



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

### St Helen's Church of England Primary School

Highfield Road  
Hemsworth  
Pontefract  
WF9 4EG

**Previous SIAMS grade:** Good

**Current SIAMS grade:** Good

**Diocese:** West Yorkshire and the Dales

Local authority: Wakefield

Dates of inspection: 19 January 2016

Date of last inspection: May 2011

School's unique reference number: 139573

Headteacher: Sue Henderson

Inspector's name and number: Lynne Gillions 662

### School context

Since the last inspection, St Helen's has become an academy, part of the Wakefield Diocesan Academy Trust. The school is situated in a former mining area and pupils are mainly from white British backgrounds. There are 183 children on roll. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils in receipt of the pupil premium is well above average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs is below average and those who have English as an additional language is well below average.

### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Helen's Church of England Primary School are good

- The school is underpinned with Christian values such as trust, hope and forgiveness and coupled with the school's close links with the church these ensure children and their families are nurtured and supported in a caring environment where children can learn.
- School leaders know their community well and are committed to removing any barriers to learning, as reflected in their appointment of a pastoral care leader.
- As a result, children's attitudes to learning are more positive and enthusiastic. Most children are now making expected progress and some make better than expected progress with standards close to national averages.
- The provision of spiritual spaces in the environment is encouraging the children's spiritual development

### Areas to improve

- Continue to develop Christian values so that they are explicit and embedded and their contribution to the children's education is recognised by all stakeholders.
- Create more opportunities for children to take on responsibility for planning and delivering collective worship.
- Enhance children's understanding of other faiths through, for example, visits to different places of worship.

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

The school has identified six Christian values: friendship, forgiveness, trust, hope, truthfulness and responsibility. They 'weave their way through everything in school.' They are being introduced on a termly basis and children can talk about the ones already established. When considering forgiveness one child said, 'If you fall out and you don't forgive you lose a friend.' They recognised that forgiveness could sometimes be very difficult. These values were agreed by all stakeholders and they now need to be made more explicit so that all members of the school community fully understand the contribution they make to the children's education. The school is totally committed to its pupils and their families and parents know that school will support them with issues they face. They are nurtured and supported and efforts are made to remove barriers to learning and to provide 'a safe haven' for the children. The appointment of a pastoral care leader has helped in this area. Her work with individual children and with families is having a positive impact on attendance, particularly for those who were persistent absentees. Standards in school are variable but progress shows an improving picture with most pupils making expected progress and some making better than expected progress. This is bringing the school closer to national averages in most areas. The Success for All initiative addresses children's readiness for learning and this is increasing their enthusiasm and developing positive attitudes. It encourages co-operation in the learning process and this fits in with the school's overall Christian ethos. Parents spoke of the positive impact it is having on their children. Behaviour in school is good and there is a calm and harmonious working atmosphere. Children are polite and welcoming to visitors. The Christian character of the school makes a strong contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the children. The close co-operation between school and church provides strong support for the children's spiritual development and the interactive, spiritual spaces provide opportunities for personal reflection. Weekly reflection times in class also provide a structured time for consideration and reflection. The Hand to Mouth team visits the school annually and children participate in a range of reflective activities which stimulate children's responses to spirituality. One child said, 'It was a time to just say what was in our hearts.' Pupils enjoy learning about other faiths and cultures and show respect for diversity. Their understanding would be further enhanced if they had more opportunities to visit other places of worship.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is good**

Collective worship is a very important element of school life and all stakeholders value the contribution it makes to the lives of the children. The strong link with the church is an important element of the school's character. The regular masses in school and church, shared with parishioners, allow children to experience the liturgical aspect of Anglicanism and give children a good understanding of the symbolism inherent in Holy Communion. Children can talk readily about the bread and wine and its links to the Last Supper. Their understanding of the Christian view of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is not so well developed. Collective worship is planned around themes and a specific Christian value each term. The school also follows the liturgical year and celebrates the main Christian festivals, usually in conjunction with the church. Children experience a range of Anglican traditions including, liturgy, prayers and the use of liturgical colours on the school altar. They participate in collective worship by reading out reflective thoughts and prayers which they sometimes write themselves. They sing heartily and are encouraged to reflect on what they are singing. 'I feel like I am letting my voice free when I sing.' They behave respectfully during worship and listen attentively. Some pupils remember stories well. One pupil said that the story of Daniel showed that God can help even in desperate times. However, some pupils have difficulty in putting into words their personal responses and would benefit from more opportunities to talk about their thoughts and feelings. All teaching staff lead worship and members of the Gospel Hall also regularly come into school and children enjoy their worship times. This helps to widen their

