



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Didsbury Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Elm Grove
Didsbury
M20 6RL

Diocese: Manchester

Local authority: Manchester

Dates of inspection: 24. 01. 2014

Date of last inspection: 25.11. 2008

School's unique reference number: 105506

Headteacher: Mr M. Whitehead

Inspector's name and number: Barbara Kinch 475

School context

Didsbury Church of England school is a voluntary aided primary school set in a residential area of South Manchester where pupils' backgrounds are socially and economically above average. The proportion of children with special educational needs is below the national average. About 20% of children are from ethnic minority backgrounds. The school has close links to the churches and parishes of St James and Emmanuel in Didsbury

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Didsbury Church of England Voluntary Aided School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- High aspiration and achievement rooted in a clear Christian vision
- The excellent behaviour of all the learners which reflects a strong sense of care and responsibility
- Religious education which promotes both learning about and learning from religion very effectively
- A continuous and rigorous process of self evaluation which contributes to all aspects of the Christian ethos
- Strong and consistent leadership by the headteacher, senior leadership team and governors who are able to articulate and demonstrate where Christian values impact on the achievement and wellbeing of all members of the school community
- Close and mutually beneficial links with the Church

Areas to improve

- To support staff who teach religious education through regular in service training which ensures that balance is maintained in learning about and learning from religion

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

The Christian vision is rooted in the three key areas of 'Belonging, Believing, Becoming'. More specific values of love, service, forgiveness, respect, tolerance and humility are lived out in the way the school is managed and organised. Standards of achievement are high and the majority of learners make better than expected progress. Staff and children readily confirm that Christian values of respect and love apply to all aspects of their work and they feel valued and appreciated. Learners in both key stages value the support they receive from teachers and non-teaching staff and the relationships are a testament to this. The learners sum up the ethos as, 'We all care'. Older children volunteer to take on responsibilities for helping younger ones and have very positive attitudes to service in the school community and beyond. Links with the Sea Shell Trust, a charity which supports a school for children with profound and multiple disabilities give learners opportunities to appreciate the needs of others and to actively engage in learning new life skills. Spiritual development is given high priority through the provision of a wide variety of experiences in the arts and through religious education and worship. The school environment demonstrates its Christian foundation through displays and artefacts which are thought provoking and value laden. Positive attitudes to moral and social issues are delivered through work on well being, awareness of mental health issues, cancer, drugs and alcohol and healthy lifestyles as well as opportunities for residential activities which promote self-esteem and confidence. The school has recently won an award for the work it is doing to address homophobia. Diversity is celebrated through the curriculum and worship. Although Christianity is central to the work and worshipping life of the school, other faiths are explored through the curriculum, religious education and in the celebration of festivals across all faiths. Learners are enthusiastic about learning and can articulate their appreciation of the varied experiences they are given through the curriculum and beyond. Behaviour is exemplary and children understand that forgiveness and renewal are important parts of the behaviour policy and say that they are helped 'to make things better'.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

The daily act of worship is central to the life of the school and the impact it has on all members of the school community is profound. Learners are engaged and responsive, as well as enjoying the varied approaches, children at both key stages can articulate the things they value in worship, hearing about Jesus, learning from Bible stories, and about people who do good things. They like the fact that worship brings them together. They love singing and making up actions to accompany some of the songs and recognise this as an opportunity to praise God and feel 'joyful'. They also appreciate the atmosphere of calmness, enhanced by stillness and reflection times which are integral parts of acts of worship. There is a consistently thoughtful approach to prayer which is understood to be a time to talk to God, to praise, to thank, to say sorry, express sadness and share concerns. Learners encounter the trinitarian nature of God by the use of visual symbols, the Fruits of the Spirit Tree, a bible (God the Father), a cross (God the Son) and a candle (God the Holy Spirit), and in the blessings used by the clergy. They are all able to express this in a meaningful way. A variety of different styles of leadership are used by the headteacher, clergy, staff and visitors such as Bible Encounters. The active involvement of clergy from each church as well as other groups and parish workers enrich the experience of all participants. Planning by the RE coordinator and the Church families worker covers Christian festivals, the Church's year and Holy days. A range of themes address spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Children plan class worship and write prayers and parents' comments indicate how much this is valued. Sharing stories and Christian festivals with those from other faiths. Festivals and practices from different faiths, enriches the worship and religious education and fully supports the inclusive ethos. The school council evaluates worship and their findings and ideas are used. Children enjoy being involved in worship and they recognise it as 'a time to learn about God together and to think'. Adults participate fully and the quality and content of worship gives everyone something meaningful to take into their lives.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Learners achieve high standards in religious education which are at least in line with national expectations and generally exceed them. Lessons are well planned, varied and stimulating with many opportunities for discussion, reflection, the use of Biblical material and appropriate differentiation. The religious education coordinator has sustained a very effective approach to the curriculum which offers a wide range of activities and the opportunity to develop skills of enquiry and reflection. Teaching is of a high standard, learners are encouraged to consider and discuss their own personal responses in pairs and small groups. A lesson from Acts on the story of Peter and the lame man provided opportunities for drama, used reflection, speculation, discussion of attitudes to disability in Jesus's time, as well as reading from the Bible and summarising the story. Challenge, thoughtful questioning, pace and range of activities support diverse learning styles and differentiation is embedded in all planning and in the use of additional staff in meeting individual needs very effectively. Considerable emphasis is placed on learning from religion with creative approaches that help and learners have a clear understanding of where this impacts on their daily lives and relationships and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school is aware that the need to ensure an equal balance between learning about and learning from religion needs to be supported by regular in-service training for staff who teach religious education. Annual summative assessment based on national curriculum levels and diocesan guidance is supplemented throughout the year by work scrutinies, monitoring and tracking which inform future teaching and learning and the incremental development of higher level skills. Work in books reflects good skill development and learners make expected progress in line with other the curriculum areas. Attitudes to religious education are very positive, learners enjoy the subject and the use of Godly Play activities enhance and enrich the learning experiences. The study of Islam and Judaism as major world faiths contributes to the learners' ability to make cogent connections between shared values and practices.

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

Christian values are deeply embedded in the ethos of the school. Governors confidently express their understanding of the foundation of the school and where its Christian values of love, respect, humility, tolerance and service impact on their roles and on the care, well being and achievement of the learners. The leadership of the headteacher is clear and purposeful, the deputy headteacher has completed the Diocesan Christian Leadership course and this informs and contributes to effective decision-making across all curriculum areas. Policies include reference to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development as well as where values underpin provision and practice. The governors, leadership team, and members of the church work closely together to secure outstanding outcomes for all learners whilst ensuring that Christian principles guide their work. Religious education and worship are given high priority and support within the strategies for school improvement. When faced with challenging issues the prayerful ethos of the Governing Body means that their varied skills inform their actions and that the decisions they make are 'guided by the presence of God' in love and humility. Clergy and governors feel that the school 'acts as one' with the church. Self- evaluation is deeply embedded in the management structures and involves all members of the school community. Opinions of parents and pupils are sought so that school improvement is consistently under scrutiny. Data collection by the school confirms that parents value and support the Christian ethos and believe that faith matters and counts towards successful outcomes for their children. The PTA tithe 10% of their fundraising income each year to charities chosen by the children. There are very close and mutually beneficial links with the Church, clergy and PCC through shared activities, resources, support and prayer.

