



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

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

### St James Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Merestones Road  
Cheltenham  
GL50 2RS

**Diocese: Gloucester**

Local authority: Gloucestershire

Date of inspection: 3 February 2014

Date of last inspection: 14 October 2008

School's unique reference number: 115668

Headteacher: Kim Hoodless

Inspector's name and number: Andrew Rickett 201

#### School context

St James is a larger than average primary school with 350 children on roll. Children are mainly drawn from the immediate area in the centre of the town. They come from varied socio-economic backgrounds. The majority of children are from a white British heritage. The number of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average overall as is the number receiving pupil premium support. The school has expanded significantly since the previous inspection and from September 2012 the school moved to a two form entry. Major building work to accommodate the rise in pupil numbers has recently been completed.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St James as a Church of England school are outstanding

- A strong emphasis on explicit Christian values and the development of a personal spirituality make a significant impact on the children's learning and personal development.
- There are clear links between the school's core Christian values, collective worship, religious education and the whole curriculum.
- The commitment from the leadership and management, including governors, ensures that the school is continually reviewing and developing its Christian vision.

#### Areas to improve

- Ensure that the whole school community has a consistent understanding of the current opportunities for spiritual development so that there is greater clarity of how reflection and enquiry are used to engage children in discussion of matters of faith and belief.
- Develop the skills and ability of adults and children to create big questions of meaning and purpose to enable greater depth in their exploration of Christian values and spirituality.
- Make changes to existing systems of self-evaluation to monitor the impact of the big questions on the school community's understanding of Christian values and spirituality.

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

The school has made very good progress since the previous inspection in developing a core set of values that are explicitly based on Christian teaching from the Bible. All members of the school community are aware of these values and can articulate, from their own perspective, how they make a difference to the lives of the children. The school's leaders and managers have ensured that, whether it is school staff, parents or governors, they are kept fully informed about how the core values are being used in the everyday life of the school and the part they play in promoting them in school and at home. As well as being explored through acts of worship, the values are very effectively used in the classroom to inform the school's approach to dealing with pastoral concerns such as behaviour and its approach to teaching and learning. This is particularly evident in lessons such as religious education (RE) and social, moral, spiritual and cultural education where the values are regularly referred to. This notably which enhances the learning experience. For example, in an RE lesson, a Key Stage 2 class explored teachings from the Bible and the Qur'an by identifying their links to the school's values. In this way the values make a contribution to the children's overall academic achievement which is consistently above national expectations. It is also a reflection of the important place that RE has in promoting the distinctive Christian ethos of the school. The expectation that children will be actively engaged in their learning is one of the reasons why their response to RE is positive. Children have an excellent understanding of how the values are an expression of the school's Christian ethos and can relate them to specific stories from the Bible as examples of how Jesus taught us to lead our lives. The progress made in developing a shared understanding of spirituality and how it can be put into practice in the classroom has been excellent. Children are used to being asked to reflect on the meaning and purpose of difficult concepts and enter into these discussions with excitement and relish the opportunity to be challenged in their thinking. The school has a good understanding of the need to take this further by developing the existing high quality opportunities for spirituality so that they are equally understood by the whole community and make an impact across all aspects of school life, including the curriculum. The development of the ability to use questioning to elicit greater depth in the children's responses is a key element of this area for improvement. The impact of the core Christian values is evident in the very high quality of relationships throughout the school community with a mutual respect between children and adults. Children have an excellent appreciation of the need to be respectful of others regardless of their background.

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

Acts of worship at St James are distinct times in the school day but are also integral to the overall life of the school to which they make a significant contribution through the explicit links between the core values and all aspects of school life. This is something that children appreciate and which even the youngest children understand. For example, Key Stage 1 children, they explain how the prayers they say in collective worship help them to understand the importance of forgiveness and that it is the right thing to do no matter how difficult it is to sometimes achieve. It is this level of understanding, that values are not always easy to live out, which makes the impact of collective worship outstanding: the messages children hear are recognizable in their own lives and experiences. Worship themes are strongly linked to Bible stories and deliver clear messages that children understand. This is borne out in the regular feedback from interviews with children carried out by staff and governors. The use of the 'Open the Box' diocesan resource means that children have a good awareness of the Trinity and are able to explore difficult concepts such as 'how the Holy Spirit works'. For example, children explain that the Holy Spirit guides us and they equate that to the lighting of a candle which helps them to see in the dark. Children have a very good understanding of the difference between acts of worship and assembly. They explain how the simple lighting of a candle in itself doesn't make an assembly an act of worship: 'it needs something more'. Children talk about the need to have Bible stories and prayers and time to be still and think as elements that make an act of worship. These are all regular aspects of worship at St James. Children have a very

mature understanding of the purpose of prayer and the difference it can make by bringing comfort and strength to those in need. Children have opportunities to plan and lead collective worship through regular class worship which is based on the current value. They also plan and lead the major celebrations of Christian festivals held in the parish church at Harvest, Christmas and Easter. Children have a clear understanding of what these festivals mean to Christians. Acts of worship at St James are joyous occasions and are a life affirming experience for both adults and children.

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

An indication of the progress made since the previous inspection, and particularly since a major review of its ethos in September 2012, has been the way that the school community has developed a shared language through which it articulates a distinctive Christian vision. The school has gathered evidence of this and it shows far greater depth of understanding of how the values make an impact on the children's lives. This is something that parents are aware of and particularly appreciate. For example, they agree that it is right that through the school's Christian values, children are confronted with 'things that are happening everyday'. With the embedding of the core values and the progress made in articulating spirituality the school has made very good progress in developing its Christian character. The leadership and management, with a strong commitment and effectiveness from the headteacher and RE leader, have ensured that there is clarity to the strategic way that the school is moving forward. This is very ably supported by the governors' ethos committee which, through its active involvement in the self-evaluation process, has an outstanding understanding of the school's successes and how to continue to take it forward as a church school. The fact that the chair of the ethos committee also sits on the curriculum committee ensures that links between Christian distinctiveness and academic achievement are regularly discussed. The school's leaders are aware that as it continues to develop its distinctiveness so it will need to review its self-evaluation processes and adapt them as required. The role of the RE leader, who is also the deputy headteacher, in developing the Christian ethos, ensures that the school is effectively preparing the future leadership of church schools. There are close links with the parish church through the committed involvement of the vicar who is supported by very effective foundation governors and a church team who regularly lead collective worship using the 'Open the Book' programme. Staff and governors are kept up to date through regular training in developing aspects of church school distinctiveness and the school is always keen to try out the latest resources produced from the diocese. St James has worked hard to put children at the heart of its mission as a church school and it continues to look for ways to be even better. It is very successful in using its Christian ethos to encourage children to do their best in their learning and in their personal development.

SIAMS report February 2014 St James CE VC Primary School Cheltenham GL50 2RS