



Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Lowton St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Address Newton Road, Lowton, Warrington, WA3 1EW

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

Overall grade

Excellent

The impact of collective worship

Excellent

The effectiveness of religious education (RE)

Excellent

School's vision

Love of learning. Standing tall. Make a difference. This is based on Joshua 1: 9
'Be Bold; be strong; be courageous.'

Key findings

- The shared investment in the Christian vision inspires bold and innovative leadership, which infuses school and church life. This is well supported by existing governors, but a number of new ones have yet to be trained. The vision ensures that the whole community flourishes as independent, spiritual thinkers.
- The vision leads to the school meeting the needs of all its pupils in a highly inclusive way, using a cleverly crafted curriculum. All know they are loved and valued as unique. The vision ensures leaders strategically target resources to meet the learning and pastoral needs of pupils, enabling all to flourish and succeed.
- The mutually beneficial partnership between the school and church community is a joy to witness. Regular, incisive input from clergy and church members challenges and improves practice around collective worship. As a result, pupils and staff plan, lead and evaluate thought provoking and highly spiritual worship activities.
- The Christian vision empowers children and staff to be bold and make a difference. Pupils passionately challenge all forms of injustice and instigate social action with determination. Their compassionate response to communities in need is quite remarkable.
- Leadership and management of religious education (RE) is excellent. The highly skilled subject leader is totally committed to driving improvement in RE. As a result, staff are trained to deliver RE provision of the highest quality. Pupils make rapid progress and gain a thorough knowledge of the Bible. Formal partners, for example the local school's cluster group, are beginning to benefit from this expertise.

Areas for development

- To develop the capacity of new governors to drive forward the Christian vision. This will ensure the current high standards of the school as a church school are maintained.
- To share locally, leaders' expertise around innovative pedagogical approaches to the teaching of RE. This will further strengthen the transformational impact of the vision beyond the school gates.

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

The shared Christian vision lies at the heart of the work and life of this school. The vision and underpinning values explicitly pervade every corner of the school environment. Bold, visual expressions of the vision mean all who enter are intrinsically drawn in and included. There is a sense of joy, family and high aspirations for all. The shared process of vision development gives joint ownership. The clarity around the role of the vision in meeting the needs of the school's unique context, enables all to flourish. Governors monitor the school's effectiveness as a church school as part of the robust self-evaluation system that is in place. This drives improvement by identifying areas for development and strategically targeting resources to facilitate this.

The headteacher drives and challenges everyone to extend their thinking, be resilient and reflective learners and consider their own beliefs and convictions. He describes pupils as 'fertile soil' and promotes the vision as the route to cultivation. The innovative way he uses academic research to craft the curriculum and pedagogy of staff is remarkable. Dialogic teaching methods have a tangible impact on pupils' learning and spiritual needs and on the teaching of RE. The profound way pupils' articulate their opinions and beliefs is awe inspiring. A Year 5 pupil eloquently contributed to a discussion around the crucifixion, offering an atheist view. Parents see the outcome of critical thinking on pupils at home. They say pupils 'look inside themselves' and take a reflective approach to solving problems. The Diocese recognises the transformational impact this Christian leadership has. They enable other church schools to benefit from this expertise. Teachers are signposted to the school to observe RE teaching. The strong focus on professional development prepares future leaders. For example, Christian Leadership training from the Diocese.

The shared vision and values ensure relationships in the school community are outstanding. Parents are highly complimentary of the Christian leadership and dedication of staff in meeting the needs of pupils. They say, 'The vision of being bold, strong and courageous shines through.' Parents speak with gratitude about the welcome, compassion and support shown to pupils with additional needs. A child with complex needs tells his family, 'My teacher says Jesus loves me.' Leaders strategically target resources to meet the needs of all pupils. Funding is allocated to provide a learning mentor. She tailors interventions for vulnerable pupils and offers pastoral support. Leaders showed courage during the recent pandemic, making difficult decisions in pupils' best interests. All pupils who needed to attend school were offered a place. As a result, the experience strengthens the vision and purpose of the school, knitting the community even closer together.

