

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Stephen's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
Round Street, West Bowling
Bradford BD5 7HU

Diocese: Bradford

Local authority: Bradford

Date of inspection: 23rd March 2010

Date of last inspection: April 2007

School's unique reference number: 107323

Headteacher: Mrs Lesley Heathcote

Inspector's name and number: Mr R D Masterton No. 483

School context

St Stephen's CE VA school educates 293 children (including a maintained nursery) and serves an inner urban district of Bradford. 75% of the children are Pakistani and over 80% of children speak English as an additional language. Some 39 pupils are listed on the special needs register. The school is located a short distance from the parish church.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Stephen's Church of England Primary School as a Church of England school are good.

This Christian-inspired school works effectively and comfortably in a largely Muslim community where it enjoys high respect for its faith-based approach to education and care. Managers clearly understand what work is needed for further improvement. Since the previous inspection good progress has been made using self evaluation, reviewing religious education and collective worship in line with diocesan guidelines, monitoring the teaching of religious education and providing a room for spiritual reflection.

Established strengths

- The leadership and vision of the head teacher and the local parish priest.
- The respect that the school has gained from the local community in offering effective primary education within a context that is demonstrably inspired by Christian faith and values.
- The spiritual and intellectual development of children who enjoy and value the success and security offered by the Christian values of their school.

Focus for development

- Establish secure assessment in religious education to ensure that all children do as well as they can and that overall achievement matches the best of other school subjects.
- Develop creative contributions from children for collective worship and make more use of the church.
- Secure a greater involvement of foundation governors in monitoring collective worship, religious education and the effectiveness of St Stephen's as a voluntary aided church school.

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

Through a clearly Christian ethos, St Stephens effectively promotes children's development in a style well matched to the ethnically mixed community it serves. There is a rich curriculum supplemented by many and diverse enrichment activities. Christian teaching is evident in many aspects of teaching and learning and children learn much about other communities and cultures. Parents, children and staff recognise and praise the Christian values that are the basis of the school and cite how they shape behaviour and relationships, promote respect for individual needs and religious beliefs and nurture a deep rooted concern for others' well being. Children develop good standards of personal development, particularly their spirituality and sense of right and wrong. They say they are always helped to succeed. Children are intellectually curious and willing to discuss difficult ideas that they meet in their learning, especially in religious education. They can relate what they learn at school to ideas they meet at home and to the additional religious teaching that many receive. Through this, children grow a high respect for human understanding and insight informed through faith. Children's commitment to the needs of others is good. They actively support charities and are expected to look after and help each other in their learning and around the school. Children report that such mutual support is an everyday feature of their life at St Stephen's. They respond thoughtfully to the very rich display in school that includes many Christian themes; they value their prayer garden and the awe inspiring room the school has established to encourage reflection and prayer. St Stephen's is an oversubscribed school where children say they are happy to learn and one that parents greatly value since it is effective and so clearly inspired by faith.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is satisfactory

Children enjoy daily collective worship, respecting its purpose bringing their community together to draw inspiration from Christian faith and to respond to the needs of others who are less fortunate. Children participate enthusiastically through singing, answering questions, contributing prayers and helping presenters. However their creative contributions are not well developed and they currently have little opportunity to shape, contribute to or lead acts of collective worship themselves. School collective worship is very inclusive with children from almost every family joining in and it nurtures the spiritual development of both children and adults. Christian and Anglican traditions are incorporated with the use of joyous music and a lighted candle to mark the special nature of coming together. Collective worship marks the major Christian festivals with the school confident to celebrate Easter and Christmas. Other aspects of Anglican inspired worship are less well represented such as an approach to the sacraments or acts like sharing the Peace. Use of the parish church for collective worship is limited but a recent public procession to it for a Christmas service was very popular with children and their parents thus showing the potential for greater use of the building. Planning for collective worship is secure bringing into one scheme that undertaken in classes, traditions from other faiths and the regular contributions from the parish priest. His presentations have high impact on children. On the day of the inspection he used a large globe, a powerful electric lamp and vivid pictures to wow children with a perspective of wonder concerning their world, its seasons and its beauty – the product of God's creation that sustains our existence. All daily school assemblies include the elements of collective worship, reflection and prayer with enhanced content on two days each week. Parents are welcome each Monday at the start of the school day and a small but significant number of parents do attend. There is some monitoring of quality and impact but it is not yet leading to planning for improvement and greater children's participation.

The effectiveness of religious education is satisfactory

Religious education underpins the Christian foundation of the school and draws strength from the faith and cultural diversity of the local community. School managers have taken steps to improve provision with responsibility now assigned to class teachers but have not yet established a regular system for assessment of each child's standards in the subject. They are therefore unable to report on children's progress or their standards and in consequence do not know if general achievement matches that in core subjects or if individual children are doing as well as they can. In lessons observed and work inspected children were being encouraged to think and learn at levels matching those expected for their ages. The quality of teaching and learning varies from satisfactory to good and is satisfactory overall. Younger children were seen being taught the Easter story and asked to illustrate scenes from the death and resurrection of Jesus but its significance was not emphasised. Older children were challenged to reflect on the life and teaching of St Francis of Assisi through tasks promoting higher levels of religious understanding. However in both lessons greater account could have been taken of children's different starting points for their understanding and a wider range of activities offered, particularly for the older class, to ensure all children enjoyed a challenge reflecting their individual abilities. Children are very positive towards religious education. They enjoy learning about and comparing different religions and the strong faith background of many children's families means that the subject is greatly respected. It makes a good contribution to informing children's moral choices and their response to the needs of others. For older children it provokes their mature consideration of knowledge, fact, belief and faith.

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

The head teacher provides very effective leadership that is growing the effectiveness of this church school serving a predominantly Muslim community. The explicit Christian values are well reflected in a school ethos where families of other faiths or none are welcome, feel secure and offered general support. These values merit a greater profile in communications such the prospectus offered by the school. The local parish priest, a foundation governor, makes an outstanding contribution to school work, not only supporting collective worship but drawing the school into a vision for a modern inner-urban parish worshipping community and church centre. School self evaluation of church school effectiveness is secure and accurate but the contribution from foundation governors is limited. The Parochial Church Council has recently nominated a foundation governor from a non Christian background in order to strengthen local community commitment to the aims and work of the school. Supported by many opportunities for professional development, staff identify strongly with the school's mission and are developing skills to sustain its distinctiveness and effectiveness. The school has developed extensive partnerships with other local schools and with the leaders of mosques in the school district. Through these connections the school is actively promoting community cohesion and opening children's eyes and understanding beyond their immediate surroundings and culture.