



The Methodist Church 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Townsend Church of England School

High Oaks
St Albans
Hertfordshire
AL3 6DR

Previous SIAMS grade: Outstanding

Current inspection grade: Outstanding

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority: Hertfordshire

Date of inspection: 11 July 2016

Date of previous inspection: 21 June 2011

School's unique reference number: 117555

Headteacher: A Wellbeloved

Inspector's name and number: Kathryn Wright 436

School context

Townsend Church of England School is a smaller than average, co-educational, mixed ability secondary school providing for Years 7-13. The school has a large catchment area, and pupils attend the school from approximately 50 different feeder primaries. The school has a significant number of in year admissions and the proportion of pupils who have SEN support is above the national average. The school has close links with both the cathedral and the Parish of St Michaels.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Townsend School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The sustained Christian vision of the headteacher, leadership team and governors promotes the school's mission to love, show compassion, nurture academic achievement and serve others
- Christian values are lived out by all members of the school community through the school mission statement 'Achievement for All and Respect for All' ensuring that pupils are able to flourish and are prepared for life in modern Britain
- The inspirational leadership and high profile of religious education (RE) affirm its place as a core subject and lead to very good achievement by all pupils
- Strong commitment to pupil voice and leadership, particularly the RE Ambassador scheme, means that students inspire one another in acts of Christian service and mission

Areas to improve

- To ensure that all pupils confidently articulate the relationship between the Christian value of the month and the biblical teachings on which they are based so that they deepen their understanding of the foundation of the Christian vision
- To expand the role of the RE ambassadors in order to secure greater consistency in form time collective worship
- To review the RE curriculum at Key Stage 3 to ensure that pupils enquire into Christian theological concepts in greater depth preparing them effectively for GCSE studies.

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

The school lives out its mission of 'Achievement for All and Respect for All' through its Christian values of love, compassion, tolerance and service. Pupils are empowered to achieve and give their best as children of God. Pupils speak of being able to flourish and 'be themselves' as part of a warm, accepting, secure and welcoming environment. The connections between biblical teachings and values are explicit in 'Learning for Life' lessons, displays around the school and on the website. Some pupils are able to articulate links between the Christian values and the biblical teachings on which they are based, however this is not always clearly expressed. Respect for All is evident through the life of the school in relation to the curriculum, behaviour for learning and relationships. Every member of the school community is treasured as a member of a Christian family and this is particularly evident in support for vulnerable pupils and their families. Pupils who join the school mid-year are well supported by their peers, and nurtured in an understanding of the Christian ethos through a well-being programme. This emphasis on building strong relationships has led to good attainment (GCSE A*-C including English and Maths 66% 2015), progress and attendance. The school's approach to celebrating diversity is exceptional. Everyone upholds and exemplifies 'Valuing All God's Children'. In response to pupil voice the school amended their Respect for All statement to include reference to different lifestyle choices. The emphasis on inclusiveness is further promoted through a strong anti-bullying programme, and teachers talk about the impact of this in terms of appropriate use of language. Growth Mindset principles are promoting pupils' self-esteem and raising aspirations. This means that pupils are well equipped to live life in a diverse society. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) is promoted in all aspects of school life, particularly through the curriculum and display work. 'Learning for life' provides opportunities for pupils to respond to local and global issues such as terrorist atrocities through the creation of a reflection board. Pupil leadership is at the heart of school improvement and the distinctiveness of the school. Pupils take ownership of charity events and fundraising, and many take part in voluntary work supporting local churches, the disabled and elderly. Pupils talk about being inspired by one another to serve the vulnerable. Religious education (RE) has a prominent place within the school and makes a significant contribution to the Christian ethos, in particular through an enquiry into the life of Jesus. Pupils have a good understanding of Christianity as a global faith, with some students serving abroad with Christian organisations and sharing their experience with their peers. In addition, links with other subjects such as History enable pupils to make connections in their learning and consider the impact of faith and belief when considering events such as the Holocaust.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship has an integral place in the life of the school. It is exceptionally well led by a committed and enthusiastic teacher who provides outstanding support for her colleagues. Pupils and staff understand the purpose of collective worship in providing time and space for them to reflect and think as well as learning about the Christian faith. Pupils speak about coming together as a diverse family, and celebrating a sense of belonging and identity. Many talk about the impact of worship in terms of their own behaviour and actions, as well as 'having their minds opened'. Every pupil has an opportunity to lead worship during the year as part of a form group. Pupils value these occasions as a chance to write and lead prayers, as well as develop their leadership skills. The observed act of worship provided a clear Christian message linking to the monthly theme of appreciation. The life of Malala Yousafzai (Malala Day is 12th July) was presented in an engaging way, and pupils were asked thought provoking questions about standing up for the weak and taking courage in times of adversity. This was reflected back to biblical teachings in the opening chapter of the book of Joshua. Worship is planned to reflect Anglican practice through its structure of gathering, engaging, responding and sending. Collective worship is well managed and organised based on monthly themes linked to Christian values. These themes enable pupils to engage with Christian beliefs such as redemption and the Trinity, and to understand them confidently. An understanding of the persons of the Trinity is also supported through

