THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND EDUCATION OFFICE

The Methodist Church

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Mary and St Thomas Church of England Primary School	
Barton Close, St Helens, Merseyside, WA10 2HS	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	**Outstanding**
Diocese	**Liverpool**
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Date of academy conversion	August 2015
Name of multi-academy trust	The Three Saints Academy Trust
Date of inspection	20 April 2018
Date of last inspection	May 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary Academy 142161
Headteacher	Lyndsey Lewis
Inspector's name and number	Ann Lock 919

School context

St Mary and St Thomas Church of England Primary school is a founding member of 'The Three Saints Academy Trust' which was formed in 2015. The school is located in an area of socio-economic disadvantage with a high proportion of pupils receiving pupil premium funding. There are a significant number of pupils who are young carers. The number of pupils for whom English is an additional language is low compared to national figures. There are a significantly higher than average number of pupils who have special educational needs. The school is a teaching school and is the first one nationally to be awarded a professional development standard. It is also a national mathematics training hub which shares excellent practice locally and nationally. There is a new headteacher of the school and leadership team since 2016. The school is overseen by the chief executive officer from 'The Three Saints Academy Trust'.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Mary and St Thomas as a Church of England school are outstanding

- Distinctively Christian values are made explicit and are deeply embedded in the whole life of the school, which results in outstanding academic and personal development of pupils, including religious education (RE).
- Driven by its Christian ethos, the school is exceptionally committed to transforming pupils' lives, whatever their background, to empower them with vital life skills to pursue their ambitions. This results in high levels of motivation together with excellent behaviour and attendance.
- Worship is the heartbeat of the school. Leaders are adept at exploring innovative ways of developing rich, spiritual experiences for the school community, often through inspirational singing and spontaneous prayer.

Areas to improve

- Continue to inspire pupils to develop their higher-levels of enquiry, analysis, interpretation and reflection of biblical text so that pupils are equipped to discuss the theology of Christianity as a living, world faith.
- Consider how more pupils can become independently involved in the planning and delivery of worship, so that prayer and spiritual reflection are even more deeply embedded in the life of the school.

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

St Mary and St Thomas school is deeply Christian. The character of the school is founded upon its memorable mission statement, 'believe, achieve, shine', which pupils readily quote, inspiring their daily lives. The whole school community were involved in a collaborative review of their mission statement in 2016, resulting in a declaration which emphasises their belief in God. The school's chosen values are extremely pertinent to the social context of the school. This links in well with 'The Three Saints Academy Trust' mission statement, which is based on a verse in the Bible, 'If you can believe, all things are possible to those who believe'. A parent said that, 'if children of the school leave with Christian values instilled in them, they will have bright futures'.
The Christian character of the school consistently motivates high levels of academic and personal achievement, including RE. This is remarkable when taking into account the low starting points of the vast majority of pupils. School staff are successful in meeting the needs of all learners across the ability spectrum, including children with special needs, who make the same outstanding progress as their peers. The school's Christian ethos is open, warm and sensitive to the needs of all pupils whatever their faith background. The school invest their time and finances in creating rich, varied, curricular and extra-curricular activities to provide broad and balanced experiences. The school have a unique plan to ensure that all pupils encounter at least fifty wide-ranging spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) activities during their primary education, such as a visit to the theatre or an alternative place of worship. This plan offers hope and aspiration, promoting resilience to succeed in the face of adversity. Further evidence for ensuring the highest levels of personal development and well-being is the deployment of therapeutic team staff to encourage all pupils to thrive.

Christian values are the inspiration for the strong, moral purpose within school. This results in excellent pupil behaviour and interpersonal relationships. Leaders, including governors, are excellent role models, nurturing and encouraging one another to shine and live in Christ's love. An example of Christian love in practice is the support and recognition given to young carers. This is also demonstrated by the Year 4 pupils, who are currently undertaking the Archbishop of York's Award which involves them assisting with the organisation of the church summer fair. Pupils are frequently encouraged to demonstrate Christian compassion in action. During Advent, pupils make a daily offering to the local foodbank promoting an attitude of giving, rather than receiving.
In the daily rhythm of school life, pupils are gently nurtured to participate in spiritual experiences which foster personal reflection and exploration of faith, for example, by giving thanks to God at lunch time. Quiet times are built into the day for prayer and meditation, including peer massage sessions, which calmly prepare pupils for learning. RE lessons facilitate pupils' deeper thinking about spirituality and provide a safe environment for discussion of faith in a broader context. This contributes successfully to pupils' understanding of diverse faiths and cultures. The school are keen to further develop pupil understanding of Christianity as a living world faith at national and international level.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship is engaging and relevant for all members of the school community. It has a high profile and provides an opportunity for spiritual reflection. The worship leader says, 'worship inspires thinking and day to day actions in our school community'. Parents comment positively that their children bring home the joy of worship. It is well planned and resourced and constantly evolving to ensure it is pertinent for all. An example of this is the positive response to developing a wider repertoire of lively and reflective worship songs, which connect spiritually with pupils and staff. As a result of worship, one Year 5 pupil said, 'I am confident that God and Jesus are on my side'. Collaborative devotions with their partner school in the Trust are resulting in the sharing of new ideas, enhancing the worship experience of all, especially through the Eucharist.

