

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

The Priory CE Primary School, Birkenhead

Aberdeen Street
Birkenhead
CH41 4HS

Previous SIAMS grade: Outstanding

Current inspection grade: Good

Diocese: Chester

Local authority: Wirral

Dates of inspection: 30 June 2016

Date of last inspection: 24 September 2010

School's unique reference number: 105085

Headteacher: Peter Faragher, Acting Headteacher: Greg Edwards

Inspector's name and number: Lisa Horobin

QA Assessor: Lyn Field 151

School context

The Priory is a one form entry primary school with 212 pupils. The majority come from the local area and most are White British. The school is situated in an urban area of significantly high social and economic deprivation, half of pupils receive extra funding via the pupil premium which is well above average. Attainment on entry is below the national expectation. During the past academic year, the position of headship has been shared between the headteacher and the acting headteacher. The headteacher retires in August after 22 years.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of The Priory as a Church of England school are good

- The exemplary behaviour and attitudes of the pupils are based in a secure understanding of the Christian values of friendship and respect.
- The strong relationships within the school community reflect Jesus' command to 'love one another as I have loved you' and contribute to the distinctive Christian ethos.
- The high profile of religious education (RE) throughout the school led by a dedicated and enthusiastic RE coordinator results in good progress made by pupils and inspirational teaching.
- The vibrant and stimulating learning environment celebrating pupils' creativity and Christian values enriches the Christian character of the school.

Areas to improve

- Develop a coherent and shared Christian vision for the school in order to drive forward the impact the school has in the community.
- Establish a more robust system of planning, delivery and evaluation of collective worship that involves all members of the school community and has a clear structure for recording content and reviewing practice in order to inform improvement.
- Develop a shared definition and understanding of spirituality, to improve the ways in which the high quality experiences offered to pupils specifically enrich their spiritual development.
- Improve systems of self-evaluation so that the views of all stakeholders contribute to the strategic development of the school.