understanding of the different expressions of Christianity. Prayers are said at different points in the day but there is room to develop more opportunities for spontaneous prayer. Children understand that prayer is an important element of faith for believers. There is a pupil worship committee made up of pupils from Years 1 to 6. They regularly review worship and suggest improvements. This has led to a greater emphasis on singing and action songs. Children would now benefit from opportunities to plan and deliver collective worship themselves. The responsibility would encourage their spiritual development and build their confidence and presentation skills. The co-ordinator is relatively new in post but is making a positive contribution to the development of collective worship and is well placed to move it on further. Collective worship is monitored by the ethos committee of the governing body and their regular visits ensure that they keep abreast of all that is happening in school.

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is good**

Religious education has improved since the last inspection and areas for development have been addressed. New assessment procedures based on age-related expectations are in place, standards are now tracked more effectively and are mainly in line with national averages with some groups making good progress. There has been a drive to introduce more creativity into lessons and this is making the subject more enjoyable for children. They particularly like drama and art activities. Evidence in class Big Books shows that a range of activities now enhance the teaching of RE. Marking in books helps children to develop further. Coupled with the Success for All strategies, this is enabling better progress. There is scope to integrate Christian values further into the teaching of RE. Children are given opportunities to ask challenging questions and to consider for themselves spiritual issues. They explored a range of responses to the question, 'Who is God?' They enjoy learning about other faiths both in RE lessons and in the termly faith weeks. During these weeks each class investigates a particular question and presents their findings to the whole school. Pupils would greatly benefit from more first hand experience such as visiting other places of worship. Teaching is at its best when good links are made to previous learning, when children can compare their own experience with the unfamiliar and when learning is reinforced during the lesson. In successful lessons, the children are enthusiastic and animated and eager to learn. There is scope for greater differentiation in RE to ensure that higher achievers are stretched as well as supporting those of lower ability. RE is monitored regularly by staff and governors. The new subject leader is getting to grips with the subject and is aware of what needs to be done throughout the year to ensure that progress continues.

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

Leaders are committed to a shared Christian vision for the school. The headteacher described this ethos as being 'inherent in all we do'. When deciding on which Christian values the school should prioritise, all stakeholders were consulted. Parents were sent a questionnaire and some parents particularly appreciated being part of the focus group. Further work now needs to be done to make sure those values are explicit and recognised by everyone. Leaders are aware of standards in school and what areas need addressing to ensure children make good progress. They are very knowledgeable about the community they serve and are committed to putting in place support measures which will help their pupils make the most of their education. This is exemplified in the appointment of the pastoral care leader who is part of the senior leadership team. Governors visit the school regularly and the ethos committee oversees the school's performance as a church school. They attend collective worship, meet with staff and children and report regularly to the governing body. They particularly value the school's distinctiveness, the quality of relationships, the calm atmosphere and the care shown to one another which they see as all part of the Christian ethos. The school's link with the church is a mutually beneficial partnership and is valued by the whole school community. One parent described the positive influence it had had on her child's spiritual growth which she appreciated even though they as a family were not church attenders. This link helps to embed

children into the wider, local community. Partnerships with other support agencies such as the trust, the diocese and school improvement partners are now more supportive and are helping the school address some of its challenges and move forward. The school endeavours to forge strong links with the parents and has introduced a parents' forum where there are open discussions about school issues. Courses also provide parents with opportunities to support their children in learning science and maths for example. Training is offered to staff and governors to enable them to keep up with current initiatives and to function effectively as leaders of a church school.

SIAMS report January 2016 St Helen's CE Primary School, Highfield Rd, Hemsworth, Pontefract WF9 4EG