The vision's theological roots inspire staff. Consequently, they take bold risks with teaching methods. This allows pupils to lead philosophical debate and have a strong awareness of a range of beliefs. Recruitment and induction of new staff centres around the vision and values. The vision has a clear impact on their spirituality. Staff say, 'I feel closer to God here than I have ever done.' Staff attend a range of in school and diocesan training around the school as a church school. Staff at all levels feel valued and able to utilise their particular skills. One built a bicycle shelter as a response to pupils wanting to cycle to school.

The good mental health of pupils and staff is a high priority and sets the scene for calm, productive learning. Pupils have daily meditation and use music, yoga and art as calming tools. Staff describe the school family as a 'protective bubble'

during difficult times. They feel cared for by leaders, who have an ‘open door policy’. Staff are signposted to access professional support if needed. This means all staff thrive and the vision enables them to ‘stand tall.’

The Christian vision impacts greatly on mutually beneficial partnerships. The church’s close involvement in vision development means they live out the vision alongside the school. Clergy play a key role in developing collective worship that reflects the varied liturgical, and other, traditions of Anglican worship. Clergy challenge staff to be ‘bold and courageous’ when delivering worship. Staff take pupils through the 'Stations of the Cross' and they are invited to say 'The Grace' each day as a result. Pupils join the church congregation to celebrate the eucharist. This is described as a ‘highlight’ for parishioners. They say they are deeply moved by pupils’ prayers for peace.

The biblical roots of the vision are ingrained in pupils. They speak about being ‘bold and strong’. The holistic infusion of the vision and values across school life and learning, greatly impacts on pupils’ character development. They have a strong awareness of local, national and global issues. They feel empowered to instigate social action. During a school visit, pupils insisted on sharing their spending money with a homeless person. Responding to the Ukraine crisis, pupils express a need to take action and plan aid efforts. Prayers and reflections for Ukraine citizens form a moving centrepiece in the school grounds. The school supports a range of charities for example, The Epiphany Trust.

Pupils discuss equality and discrimination with maturity. They reference the courage of Rosa Parks and how she made a transformational difference. ‘Picture News’ sparks debate around a range of world views and issues. This contributes to pupils’ knowledge of major world faiths and cultures and their respect for all. ‘Eco Warriors’ show stewardship towards God’s world by monitoring energy use and campaigning against single use plastic.

Collective worship is an important part of the day. Staff say it is a time to come together, ‘celebrate love of God’, be still and reflect. Everyone is invited to participate in their own way. The intensive training and support staff receive from leaders and the church community ensures worship is a profound expression of the vision. All pupils learn to plan and participate in worship. They progress from joyful sung praise and prayer in the early years, to taking a key lead in whole school and church worship. ‘Worship Warriors’ meet to create prayer bags and plan acts of worship. These include retelling key events in the Bible, for example the Exodus from Egypt. Pupils confidently lead prayer and reflection and engage their peers through questioning and drama.

RE gives pupils’ an impressive knowledge of the Bible, and a range of world faiths and views. They talk about Shabbat and relate this to having time to reflect on God’s word. Pupils adeptly apply their enhanced critical thinking skills to analysis of text. They relate RE to the way they live out the school’s vision and values. Leaders clearly articulate what spiritual development means in this school. They say it is not only about pupils being with God but about their encounters and experiences in the world. Pupils are encouraged to savour works of art and natural phenomena for example, a solar eclipse. This sparks curiosity through questioning and helps pupils articulate spiritual issues and feelings.



The effectiveness of RE is

Excellent

The experienced RE leader is passionate about the subject. She enthusiastically shares its underlying theology and philosophy with staff. High expectations lead her to identify clear priorities and actions for improvement. She undertakes rigorous monitoring of the effectiveness of RE and gives her time freely to challenge and extend staff’s knowledge and expertise. As a result, data and evidence in pupils’ books, demonstrate a rapid progression of skills and knowledge and excellent progress.

Contextual information about the school

Date of inspection	22 March 2022	URN	106486
Date of previous inspection	21 May 2015		
School status	Voluntary Aided primary school	NOR	235

Name of MAT/Federation	n/a		
Diocese	Liverpool		
Headteacher	David Sherriff		
Pupil profile	The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is below national averages.		
	The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below national averages.		
Inspector's name	Anna Barker	No.	959