Year 6 pupils are given a responsible role in confidently planning and delivering worship, which makes the experience rich and meaningful for them. The school want to further extend pupil participation in independently devising and shaping worship. Pupils' responses and evaluations are actively taken into account and valued when planning for the future. Evaluations from parents are also taken into consideration. Because of this, parents feel as though they belong to the Church of England through St Mary and St Thomas School. Recommendations for the development of spontaneous prayer are helping to develop a spirit of openness. Some pupils commented that open prayer 'makes them feel better as they are turning to God and they feel comforted'. Christian values are at the heart of worship and enable pupils to understand and interpret British values and democracy from a faith perspective. This leads to pupils taking responsibility for their own actions. Worship is led by all teachers and many members of local Anglican churches. Pupils have a very good understanding of the relevance of Jesus Christ and the Trinity. There is a growing openness to the Holy Spirit illustrated by the symbolism from a candle. A Year 3 pupil explained that he 'can feel the heat from the candle even though it is not visible, just like the Holy Spirit'.

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The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

The achievement and progress of pupils in RE is excellent and in line with core subjects. Progress is particularly impressive taking into account pupils' low base line assessments. There are no significant gaps between groups of pupils. RE is taught in innovative ways using peer partnering, role modelling and the resources of the local church. Pupils respond with enthusiasm. RE is one of the pupils' favourite lessons, because there are opportunities to facilitate deep thinking and engage in stimulating discussions about religious ideas, in a safe environment. Pupils are able to express their views confidently, especially what it means to be a Christian. Within RE, pupils' understanding of Christian values are explored, discussed and strengthened. All pupils are encouraged to fully participate in debates, to think independently and to listen carefully to diverse points of view and to consider, with respect, those from other faiths. School are eagerly anticipating new resources to reinforce the teaching and learning of Christianity and aiding the further development of independent thinking and analysis of biblical text.

The leadership and management of RE is strong. The subject is coordinated enthusiastically by a member of the senior leadership team, who ensures that the teaching of Christianity is rooted in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The time allocated to teaching and learning of RE is prioritised and the aspiration of the school is to always provide high quality RE teaching and learning. A succession plan is in place to ensure the seamless transition to a new leader following the retirement, after years of devoted service, of the current RE co-ordinator. He will be replaced by someone who has been mentored into the role. Monitoring of RE is rigorously carried out to ensure high standards and ambitious outcomes for pupils. Lessons are consistently outstanding with stimulating pace, interesting content and challenging questions.

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

There is very strong and inspirational Christian leadership from the headteacher and the long-standing chair of governors. This results in a collective vision to promote a dedicated Christian community at the school of St Mary and St Thomas. The Chief Executive Officer of the 'Three Saints Academy Trust' actively monitors the school's distinctive Christian ethos and ensures that Christian values are the bedrock of its vision. Consequently, school leaders ensure that every child has the opportunity to flourish within the context of a distinctively Christian setting. This is borne out by excellent academic standards, exemplary behaviour and the positive, personal development of pupils. Christian values are observed in action through constructive, professional relationships. A senior school leader said, 'forgiveness is at the heart of the school. It's okay to make mistakes and then move on to a fresh start'.

Discerning governors produce an impact statement annually to analyse professional development and school priorities. They rigorously ensure that RE and collective worship meet statutory requirements and policy aims are distinctively Christian. There is an expectation from governors that Christian values should permeate all aspects of school life. Governors active involvement in school has been recognised through the bestowment of a national award. Governors work in close partnership with the Trust to ensure that opportunities for the pupils of St Mary and St Thomas are at the forefront of advances in education. The Chair of Governors, who is a lay reader at St Thomas' Church, is a constant, devoted presence ensuring that the Christian character of the school is promoted. She played a vital role during a long interregnum to ensure that strong church-school links were maintained. The school is now well supported by the Revd Wood whose spiritual input brings cohesion and consolidates the church-school family.

Parents have a vital role within the school. The establishment of a parents' forum ensures parents are consulted in decision-making and that their opinions are highly valued. Strong parental involvement strengthens the school family and reinforces Christian values between home and school. One parent said, 'Children are given the chance to learn and grow, whilst feeling confident and secure enough to ask questions and explore their faith'.

School leaders are outward looking and work effectively with 'The Three Saints Academy Trust' and many other external partners to share excellent practice. These include Liverpool Diocese, the St Helens Teaching School Alliance, the national mathematics hub and the churches of St Helens. School leaders prioritise staff professional development at all levels and are skilled at identifying talent to nurture seamless succession planning. The school has an excellent record of developing teachers and future leaders of church schools, who continue to positively impact the education of pupils at St Mary and St Thomas School. They are deservedly proud of their achievements as a beacon of excellence founded upon their distinctive Christian foundation which states, 'believe in ourselves, each other and God'.

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