Lent 'when Jesus fasted'. Collective worship includes prayers and responses that the children learn and use. There is evidence that children contribute to worship times and their confidence in leading was demonstrated in an excellent performance of 'Pandora's Box' which emphasised the place of hope in the face of adversity. Children have the maturity to take a greater and more prominent role in planning and leading worship. Collective Worship follows a clear, thematic structure across the school year and includes the major Christian festivals and those of other faiths. It is supported by visits from local clergy and church members whose input is enthusiastically remembered by children. Some monitoring of the impact of collective worship has taken place, including feedback from children. There is scope for this to be developed through the observations of staff, governors and parents and also through child-friendly formats that ask children how worship makes them feel and what they might wish to change.

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

School leaders have been effective in creating a church school environment which has a shared vision and sense of purpose. All leaders, including governors and children, have a clear understanding of what makes the school distinctive. The partnership between the school and the local church is long-standing and embedded; school and church leaders have been proactive in consolidating mutually beneficial links which are appreciated and supported by parents and the local community. The pupil voice is highly valued and children are encouraged to take on leadership roles, including through the school council whose ideas for enhancing the school grounds have been followed through. Self-evaluation is rigorous and relevant; staff and governors emphasise that maintaining the Christian ethos through development planning is their priority. School leaders have worked hard to develop children's awareness of other faiths and cultures, for example through activities such as Indian dancing as part of children's learning about India. Children's studies in RE also widen their understanding – for instance, they relate with confidence the story of Rama and Sita. School leaders have also promoted global awareness and children have benefitted from links with a school in Gambia. In addition, leaders encourage children to participate in local events and to support charitable causes, as shown in the tremendous response to the shoebox appeal. All this is having a cohesive effect on the community and an impact on attitudes and is summed up by one child who explained that 'we go to a very special school.'