

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Westleigh Methodist Primary School

Westleigh Lane Leigh WN7 5NJ

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Methodist District

Bolton and Rochdale

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Date of academy conversion

September 2013

Name of multi-academy trust

The Acorn Trust

Date/s of inspection

14 September 2017

Date of last inspection

13 September 2012

Type of school and unique reference number

Primary 140087

Headteacher

Cathy Whalley

Inspector's name and number

Gillian Simm 881

School context

The school is an average sized primary school having increased in size over the last three years. Its proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well above average as is the proportion of pupils with a special educational need or disability (SEND). The proportion of pupils who come from an ethnic minority background or speak English as an additional language is below average. The headteacher has been in post since April 2013, one term before the school converted to an academy together with Bedford Hall Methodist Primary School as part of the Acorn Trust. The Westleigh Start Well Centre is on the school site.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Westleigh Methodist Primary School as a Methodist school are outstanding

- The headteacher and senior leaders have successfully developed and articulated a clear vision for the school based on explicit Christian values that is impacting on the achievement and wellbeing of all members of the school community.
- The strong relationships, rooted in the teachings of Jesus, are helping to break down barriers to learning and enabling children and their families to thrive.
- The school environment enhances pupils' spiritual and moral development through visible Christian symbols, celebrations of pupils' achievements and opportunities for prayer and reflection throughout the day enabling them to develop a deep understanding of faith and appreciation of the world around them.
- There are strong mutually beneficial partnerships with Bedford Hall Methodist Primary School, the local church and the Methodist Circuit which give children and staff a sense of belonging to the wider Methodist family.

Areas to improve

- Involve the pupils, and other members of the school community, in the evaluation of individual acts of worship to gain evidence of the immediate impact that these are having on the pupils and to inform planning.
- Develop the worship area so that it becomes a dedicated space which enhances the collective worship experience.
- Implement the new religious education syllabus ensuring the Methodist units are incorporated to inform pupils' learning about Methodist beliefs and traditions.

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

A strong commitment to Christian values, Methodist traditions and the development of the whole child underpins the work of the school. The school aspires to be 'A Christian family where all can develop to their full potential'. Since the last inspection the Christian values have been clearly identified and made more explicit within the whole school community. They are central to the life of the school and result in excellent behaviour, a calm and nurturing learning environment and very good relationships. The core values of love, teamwork, thankfulness, generosity, peace, forgiveness, equality and justice are shared by both schools in the Acorn Trust. The Christian ethos supports the children and their families so that barriers to learning are broken down and allows both pupils and their families to thrive. Funds have been invested in additional staff appointments and in delivering support programmes for parents/carers demonstrating the school's commitment to meeting the needs of all children and their families. The school's extensive focus on nurture and care results in high levels of attendance and excellent behaviour. The achievement data clearly demonstrates that, whilst focusing on the whole child and the needs of the community, the school has enabled pupils to achieve high standards. Funding provided to support disadvantaged pupils has been well used so that they perform better than the national average for similar pupils. The focus of the school is very much on ensuring that each pupil is given the opportunity to flourish and reach their full potential as children of God. As a result, the school gives pupils many opportunities to grow and reflect upon how they can do their best every day and for the rest of their lives through 'growth mind-set' and 'enquiry' approaches to their learning. The pupils work in a supportive and respectful atmosphere which contributes to the good progress that they make. The staff model Christian values in the relationships that they create amongst themselves and with the children. As one teacher said, 'Discussing the values with the children every day impacts on the teachers as well'. The school also benefits from the support of the chaplain who leads worship regularly and provides support for pupils, staff, parents and carers. Consequently, this is a supportive and caring learning community, where children and adults know they are valued. The Methodist belief that 'all are welcome' means that the school has an 'open' admissions policy and despite having grown considerably in recent years it remains over-subscribed. Parents claim that they feel welcome in the school and talk about staff being 'approachable' and 'non-judgmental' resulting in them not being afraid to ask for advice and support. The school's 'Methodist Aims and Values' are given high priority resulting in parents describing the school as 'a caring place based on clear Christian values'. One parent commented that she was impressed by how the teachers talk to the children about 'how Jesus is in their lives today'. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) has a high profile in the school and this is developed through the curriculum, collective worship and religious education (RE). Additional activities such as Rainbow Diversity Day, the 'It's Your Move' transition project and representation on the school council further enhance the SMSC curriculum. The children have an excellent understanding of and respect for different faith perspectives which is also developed through the school's RE lessons. One child commented 'Christian values are for all people. If they were only for Christians then only Christians would be good people and that isn't true'.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is a valued feature of the daily life of the school and the headteacher has overall responsibility for this. It takes place at the beginning of the day and, as well as being an uplifting start to the school day, is seen as the bridge between home, school and church. There is a yearly plan of themes which the school has chosen in order to make the Gospel relevant to the lives of all members of the learning community. Weekly planning is reviewed with staff so that learning and discussion is extended into the classroom. In one RE lesson, where children were learning about the second pillar of Islam they were able to make links with what they already knew about perseverance. A range of leaders and members of the community, including the school chaplain, deliver collective worship throughout the year and use a range of approaches and this ensures it is exciting and stimulating and engages the children. The Methodist tradition of using singing as a way of learning about and celebrating faith is a key feature of worship. The worship begins with the lighting of three candles whilst the whole community says together, 'In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit'. This is helping to develop children's understanding of the Trinity as all the children were able to talk very knowledgeably about 'how God is three in one.' As well as playing an active part in the worship and contributing prayers, the children are also regularly involved in the organisation. They manage the powerpoint, music and setting up of the worship area. In the worship observed during the inspection one pupil read a prayer which she had written in response to her concerns about the floods in Florida. The children have many opportunities to lead collective worship and are both keen and excited to do so. One parent talked about how her normally very shy child had insisted on taking part and had 'grown in confidence' as a result. Through collective worship the children share what they have learnt about their year group's Christian value with the rest of the school and parents which is helping everyone to develop a deeper understanding of each value.

