



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

### St Matthew's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Norris Street  
Little Lever  
Bolton  
BL3 1BQ

**Previous SIAS grade: Good**

**Current inspection grade: Outstanding**

**Diocese: Manchester**

Local authority: Bolton

Dates of inspection: 9 March 2016

Date of last inspection: November 2010

School's unique reference number: 105242

Headteacher: Georgina Ryding

Inspector's name and number: Nigel Castledine (652)

#### School context

St Matthew's is a single-form primary school in a semi-urban setting on the edge of the Bolton conurbation. Mobility of children is low as are the proportions of children who are disadvantaged or from multi-ethnic backgrounds. Almost all children have English as their first language and where this is not the case, the children are bi-lingual. A low proportion of the children have special educational or disability needs. Among a number of national awards gained, St Matthew's was awarded the RE Quality Mark gold award in 2015.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Matthew's, Little Lever, Bolton as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The affirming, positive influence of the chosen core gospel values underpins every aspect of the life of the school and strengthens its pervasive Christian ethos
- Perceptive leadership from the headteacher, senior staff and governors ensures the school's strong Christian character enhances learning outcomes for every child
- Positive, supportive and trusting relationships between all members of the school community have an affirmative impact on the children's excellent behaviour

#### Areas to improve

- Increase the active involvement of the children in whole school worship to support them in developing their abilities to plan and lead worship independently
- Develop wider opportunities within the curriculum to extend and enhance the children's understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith

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

The school's Christian values of faith, hope, love, honesty and justice underpin the life of the school. They ensure that everyone is treated with respect and dignity as members of God's family. This reflects the Christian teaching of the value that God places on every unique person. These Christian characteristics also impact on the achievements of every child by ensuring the children achieve their potential both academically and spiritually. Data shows that most children achieve above the national average in reading, writing and maths. Their progress in both Key Stages is at least good. This includes children who are vulnerable, disadvantaged or with special educational needs. Because of caring and differentiated delivery of both education and nurture, children enjoy their success in learning and want to be in school. This is reflected in high attendance figures which exceed national expectations. There are frequent learning opportunities that help children to explore their personal spirituality and the 'big questions' of life. The school also promotes spiritual, moral and social and cultural values within the curriculum and collective worship. Children's concern for others is shown by their community involvement and charitable giving. Each class selects a good cause, balanced out between local, national and international charities. Exemplary behaviour is maintained by all age groups. This is modelled for the children by all adults in school. Bullying is a rare occurrence and any reported instances are taken seriously with swift and sensitive resolution. Unacceptable behaviour, disagreement and conflict are dealt with fairly and compassionately, applying Christian principles. A high percentage of families at the school state they are Christian. Those of a contrasting faith or culture consider they are well integrated in school and their distinctiveness is respected. St Matthew's also seeks out wider opportunities to deepen the children's understanding and respect for those of a different faith or culture. These include linking with local schools serving a contrasting community. Religious education (RE) is positively influenced by the school's Christian values and by the themes of collective worship. Each classroom has a reflection area with high quality interactive faith displays and artefacts which support the children in reflection or prayer. The varied, extensive outdoor environment at the school also enables the children to reflect on the awe and wonder of God's created world.

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

Collective worship at St Matthew's is inspirational, inclusive and central to school life. Linked into all subjects of the curriculum, it underpins the faith ethos of the school. Worship planning and delivery respect the beliefs of those of other world faiths and those of no particular faith. Whilst emphasising Biblical themes in school worship, the school also includes stories and celebrations from other sacred texts and world faiths. Worship has a clear focus on God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with the children's theological understanding developed through their learning in RE. The cycle of the Christian year is followed and the major festivals and key events are celebrated. The school community worships in the church at festivals and for special occasions such as harvest thanksgiving. These occasions, which bring the school and church together in worship, are well attended by parents. Anglican tradition is present in worship with the use of artefacts, Christian prayers, worship songs and liturgy. Key Stage 2 children take part in a specially adapted monthly Eucharist in the parish church. Younger children comment on looking forward to being able to receive communion when they are old enough. This worship helps the children to perceive the importance of the Eucharist within Christian worship. Different leaders of school worship include senior staff, teachers, local clergy and visitors. Children who are worship club members speak with enthusiasm about how their contributions of drama, prayer and music enrich worship led by adults. However, the children do not plan and lead all aspects of whole-school worship themselves. The impact of worship on the school community is gauged via the evaluations of children and adults. This information influences the future planning and delivery of worship. The worship club was an outcome from these evaluations. Every act of worship includes prayer and reflection often using the children's own prayers as well as traditional prayers such as the Lord's Prayer and blessings. Describing the

impact of prayer, a child in Year 6 said, 'When the priest blesses me, it makes me feel free of sin.' Prayers are also used during the school day, at its start and at its conclusion, as well as before lunch.

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding**

RE as a subject is given high status within the life of the school and is a core subject of the curriculum. Children of all abilities achieve in line with or above national expectations in RE. They gain an accurate knowledge of the religions studied and grow in their abilities to express their own beliefs. Children' understanding of the impact of religious belief on their own thinking and actions is also very evident. The quality of teaching is always good and often outstanding, which ensures that children are inspired and motivated by RE. Children are encouraged to respond to their RE learning in a variety of ways other than just the written word. Several children spoke of RE as their favourite area of the curriculum, emphasising the inspiration they receive from RE. One child commented, 'God is amazing and just wonderful' when responding to the question 'Who is God?' Class RE journals demonstrate clearly the excellent range of creative learning opportunities being offered. Christianity is studied as the core of RE alongside the beliefs and traditions of other world faiths. Educational visits to contrasting places of worship strengthen this learning. A local Methodist minister has enabled the children to develop a link with a school in Nepal. However, the children's understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith lacks depth. Formal monitoring of the children's progress in RE, a development point from the last report, has been fully addressed. The effective RE subject co-ordinator samples RE lessons and collects data on learning outcomes. He also supports the development of teachers new to teaching RE to help them with lesson planning and delivery. The school has successfully adopted the new diocesan 'Questful RE' scheme which has expanded and refreshed the RE curriculum.

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

The shared vision of the school's senior leaders is underpinned by the Christian ethos of the school and the strength of the chosen Christian values that permeate all aspects of school life. These strong foundations have enabled senior leaders to ensure that all children are supported in striving to achieve their full potential. The appointment to the staff of a pupil premium champion has ensured that the needs of disadvantaged children are met with their progress carefully monitored. Senior leaders know their school well through the use of thorough evaluation. Carefully considered development plans ensure that the school continues to seek to improve even further. The governing board is well-informed as to the school's on-going development. Its formal scrutiny and evaluation of the distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Matthew's as a Church of England school is fed back into ongoing school development planning. This fulfils a related action point from the last report. Governors are also involved in the evaluation of the outcomes and effectiveness of RE. All staff and governors benefit from professional development opportunities with time being given to considering the importance of the school's chosen Christian values. The school has been awarded the Leading Parent Partnership for a second time. This recognises the strength and quality of the mutual partnership between the school, parents and carers and the beneficial links with the local church and community. The Diocese has strong links with St Matthew's through its support and courses, with the deputy head successfully undertaking the Christian leadership course. Year 6 children take part in the annual cathedral School Leavers' service. The words of the school mission statement, 'Love, Learn and Grow', bring together all aspects of life and work at St Matthew's.