



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St. Matthias Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Bacon Street
Bethnal Green
London
E2 6DY

Previous SIAMS grade: Outstanding

Current inspection grade: Outstanding

Diocese: London

Local authority: Tower Hamlets

Dates of inspection: 19 October 2015

Date of last inspection: May 2011

School's unique reference number: 100956

Headteacher: Clare Sealy

Inspector's name and number: Jan Matthews (NS 855)

School context

St Matthias is a one form entry primary school with nursery provision. The area the school serves is one of the most culturally diverse in Europe. A large majority of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest group of which is Bangladeshi. The percentage of children speaking English as an additional language is much higher than average, as is the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average. The leadership of the school has been stable since before the last inspection and staff mobility is low. Many staff practise a faith other than Christianity and, as such, reflect the community outside the school gates.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St. Matthias School as a Church of England school are outstanding.

- School leaders share a passion for teaching children the Christian values and attitudes that will help them become the positive opinion formers of future Britain.
- The overwhelming ethos is one of warmth, welcome and inclusion with difference being celebrated rather than tolerated.
- Inspirational times of collective worship are based in Anglican tradition yet accessible to adults and children of all faiths, or those of no faith.
- The reflective and aspirational leadership of RE has resulted in a continually evolving and relevant curriculum for the children.
- The school's values are firmly based in scripture and are evident in the relationships throughout the school
- Children speak confidently, easily using the language of respect and Christian values about their own diverse community

Areas to improve

- To bring the assessment of RE in line with the assessment of Curriculum 2014 through developing a clear set of Key Learning Outcomes against which attainment can be evaluated at the end of each Key Stage.
- Establish a regular time of age appropriate worship in the early years classes.

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

Acceptance and celebration of diversity is a real strength of the school. It was founded by the church to 'serve the poor of the parish regardless of their religion'. Today's school leaders are passionate about welcoming and accepting every child and every family as a unique and special child of God. The school's admissions policy enables it to be a true reflection of the community that it serves. The way in which Biblical examples are used to promote universal religious values is a highly successful way of tackling the possible tension between being truly inclusive and creating a distinctively Christian ethos. Relationships within the school community are extremely positive. Parents speak highly of the staff, describing them as 'warm' and 'caring for them like their own'. Children report feeling safe and loved. Pupil Premium funding is used wisely to ensure equality of opportunity. It is in this environment of acceptance and safety that children achieve exceptionally well against their low starting points. Throughout the school there is a calm and purposeful atmosphere; children and adults treat each other with respect and behaviour and relationships are outstanding. This is clearly attributable to the way in which the Christian values are consistently taught and applied. Children are very aware of trying to do 'the right thing' but they also speak of, and demonstrate, the importance of repentance and forgiveness when things go wrong. In addition to the Religious Education (RE) curriculum, Christian stories are woven throughout the wider curriculum with the result that staff and children of all faiths and no faith 'share' and 'own' the mission of the school. Religious education has an impact way beyond RE lessons. A particularly successful aspect of RE is the way in which children are encouraged to make links and apply what they learn in everyday situations. Children's social, moral, spiritual and cultural welfare is exceptionally well provided for through the caring ethos and expectations of the school. In classrooms and around the school, displays and signs remind children and staff of the Bible stories from which the spiritual and moral fabric of the school is woven.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worshipping together is absolutely central to the school's work in strengthening the community. Children and staff of all faiths happily join together, learn together, sing together and share times of reflection and prayer. This is followed by the exhortation to 'go and make a difference today'. Children of other faiths or of no faith are acutely aware of how they can use worship times for their own reflection, private prayer and meditation. They talk comfortably about how prayer is 'a time of God' and how listening to God can help with difficult decisions. Some children talk of God being a 'light in your heart to guide you'. Collective worship makes a very positive contribution to the spiritual development of the whole community. Parents even talk about how their children bring assembly themes into the home and implore family members to abide by school values. Following an assembly based on 23rd Psalm, children were animatedly discussing God's trustworthiness. They made links with God's promise to Abraham / Ibrahim that his children would be as many as the stars in the sky. It was clear that they had an excellent understanding of the story and how it is told in Christianity, Islam and Judaism. They also showed immense respect for each other's beliefs. The routines and symbols used in daily worship are firmly grounded in Christian tradition. The vicar is a frequent and well-loved visitor to the school. He regularly leads worship in the Anglican style. Children are very respectful during worship and they are enthusiastic about joining in through reading Psalms or prayers. Various aspects of Anglican tradition are taught as appropriate through the Church's year. At Easter, the whole school spends a day immersed in the events of holy week. Children are taught about the Trinity and the person of Jesus through celebrations such as Christmas, Ash Wednesday, Easter and Pentecost. A worship team consisting of head, vicar and link governor work very effectively together to plan appropriate, relevant patterns of worship. As part of this pattern, children plan and successfully lead their own class assemblies. Worship is thoroughly evaluated by the team through the use of mini-surveys. The results of which are considered and used creatively to plan even better times of worship. The effectiveness of worship at St. Matthias is seen in the children's respect, understanding and tolerance and the easy way in which they share their thoughts and their faith. As one child commented 'I want the light of my heart to shine everywhere'.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Since the last inspection, school leaders have worked relentlessly on developing a high quality, bespoke religious education curriculum. Christianity forms the backbone of the curriculum and many units of work consider the same themes considered from the perspective of different religions. There is also a significant emphasis on recognizing children as spiritual beings and preparing them for life in modern Britain. Of particular merit is the fact that children are expected to 'do something practical' as a result of their learning. As a result of strong leadership, standards in the teaching and learning of RE have been improved significantly. Children are taught exceptionally well about the need for respect and tolerance. Teaching is focused and clear and all children, even the very young, are taught to think critically and make links between stories. For example, in a highly effective Early Years lesson on light, children made clear links between the baby Jesus of the nativity and the adult Jesus of Holman Hunt's painting The Light of the World. A high quality lesson about the Sikh Langar challenged to consider their own attitudes to sharing in a real life situation. Skillful questioning in a Junior class enabled children to make links between real life scenarios, values and Bible stories. Teachers have consistently high expectations and children's progress in RE is rapid. Huge gains in knowledge are made during each topic. In RE books, teachers' 'green pen marking' pushes children to think deeply and apply the lesson to their own lives. Led by the head teacher and ably supported by a leader-in-training, RE is given a high status within the curriculum. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning in RE is excellent. It leads to effective plans for improvement, for example improving the assessment of RE so that it is in-line with assessment in the new (2014) national curriculum. The effectiveness of RE is seen in the improvements in consistency and quality of lessons, as well as in the high standards of children's work.