Collective worship is evaluated by school leaders on a termly basis and the school has recently introduced a system for some pupils to evaluate individual acts of worship. However, this is still in its early stages and does not yet include a wide range of pupils and other members of the school community. Currently, the worship area is also used as a teaching area throughout the day but plans are in place to create a more permanent worship area. Each classroom has a reflection area which focuses on one of the eight core Christian values. Pupils talk confidently about each of the values and are developing a deeper understanding of each as they move through the school. As a result of using a range of age appropriate resources including holding crosses, prayer stones, candles, worry boxes and good deed cards children are developing skills of personal reflection and prayer. In the class focusing on thankfulness one child explained that the resources 'remind us what we should thank God for'. Many areas have a small globe that pupils can hold when they want to focus their prayer on people across the world. Another child reported how he had used it when praying for the people suffering because of the effects of hurricane Irma. Children have also learnt about and regularly use other prayers such as the Lord's Prayer, the Methodist Covenant Prayer and the Grace. Parents value the regular occasions given for them to share in school worship and talk of how joining in the worship and seeing the children so engaged makes them 'feel happy inside'. Church services to celebrate Christian festivals are well attended and parents and carers value being part of the school family in this way. 'Sticky Church' sessions at school have been introduced by the school chaplain and are very popular. Many families who would not normally attend a traditional Sunday service attend these sessions where they learn more about God and share in prayer with members of the church community.

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

The vision of leaders at Westleigh Methodist Primary School is to combine academic excellence with high levels of care in 'an ethos that fully supports the Christian foundation of the school'. Although the school has undergone significant changes since the last inspection this vision has been maintained and in many areas strengthened. As the Acorn Trust Chief Executive Officer (CEO) said, 'given the current educational climate the school converted to academy status so that it would not have to change.' There is evidence of strong Christian leadership from the headteacher supported by the CEO and the senior leadership team. The three action points from the last inspection have been thoroughly addressed. The academisation with the Acorn Trust has brought many benefits to the school whilst allowing it to retain its individuality and maintain its distinctiveness as a Methodist school. The two schools now work alongside each other, sharing best practice and providing challenge as well as developing strong, collaborative links between two Methodist schools. They work together to identify and develop the children's understanding of the Christian values as well as working on key policies such as the new behaviour policy. As well as providing a high quality education for the pupils, leaders see their mission as 'helping the community grow and learn as Christians through mutual support'. In the absence of a local chapel the school has successfully adopted many of the characteristics of a Methodist chapel, providing a range of support to families within the community. There are also strong links with Hindley Green Methodist Church which are mutually enriching including the 'Sticky Church' sessions at the school and the pupils' attendance at the regular coffee mornings in the church. The chaplain has been a fantastic support to the school providing pastoral support and guidance for the whole school community and as a result, when the current chaplain retires next year, the circuit has plans to appoint a full time chaplain to work with both schools in the trust. The teachers value the friendship and support within the whole school community which gives them a strong sense of self-belief and self-confidence. Governors know the school well because of the effective sharing of information by the CEO, headteacher and senior leaders. One member of the group attributed this to the 'trusting open relationship' they have with senior leadership. On-going evaluation of the school's work by school leaders is resulting in sustained improvements. An ethos committee has been established specifically to monitor the Christian ethos of the school. Its members have recently carried out a range of monitoring activities including learning walks and pupil interviews focusing on the reflection areas and the children's knowledge and understanding of prayer and Methodist traditions. As a result of this monitoring, more formal evaluation of collective worship is now a focus for the ethos committee this year. A 'Vision for the Future' activity last year, organised by school leaders, sought views from all stakeholders about how the school can prepare pupils for the future in a rapidly changing world. This has formed the basis for the school's long term development plan. Opportunities for professional development of the staff are evident at all levels of leadership including support for those who may aspire to becoming future leaders of church schools. Since joining the Trust middle leaders have been given the opportunity to take temporary senior leadership roles in the partner school. As the school is in the process of introducing the new Wigan RE syllabus the headteacher has taken responsibility for RE to ensure that the new syllabus is successfully implemented and strengths of the previous syllabus are not diminished.