



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Holmeswood Methodist Primary School

Chapel Lane
Holmeswood
Near Rufford
L40 1UD

Previous SIAMS grade: Outstanding

Current inspection grade: Good

Circuit: Liverpool

Local authority: Lancashire

Date of inspection: 2 July 2015

Date of last inspection: July 2010

School's unique reference number: 119403

Headteacher: Relph Higson

Inspector's name and number: Lyn Field 151

School context

This rural school is built in the grounds of the Methodist chapel and is far smaller than most schools with 32 pupils on roll. All pupils are of White British heritage and come from the village and further afield. There are two classes but extra staffing means that basic skills are taught in smaller groups. The proportion of pupils for whom the schools receives extra funding is slightly lower than average but the proportion with special educational needs is higher than usual. The Methodist minister is chair of governors and both he and the headteacher have been in post for ten years.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Holmeswood as a Methodist school are good

- The strong partnership with the Methodist church and the village has enabled the school to survive and flourish at the heart of this small community.
- The headteacher is passionately committed to the Christian character and small size of the school. His leadership takes maximum advantage of these features so that pupils achieve well and grow in spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding.
- Pupils fully accept and value individual differences so everyone grows in self-esteem.
- The tireless attention to the school environment, particularly the school garden and the use of the chapel enables pupils to understand their responsibility for all aspects of God's world.

Areas to improve

- To promote a better understanding of the principles of Methodism so that the whole community understands how these shape the Christian distinctiveness of the school
- To review the vision for the school and the selection of core Christian values in order to clarify the school's Christian and Methodist identity as a reference point for future leaders

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

All pupils have a strong voice in school life. They take the Christian character and values very seriously so it has a major impact on their personal development. Pupils say they take an active part in school life not because of their talents or their interests but because they are needed. Serving others is therefore central to the ethos of the school. A typical comment was 'you can't be greedy for yourself here and that's why we help people we know and all over the world'. This was a reference to fundraising for a local family and for a toilet-twinning project in Africa. There is a powerful sense of family that is unhampered by the usual year group structure in schools. Not only does everyone know everyone else well but they embrace the specific difficulties faced by pupils with special educational needs. Pupils accept others for who they are and this ability is a striking and very mature feature of their excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It was evident in their visit to a Methodist care home where they had no difficulty adjusting to the needs of residents with dementia. Pupils readily relate their personal conduct to Christian values although they feel, perhaps correctly, that the school's set of six core values does not fully capture the distinctive character of the school. Although RE lessons cover Methodism, planning requires some revision to ensure there is better progression in learning for older pupils. However, pupils value RE for what they learn of other faiths and this gives them a global perspective on society and on Christianity. Teachers are confident to tackle sensitive topics such as slavery in the world today. Consequently, pupils are beginning to think critically and this spills over into how they reflect on their extensive knowledge of Bible stories and relate them to modern life. Regular visits to the places of worship used by six world faiths are thoroughly enjoyed by pupils who appreciate that the values of their school are equally promoted and owned by other faiths.

Teaching is organised so that lessons are precisely planned and matched to groups of pupils. This helps them develop independence and they stay on task because there is an excellent culture for learning in which they support each other. Pupils with special needs do well because attention is constantly given to raising their self-esteem. More able pupils do equally well and often reach the highest levels. In terms of national awards alone, the school garden is an exceptional achievement for the school. Pupils gain first hand experience of growing their own food, providing habitats for wildlife and reflecting spiritually in outdoor spaces, all of which they see as elements of their responsibility to care for God's world.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Worship is a powerful vehicle for pupils' spiritual development because they use the skills they learn across the whole curriculum to make an active contribution to worship. Adults and children all come together for worship which affirms the strong sense of community on a daily basis and having the chapel on site adds to the special atmosphere. Worship has an informality that is partly a feature of the school's Methodist foundation and partly arises naturally from its small size. Pupils spontaneously comment on what is said so everyone remains fully engaged. Themes are followed up in Tuesday worship in the shape of key questions and these are shared with parents to discuss at home so the impact of worship widens. Pupils have a secure knowledge of the life of Jesus and his place in the Trinity. This is enriched by attending the 'Hope Journeys' run by another Methodist church in the circuit where they 'experience' and reflect on the events of Christmas and Easter. Music and singing play a key role in worship and pupils are keenly aware that what they sing carries Christian messages. They 'do loads of our own prayers', both those formally written and those led spontaneously. Different types of prayer are identified (listening, sharing) and this helps pupils to understand the different contexts and purposes of prayer. It makes a strong contribution to spiritual development because it respects personal standpoints and extends into the whole of school life. Pupils are aware of John Wesley and a few can refer to his 'Rule' but it has a very low profile and opportunities are missed to help pupils relate this to their service of others.

The role of pupils in planning, leading and evaluating worship was an issue raised by the last inspection. In spite of attempts to implement a formal structure for this, leaders have wisely recognised that this is not appropriate in such a small school. The style of worship has sensibly evolved so that pupils of all ages naturally contribute and add significantly to the quality of what everyone experiences. A pupil's very moving reading of the poem 'Footprints', for example, held the rapt attention of everyone present. This sits comfortably with Methodist traditions in worship but these are not made sufficiently explicit to pupils for them to have a clear picture of what this means.

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

The very close working relationship between church and school significantly enriches the life of both communities. It enables the school to operate as a much larger organisation because of the extra space the chapel offers. Pupils and staff benefit from having a sacred space permanently available and this raises the profile of worship as part of school life. The Christian ethos and the personal faith of school leaders inform decision-making. In particular, the belief that every individual is loved by God means all children are welcomed, whatever their needs and the school is truly a church school for all. The curriculum takes maximum advantage of the school's small size to give all pupils a far broader first-hand experience of different faiths and geographical locations than is usually seen. However, not enough attention has been given to articulating the school's explicitly Christian identity in order to ensure this provides a clear rationale and benchmarks for future leaders. As an effective church school, it reflects the importance Methodists place on small groups within the whole movement. Similarly, there are echoes of the Methodist 'Connexion' through the links with other Methodist schools. However, these features are not promoted so pupils do not perceive the significance of the wider Methodist community of which they are a part. The size of the school limits the scope for staff to engage at a national level with developments in Methodist education but there has perhaps not been enough thinking about alternative ways to access and contribute to this partnership. The headteacher and staff have an accurate and realistic view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The stability of staff and governors over a number of years means a deep understanding has emerged of how the relationship between the school, the church and the village community is central to the school's survival. Its success builds on this and all stakeholders acknowledge the part played by the passion and commitment of the headteacher. He leads by example and this has created a staff team equally committed to the ethos of a small church school. They share responsibilities for aspects of leadership and give of their time and energy well beyond what is required of them. This extends to the parent body and wider family volunteers, in particular, those who give of their time to ensure the school garden and grounds continue to support the spiritual and social development of all learners.

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