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

School leaders have a united and explicit vision to be a 'community called by God to transform both persons and communities, to lead away from various kinds of individual and collective slavery and into God-given freedom'. Communicating this vision through a well-planned curriculum and a set of Biblically sound values, they work closely with children and their families to raise hope and aspiration for all. School leaders speak uncompromisingly about wanting the school to be 'a beacon on a hill' and its children 'the opinion formers of the future'. The impact of this vision can be heard in the children's articulate voices of reason and seen in the cohesive, harmonious community of the school. There is a strong focus, and a commitment of resources, to building the wider school community. Widely differing groups of parents are given opportunities to socialize, exercise and learn together. Parents really value these opportunities and, in turn, they work together to support the school's aims. As a result, children work hard, are very proud of their achievements and achieve extremely well. Staff and governors are highly committed to the children, to the ethos and to the school's leadership. Staff turnover has been very low. One governor stated '...I just feel honoured to be part of it all'. Strong leadership of both religious education and collective worship ensures that both areas are continually being evaluated and improved. Both have a high profile in the life of the school and statutory requirements are met. A real strength of the senior leadership team and the governors is the willingness to reflect, adapt and move with changing circumstances whether they be local, national or international. The head's recognition 'what happens in the international news is played out in Tower Hamlets' has led to timely and effective interventions to ensure that children stay safe and can keep themselves safe in a rapidly changing world. Mutually beneficial links with a number of local churches ensure that pupils have an understanding of the breadth of Anglican practice and a sense of belonging to a wide worshipping community. In the spirit of reaching out to other schools within the diocese, the governors took a decision to support a nearby school by allowing the head teacher to act as a temporary executive head. This, in turn, allowed St. Matthias' emerging leaders to take on responsibilities and train as the future leaders of church schools. As a result of strong leadership, St. Matthias is a forward looking school that makes a positive difference to its community.