

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

### **Wheatley Lane Voluntary Aided Methodist Primary School**

Wheatley Lane Road

Fence

Burnley

Lancashire BB12 9ED

District: North Lancashire Methodist District

Local Authority: Lancashire

Date of inspection: 21 October 2014

Date of last inspection: November 2009

School's unique reference number: I19702

Headteacher: Mrs A Kroukamp

Inspector: Mr I Rimmer 801

#### **School context**

Wheatley Lane VA Methodist Primary School is one of only two voluntary aided Methodist primary schools in the country. It is a school of 211 learners, mostly white British, situated in a rural area serving the immediate community as well as a wider surrounding area. The proportion of learners with additional needs, those from minority ethnic groups and those known to be eligible for pupil premium, including free school meals, is below average. Ofsted judged the school as good in March 2013. Currently, the headteacher works two days a week and the deputy works three days a week as acting headteacher.

#### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Wheatley Lane VA Methodist Primary School as a Methodist church school are outstanding**

- The strong Christian leadership ensuring that distinctively Christian values are explicitly shared and developed so that they have a very clear impact on the life of the whole school community
- The high level of challenge and engagement of learners in religious education (RE) helps learners understand values which are important to the school from a distinctively Christian perspective and enables them to explore their relevance to their own lives
- The very strong and mutually supportive links between school and church which serve to enhance the distinctively Christian values throughout school life

#### **Areas to improve**

- To further embed the formal monitoring and evaluation of collective worship including a wide range of stakeholders so that records support its continuing improvement
- To formalise the moderation of learners' assessed work in religious education in order for it to inform future planning accurately so as to ensure all learners make the best possible progress in RE

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

Distinctively Christian values are embedded in the school community because they are explicitly reinforced throughout daily life. Governors evaluate, challenge and support the impact of Christian values so that they underpin everything. Learners regard their school as caring, welcoming and forgiving where peace, hope and patience make the school a better place, to achieve their full potential. As a consequence, all groups of learners make expected and above expected progress and so exceed local and national averages. Learners, staff and parents appreciate the impact of the Christian values box initiative and how learners are helped to show respect, develop their social skills and believe in their own abilities to become confident learners. One learner said, 'We are thankful for what others do for us'. Year 6 'assistant gardeners' care for the youngest learners in line with the distinctly Methodist 'All We Can' theme of potential. Learners apply John Wesley's rule to do all the good they can. An example of this is the School Council's 'Drop and Go' initiative which successfully engaged the local community to reduce traffic congestion. RE helps learners develop a distinctively Christian understanding of the school's values. In RE, learners expressed thankfulness remembering classmates approaching them at the friendship stop whilst others shared their enjoyment of nurturing younger learners through prayer. Some wrote prayers asking God to help them care for others. Learners and parents value the school services in church, the opportunity to support the local food bank and links with the nearby mosque which they say develops their respect for diverse faith communities and understanding of similarities and differences. Governors see the impact of the Thursday Prayer Group co-led by the Methodist Church in strengthening the learners' understanding of community within the Methodist church and are particularly enthusiastic about the Christian Values Group currently producing a school motto to summarise the mission statement.

**The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding**

Links are strong between worship, RE and Christian values so that worship is central to school life and promotes a deeper and living understanding of Jesus Christ. Christian symbols are displayed prominently at the front of the hall and serve as a strong focus for worship. Learners offer prayers and staff comment how singing raises the worship to a higher level and learners value how worship makes a difference to them. One learner said, 'What they speak about in worship really helps you think about what you are doing'. Learners notice that teachers always refer to the Christian values from daily worship. In planning worship, Year 6 learners included open questions and prayers to encourage whole school reflection about faith and thankfulness from the perspective of first world war soldiers. Learners shared their thoughts about worship led by Year 2 learners on 'belonging' and how stories from the book of Acts inspired them to pray. Staff were moved by multisensory worship about hope and trust when one learner shared, 'God is my only hope, he's my harness, he keeps me up when I fall.' Staff in one class acknowledged that worship on forgiveness had an instant impact upon behaviour amongst their learners. Worship closes with a blessing to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and learners understand the Trinity as, 'God who has split himself up into three'. As leaders use interactive approaches, so worship enlivens the school community. Worship deepens spirituality and many members of the school and church see spirituality week as fundamental in promoting this. Learners' prayers are evident around school including the prayer room. One reads, 'In hard times you must pray for help to get you through'. Whilst evaluation of the impact of worship by all stakeholders is secure, evidence is usually only gathered orally which means there are limited written records to support and track continuing improvements.

**The effectiveness of Religious Education is outstanding**

Learners achieve standards in RE which are at least in line with national expectations and a

significant number achieve higher. This is possible because of a comprehensive and interesting RE curriculum with appropriate balance between learning about and learning from religion including personal reflection. It places a high priority on Christianity, coverage of other faiths and includes high quality assessment activities. Learners achieve so well because RE lessons are challenging and engaging. Learners speak about their RE lessons over time as being of 'just the right level of difficulty'. Learners' books and class scrapbooks provide clear evidence of excellent standards in RE across the school and learners say they enjoy responding thoughtfully to teacher comments. Governors know about the standards in RE through reports from the RE co-ordinator and visiting classes. Moving from team-teaching and book scrutinies to establish more formal whole staff moderation of learners' work in RE is further raising staff expectations in RE across the school. RE inspires learners to develop a thorough knowledge about RE as well as evoke personal responses to Bible stories and strengthen links to Christian values. For example, Year 2 learners knew and applied the story of Samuel to how God can speak to them personally. One learner reflected, 'Listen to God'. Year 4 learners were clearly motivated by using short videos to present qualities of true friendship in themselves and others. Year 6 learners enjoyed creative opportunities to consider how trench warfare influenced soldiers' hope and faith. Learners knew that Christians and Sikhs, serving together as soldiers, had similar ideas about God being with them and all learners showed respect for this. Holding their own wartime replicas of St John's Gospel, one learner said, 'It's pocket-sized so you can use it anytime, anywhere. It's like praying'. Another said, 'When you are having a hard time, God is with you'.

#### **The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a Church school are outstanding**

Strong Christian love is demonstrated by all school leaders towards all learners in the school community. Governors prioritised essential Christian leadership qualities both in the recruitment of the current deputy head and the new head, who starts next term to replace the current part-time head. This shows a clear commitment to responding to current and future needs in church school education. School leaders consistently live out the school's mission statement and are supported by the school staff to 'serve its community by providing an education of the highest quality within the context of Christian belief and practice'. Governors' determination to improve learners' outcomes and their focus on explicit Christian values have led to standards remaining well above local and national average over recent years. Parents say, 'All learners feel valued, cared for and loved in a way that develops their ability to learn throughout the curriculum'. To enable the school to further develop, the deputy headteacher attended the Methodist church school induction programme and the Christian Values Group grew directly from this. Governors attended training on Christian values and the RE/Worship co-ordinator benefits from attending cluster meetings and diocesan meetings to lead further improvements in the school. The minister is actively involved with school leaders including governors in evaluating the impact of the school as a church school by contributing to the church school self-evaluation document, acting to bring about change and identifying areas for further development through the Standards and Effectiveness Committee. By the RE co-ordinator attending training, staff are well-supported with advice and teacher expertise has been strengthened to promote learners' opportunities to learn from religion and assess with greater consistency. Leadership is committed to further refining and improving its self-review evidence base to ensure that the school continues to improve as a distinct church school.