

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Thornhill Lees Church of England Infant and Nursery School			
Address	Slaitwaite Road, Thornhill Lees, Dewsbury WF12 9DL		
Date of inspection	4 July 2019	Status of school	VC
Diocese	Leeds	URN	107705

Overall Judgement	How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?	Grade	Good
Additional Judgements	The impact of collective worship	Grade	Requires improvement

School context

Thornhill Lees is an infant and nursery school with 338 pupils on roll. Most pupils are of Asian heritage. Almost all pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is significantly above national averages. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is also above national averages. The number of pupils requiring additional support for more complex needs is increasing. The school formed a federation with Savile Town CE Infant and Nursery school in October 2018. The executive headteacher leads both schools. The parish church is to close in September.

The school's Christian vision

At our school we celebrate our faith diversity and provide a safe environment where our children are happy to learn. We are kind, caring and respectful to others. We aim to inspire future generations of our school and community to become lifelong learners.

Proverbs 2:10 – 'For wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will fill you with joy.'

Key findings

- Thornhill Lees is at the heart of its local community. Through a vision of commitment to nurture all ages, the school serves its pupils well and enriches the lives of families and children.
- The vision of all experiencing joy is secured through the excellent support provided, and especially for those with additional needs. Inclusion and celebration of diversity are seen at every turn so all feel valued.
- Leaders and staff are united in their role to ensure all ages flourish in every aspect of their lives, including academic progress. Standards in national assessments are rapidly improving.
- Relationships with the federated partner school are at an early stage but already energising staff to share best practice across the schools.
- The curriculum is effective and inspires a genuine thirst for learning. Within this, religious education (RE) provides a window on the world, whereby pupils know that respect is integral to a range of faiths and worldviews.

Areas for development

- Refer to the vision, and its Bible example, explicitly on the website and in key policies so that it drives the strategic development of the school as a distinctive and fully inclusive Church school.
- Ensure collective worship is distinct from personal, social and health education (PSHE), and that there are regular elements of spiritual development so that worship expresses the vision and nurtures spirituality.
- Improve the level of challenge in RE so that all abilities, particularly the more able pupils, achieve their potential.

How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?

Inspection findings

Thornhill Lees lives out its vision of inclusion and nurture. As a governor said, 'We are a school where children are the reflection of what we have done.' Family members warmly appreciate the care shown to them as well as to their children. Partnerships with parents mean that the school has a good reputation in the local area. The school is blessed in its headteacher, staff and governors. Their compassion and genuine care shine. Governors know the school well and are fully aware of what needs to improve. The focus on improving pupils' life chances through a rich curriculum, is evidence of a vision of all growing in love and wisdom. Staff are dedicated to each other and to their shared vision of service. A member of staff said, 'this is a wonderful place to work'. After a period of changes in leadership, the federation and permanent headteacher have brought a renewed energy and purpose. Sharing good practice and mutual support characterise the partnership with Savile Town school.

The school faces challenges with a high proportion of children entering Nursery and Reception classes with English as a second language, and poor communication and social skills. The number of children presenting with more complex needs is also rising. Important to living out the vision, is the excellent work with 2-year olds to develop key skills, prior to joining Nursery. Through cookery and 'Stay and Play' sessions, staff encourage parents to continue the learning and development at home. This is proving effective. Early identification is central to enabling those with special educational needs/disabilities to flourish. Leaders and staff skilfully address these with a range of interventions and support. Specialist help is secured swiftly and to good effect. Attendance is improving but is low for a small number of pupils and this affects their progress. Leaders and governors consider the vision when making strategic decisions, for example on staffing levels and creating appropriate learning spaces indoors and outdoors. This is done despite financial constraints. Their work demonstrates the determination to serve the children and enable them to grow and learn in a place of security and love. However, the vision is not consistently referenced on the website and in policies. In addition, governors are not formally monitoring and noting its effectiveness through their visits and in meetings.

The curriculum is based on developing pupils' skills and interests through enquiry. It also presents challenges to build resilience. In this way, the school enables its pupils to aspire to do better. Underscoring academic progress, personal development is a priority. The spacious outdoor areas are fully utilised to support social skills and so learning. It is clear that staff and the headteacher have expertise in early years with a depth of understanding of what makes effective learning. While results in national tests have fluctuated, this year's assessments give an improving picture, with outcomes closer to those seen in similar schools. From their individual starting points, pupils make generally good progress, and this is a direct result of the pursuit of both joy and wisdom. As a parent summed up, 'Key to school is a happy child who is happy to learn.'

The vision is lived out through the core values of respect, kindness, caring, diversity, community and happiness. Happiness is seen in lessons and playtimes. Leaders and staff take great care to ensure the environment supports learning. In every place visited during the inspection, children were happily engaged in activities. Many were sharing these with friends which is an important step towards successful learning in the future. The school community lives well together in a palpable spirit of respect and care for all. In many ways, the school's diversity in abilities, backgrounds and cultures is its strength. Behaviour is good. Pupils attribute this to the core values of respect and kindness. One said, 'We are all kind, all caring, all different but still friends.' Pupils know that these values may be found in the Christian Bible and the Quran, as well as being seen in other faith traditions. While pupils are confident to talk of the values, they are less sure of the vision which underpins them.

In an area of considerable deprivation, the school community is selfless in its support for charities and is outward facing. The link with Tanzania helps pupils and families to understand what it is like to be a child in a country where education is not as accessible as in this country. Generous support for others demonstrates the expectation of charity which is integral to Islam, the faith tradition of most families, as well as Christianity. Pupils express their growing understanding that being kind includes showing kindness to others far away. This is seen in their project on the story of refugees.

Collective worship is not consistent in offering pupils and staff opportunities for spiritual development. Planning includes use of the 'jigsaw' materials, designed for personal, social and health education (PSHE). Themes are often

secular and not related to specific examples from sacred texts. However, time in 'assembly' allows consideration of the values and is often relevant to current events which has a positive impact. A new pupil worship group meets with a governor to explore provision. This is at an early stage of development. Most classes use their 'class assembly' time for worship. Leaders are rightly concerned to make acts of worship accessible to the local faith community. There are, however, missed opportunities to make worship a more reflective, prayerful and spiritual experience. In taking a more secular route, the school is not acknowledging the faith traditions of its community or upholding the Christian foundations of the school. This is why collective worship requires improvement. Support from the local church has made a real difference to the school. As the parish church is due to close, there are concerns about securing governors to support the Christian character of the school. Links with the Diocese are growing, and leaders have engaged well with support in the lead up to this inspection.

RE contributes to learning. The subject is well-led and pupils' work demonstrates a focus on Islam and Christianity, while giving them time to consider other faiths. Pupils are growing in their knowledge of the main faiths studied. Their depth of knowledge depends on their own faith background. RE supports flourishing in giving pupils an awareness of the many similarities between faiths, for example in showing respect and kindness. Lessons, however, do not challenge the more able pupils as everyone completes the same activity. Pupils have very limited awareness that Christianity is a world-wide faith. Nevertheless, the subject gives pupils a window onto the world.

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