



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

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

### St Agnes Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Knolls Lane  
Lees  
Oldham  
OL4 5RV

**Previous inspection grade: Good**

**Current inspection grade: Outstanding**

**Diocese: Manchester**

Local authority: Oldham

Date of inspection: 17<sup>th</sup> June 2016

Date of last inspection: 11<sup>th</sup> March 2011

School's unique reference number: 105700

Headteacher: Kirsten Swift

Inspector's name and number: Frank Driessen (675)

#### School context

St Agnes CE is a smaller than average primary school situated on the outskirts of Oldham. It serves an area of mixed housing. The proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding is below the national average. The proportion of pupils having special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average. The majority of pupils have a White British background with only a few from ethnic minorities.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Agnes CE as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The head teacher promotes the totally inclusive Christian nature of the school with great drive, much keenness and a huge warmth
- Distinctively Christian values are deeply embedded in the life of the school and enable all members of the school community to consistently and confidently live out the school's vision
- There is outstanding care and support for both children and families who are placed in the centre of this very welcoming and inclusive community and nurtured as being precious and special in the eyes of God

#### Areas to improve

- Develop a more robust and structured approach to the self-evaluation of St Agnes' distinctive and effective Christian nature
- Involve the school council and senior pupils in the planning, development and evaluation of themes for collective worship eventually incorporating them as worship leaders in its subsequent delivery
- Ensure high quality training to develop staff and governors as leaders in church schools

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

The success of St Agnes' CE School in consistently maintaining its distinctive Christian character is due in no small part to the promotion by all stakeholders of the school's mission statement, 'Treat others as you want to be treated yourself' (Matthew 12:7). This gives an extremely secure and effective bedrock upon which are built the deep and caring relationships between all members of the school and extended community. The Christian ethos shines out in all aspects of school life and pupils are able to meaningfully articulate the school's core values of love, care and faith. Parents know that their pupils are loved and well cared for. One commented that everyone was 'made to feel very special' and that 'all staff openly lived out the school's values'. Another said that her child brought the values of respect, love and forgiveness home. This strong promotion of Christian values through daily collective worship and well-taught and challenging RE has a very positive influence on pupils' attitudes to learning and on their social, moral, cultural and spiritual development. Their good understanding of different cultures and faiths supports a harmonious and caring school. Pupils are able to relate extremely well to the needs of others not only in the school but also in the local and national communities and have a respect for diversity and difference. Achievements are celebrated during the fortnightly achievement assembly which enhances the self-worth of all pupils. The school environment actively encourages spiritual development with bright multi-cultural RE displays in corridors, classrooms and the school hall where they present an excellent reminder and backdrop to the collective worship that takes place there. Christian symbols including crosses and bibles in each classroom and across the school along with class reflection books help enrich the vibrant Christian ethos. The Foundation Unit provides many excellent and ongoing opportunities for spiritual development using the outdoor areas to explore God's creation and to hang prayer banners from the trees. Other activities throughout the school allow pupils to experience the awe and wonder of God's world. There is a strong and purposeful Christian atmosphere that arises from the support, trust and mutual cooperation that are central to this thoughtful and caring school.