the liturgy used in regular cathedral services. These occasions are valued by pupils and parents, particularly the opportunity to take part in school eucharists. Staff also speak of the importance of the cathedral dedication service at the start of the school year, which places the Christian ethos and Respect for All at the heart of everything the school does. Collective worship makes an excellent contribution to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development particularly through the many engaging activities and discussions pupils take part in during form time worship. However, monitoring indicates that there are some minor inconsistencies in terms of the delivery of these sessions. Links with local clergy and the Christian Education Project (STEP) provide further opportunities for pupils to experience a range of worship styles and support their understanding of Christian diversity. Prayer has an important place in the school. The prayer tree and the prayer/reflection room are well used and appreciated particularly during exam times. The role of the established RE ambassadors in supporting both collective worship and RE is in a stage of development, and pupils would like to expand their role further to have more impact.

The effectiveness of religious education is outstanding

Religious Education (RE) is exceptionally well-led by a dedicated, passionate and inspirational teacher. The department's drive and vision for the subject ensure that standards are high (A*-C 70.3% 2015), and that all pupils are able to achieve to the best of their ability. Attainment and progress are at least in line with the national average, and RE is one of the highest performing subjects in the school. Targeted interventions mean that the most able and underachieving boys are predicted better outcomes this year at GCSE. Pupils have good levels of religious literacy, and value the subject highly. This is illustrated through good recruitment to A level. Pupils talk about RE's importance in terms of understanding others and transferable skills. Lessons observed and monitoring undertaken show that the quality of teaching is good or better. Lessons were well planned to meet the needs of different learners. Lessons observed indicated appropriate levels of challenge, with teachers seeking clarity and deeper meanings through skilful questioning. Pupils were engaged in imaginative, creative and independent tasks to deepen their understanding of Buddhist meditation (Year 8), and Christian views on capital punishment (Year 10). Teachers have excellent subject knowledge, and are able to respond confidently to pupil questions. Assessment for learning is in a transition period as the school moves to a national system without levels. However, pupils can clearly identify next steps in learning and respond well to the school marking system of 'what went well' and 'even better if'. Feedback is supportive, yet challenging and is consistent across year groups. Peer and self- assessment are used effectively to help pupils understand what it means to succeed in the subject. The curriculum, based on the Hertfordshire local agreed syllabus, provides opportunities for pupils to engage well with lived religious experience and ultimate questions of meaning and purpose. This is enhanced by many opportunities for pupils to engage with members of different faith and belief communities. At present, the Key Stage 3 curriculum does not enable students to gain sufficient depth of understanding of theological concepts which underpin the Christian faith. Provision for the sixth form RE is well established through the 'Learning for Life' programme. A robust system of monitoring and evaluation takes places, and this has led to clear departmental priorities. The RE department is characterised by a team of reflective practitioners who engage with and act upon professional learning opportunities such as networks and conferences. This has had a significant impact on pupil outcomes. The team is now beginning to establish itself as a beacon of outstanding practice in the diocese.

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

The headteacher, leadership team and governors consistently and confidently articulate a strong Christian vision for the school which is rooted in serving others through an inclusive and compassionate approach. 'Respect for All' is the cornerstone of the school which leads to a meaningful and effective education for all pupils. The values are lived out by all, and the Christian ethos lies securely at the heart of strategic planning. The leadership team ensures the Christian ethos of the school is central to the

recruitment and induction of new members of staff. The well-being of the school community is paramount, with a strong emphasis on the emotional and mental health of all. There is strong collaboration with different partners including the diocese, cathedral, local schools and the music school which supports school improvement as well as enabling everyone to live out the Christian values on which the school is founded. Church school leadership is nurtured and succession planning is in place to ensure the vision is upheld. Governors provide highly effective, robust and challenging evaluation and hold the school to account in terms of its Christian foundation. In particular their desire to re-examine and enrich the school's distinctiveness has enabled all pupils to flourish through a well-rounded and holistic education. Monitoring is formalised and undertaken regularly, placing the Christian ethos at the centre of school improvement. On one or two occasions monitoring has not been followed up with swift action to secure improvement. This was noted particularly in relation to form time worship where the need for more explicit links between biblical teachings and values had been identified as an area for development but had not yet been acted upon. The school's self-evaluation is broadly accurate and key issues from the last inspection have been met comprehensively. The leadership of religious education and collective worship are highly effective in securing whole school improvement. For example religious education is a lead subject area for developing assessment beyond levels. Opportunities for active participation in and leadership of collective worship by pupils has increased significantly with the introduction of the RE ambassadors scheme. The use of the prayer and reflection space has been enhanced through the direction and guidance of pupils. Parental engagement with the school is very high particularly through a pro-active parent-teacher association, and individual support and nurture. Parents have a good understanding of the Christian values of the school and indicate that their children are happy and confident learners.

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