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

The Christian ethos permeates throughout every aspect of daily school life. The words of St Paul's letter to the Corinthians about the characteristics of love are displayed on the wall of the entrance hall and lived out by the school community. Pupils behave well and the children stressed that being polite and showing respect to everyone was of utmost importance. The headteacher and staff of the school work hard to ensure that the pupils feel loved and valued as individuals, empowering them to achieve their full academic potential. Standards are consistently high and above the national average. When asked what they like best about the school a child replied that it was the teachers, because 'they love us like we are their own children'. The parents confirmed this view and said that their children are very happy to come to school. The level of attendance has steadily been improving. The acting headteacher has expanded the opportunities given to pupils that enrich their spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. The whole of Key Stage 2 now regularly visits the forest school in the local park. Teachers comment that children have grown in confidence, resilience and self-esteem. A group of pupils visited Liverpool Anglican cathedral to join with other schools taking part in Christingle workshops this gave them a wider understanding of the Christian family. The building of a strong relationship with the other church schools in the area led to The Priory being part of a trial project where 10 children attended a residential weekend with 4 other schools. The children recalled their experience as being 'great'. One child said they now had 'knowledge of Jesus in their heart', another commented that it had changed the way he thought about how to spend his time, 'You don't have to be watching TV or playing X Box to have a good time'. There are many opportunities for spiritual development in the curriculum but staff do not have a clearly defined or shared approach to spiritual development beyond RE and collective worship. Pupils could name Bible stories and Christian values but could not easily link the two and found it difficult to express their ideas on this subject. Many pupils lack a spiritual vocabulary because it isn't used consistently across all areas of school life. RE has a high profile in the curriculum and makes a strong contribution to the Christian character of the school. The recent visit of the acting headteacher to Uganda is making a huge impact and the children's awareness and understanding of Christianity as a global faith is growing.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship reflects the school's distinctive character and plays a central role in school life. Daily acts of worship enhance the pupils' knowledge and understanding of the Bible and the Christian faith, including their awareness of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. However, plans for collective worship do not reflect the content in detail and this means there is limited opportunity for evaluation and review. Staff, pupils and parents are fully aware of the positive impact worship has on relationships, behaviour and spiritual development. One parent spoke about their child always telling them Bible stories. Another mentioned that, because of the links between school and church, their child had asked to be christened. Special occasions in the Christian calendar are celebrated by the whole school attending collective worship at the church. Pupils are confident in the knowledge that worship teaches them about friendship, respect and how to live a better life, they said worship makes them feel good. As pupils spoke about links between Bible stories and their own behaviour it was clear that they are engaged and interested during collective worship. One child commented that 'worship makes you feel stronger because you know God is with you'. The formation of the worship group was initiated by the children a year ago and has led to an increase in pupil involvement in the planning and leading of worship. The group enthusiastically described creating drama to tell Bible stories because the younger children need to learn about 'what Jesus taught us'. Prayer is an important feature of school life. This is evident in the school environment, particularly the prayer tree in the newly decorated stairwell. In each classroom there are multi-sensory reflective corners and opportunities to take time out to pray. Following a special day of prayer activities organised by the church, pupils commented that 'it was nice to get time in church and share our ideas, not just sit there' and that it had given them opportunity to 'speak to God in our own time'.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Religious education (RE) is exceptionally well led and managed by an inspirational and knowledgeable coordinator. She has a clear vision for the subject in a church school and a passion for all pupils to discover their own identity within a framework of Christian values. She is given regular opportunities to update staff and share new resources. Her enthusiasm is infectious which has led to the majority of teaching in RE being outstanding. The standards of attainment in RE are high and evidence of progress and challenge is seen across all key stages. The well-established system of assessment has been affected by the changes in the national approach to assessment, however the RE coordinator is successfully managing this change. Rigorous monitoring ensures that a well-focused action plan leads to further improvement. A result of the strong emphasis on developing pupils' reflective thinking is the creation of an ethos where pupils are encouraged to ask questions, apply their knowledge and think deeply. Teachers achieve a clear balance between learning factual knowledge about religion and giving pupil's time to make personal responses, discuss and form their own opinions. Evidence in pupils' work, classroom displays and pupils' enthusiasm for the subject clearly reveal the impact the wide range of teaching strategies is having on pupils' understanding of Christianity and other world faiths. Pupils in Year 2 exploring the Jewish festival of Rosh Hashanah reflect on the events and choices made in their own year so far, while eating apples and honey. Recent pupil workshops about Eid, that were also open to parents, enriched understanding of the importance and value of learning about and celebrating diversity across religions and culture. The RE coordinator commented that the result of these workshops had been a very successful curriculum visit to the local mosque. RE makes a significant contribution to the children's spiritual development. Children comment that 'learning about Jesus makes you a better person and the world a better place' and that RE lessons enable them to 'learn more about yourself'. Children are eager to share their learning in RE, they feel strongly that learning about God and different religions equips them with an attitude of understanding and respect for everyone.

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

The distinctiveness of the school as a church school has been firmly established by the long serving headteacher. Although members of the school community recognize and talk about the school's Christian character, it is not expressed in a form that gives direction to strategic planning. The shared headship during this academic year has been effective in contributing to a smooth transfer in the leadership and has strengthened the Christian ethos of the school. The vision of the acting headteacher who will take on the substantive role in September is motivated by his strong Christian faith. He inspires everyone to deepen the already strong links within the community and leads by example. The links with the local parish church have increasingly become more dynamic. The rector is a regular visitor to school, she is well liked and valued by pupils and parents. She is described as fun and not too 'churchy'. Several children and members of staff recall with delight the Palm Sunday procession, as being a highlight of the year. The whole school community walked through the streets to church following a 'real live donkey'. As of September the adjoining pre-school will officially become part of the school, extending further the impact school has in the local community. Parents commented in questionnaires and interviews that staff are approachable and they feel part of the school family. The full time parental involvement worker has arranged training courses for parents on a variety of subjects. These courses are well attended and parents say they feel very involved in church and school life. The support and development of the RE subject leader given by senior leadership has led to highly effective RE across the school. Although the process of self-evaluation is limited, it is in the main accurate and effects directly the school's development plans for the future. The wider involvement of stakeholders in the process of self-evaluation is an area for development.