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

Collective worship is a meaningful and positive experience for all pupils regardless of background during which they demonstrate a reverence for its spiritual dimension through quiet respect for, and participation in, prayer and reflection. Enthusiastic singing from staff and children give a good sense of a worshipping community. The Christian focus is effectively aided by the use of crosses, candles and a bright interactive display on 'What Is God Like?' Pupils comment very favourably on the worship. One child felt that it 'helped me to live my life in a better way'. Worship is led by a range of leaders that include the head, teaching staff, the vicar and others. The varied approaches utilised by the head teacher during the observed worship captured the interest and enthusiasm of the pupils. The topic of 'Fathers' Day' was used to explore the nature of 'God the Father' within the context of the Trinity. Children responded enthusiastically to the Bible stories that illustrated God as Father and Jesus as His Son. The use of a peeled and cut apple gave an effective illustration of the Trinity and enabled children to deepen their understanding well. Collective worship is set firmly within an Anglican framework with pupils developing a very good understanding of Anglican worship not only because of the occasions they attend the church for services that include Easter, Harvest and Christmas but also the visits of Year 6 for the annual Leavers' Service at Manchester Cathedral and the excellent involvement of the vicar. Eucharistic Services are also held. Many parents and the extended family attend the church services, including class-led worship, and speak with delight in the way they deliver the values seen in school every day. These comments are a reflection of the excellent links between the two communities with pupils regarding the church as a natural extension of the school. Worship is well planned by the head teacher and has an obvious school wide spiritual impact. However, although pupils' participation in the different acts of worship is extensive, they have little experience in its

planning and leadership apart from class-led worship. Pupils and parents also need more consistent opportunities to comment formally on their experience of worship so that their responses help inform future developments.

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

Standards of teaching and learning within RE are good with some examples of outstanding practice but not all lessons are consistently at this challenging level. Scrutiny of work shows that pupils' achievements are in line with national expectations and that they make good progress within learning about and learning from religion, with pupils successfully encouraged to examine the difference religion makes in their lives. RE planning has been recently updated using the new Manchester Diocesan Syllabus. Its implementation and quality of provision is regularly monitored through lesson observations, book scrutiny and pupil interviews. Good subject leadership has ensured that assessment of learning is being successfully implemented in order to demonstrate effective progress and to inform future planning for all abilities. In lessons pupils' understanding grows because they reflect upon and discuss issues that are relevant to them, such as the importance of faith in helping them understand the impact of religion on believers. Their enjoyment and understanding are enhanced through a variety of teaching methods and creative learning outcomes. Many pupils exhibit a very open attitude and enjoyment of RE. They comment how lessons challenge them to think more deeply. The best of these lessons enables teachers' subject knowledge, enthusiasm and high expectations to inspire pupils to fully engage in deep learning through enquiry, reflection and excellent Bible knowledge. The RE curriculum is enriched by activities such as visits to a mosque, by visitors who speak about their faith and by whole-school theme weeks. One parent said, 'Learning about other religions is a real strength of the school'. This enhances and celebrates diversity and strengthens community cohesion.

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

With much quiet enthusiasm and understanding the head teacher, deputy, staff and governors promote a very distinctive school vision based on Christian values. A very effective example of this is seen in the redevelopment of the school's 'Great Expectations' behaviour policy as a Christian values-driven vehicle for understanding and forgiveness. The Christian conviction of the head teacher is clearly evident through her shared vision for the school as 'an aspirational vehicle in which all pupils and adults give of their best within a Christian values-driven environment'. This is recognised by the parents, one of whom described her as someone who 'really knows every child in school and who goes out of her way to be there for them'. Parents also recognise the school's many distinctive Christian qualities and are keen to encourage and support the strong Christian ethos because of the positive impact it has upon their children's lives. Governors recognise the importance of RE and collective worship in developing this ethos and ensure that there is good timetable provision, training and funding to develop both areas, including a successful bid to a charitable trust that enhanced resources for each area. Both issues for development from the previous inspection have been met and have helped drive the RE curriculum forward. All governors and staff are 100% supportive of the distinctive Christian vision for the school and play a significant part in creating a unified Christian family. They have a deep understanding of the school's strengths and are supportive yet challenging. More focused training, however, on developing future church-school leaders would ensure the continuation of this distinctive Christian vision. The close relationship and extensive links between the school, church and community, which places St Agnes at its heart, considerably enriches the school's distinctive Christian identity. The school council makes a very good contribution to the life of the school through its active decision-making process. Children support the school's wide range of charitable works well with one child justifying what they do by saying 'it's what Jesus wants us to do'. St Agnes' is, very much, a school driven by the outworking of Christian values in action.