



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

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

**St Mark's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School**

Wood Terrace  
Shelton  
Stoke-on-Trent  
ST1 4LR

**Previous SIAMS grade: Good**  
**Current inspection grade: Outstanding**

**Diocese: Lichfield**

Local authority: Stoke-on-Trent

Dates of inspection: 28 April 2016

Date of last inspection: 16 May 2011

School's unique reference number: 124308

Executive headteacher: Michelle Johnstone

Inspector's name and number: Rosemary Woodward 583

**School context**

St Mark's is a two form entry primary school, adjacent to the parish church of St Mark. Many families face extremely difficult social, emotional and financial challenges. Three quarters of the school's population have Pakistani Muslim heritage and in recent years the school has seen a considerable influx of pupils from other ethnic groups, including many of Eastern European Roma heritage. There are significant numbers of asylum seekers and refugees. Most pupils speak English as a second language with 28 different home languages spoken. Mobility levels, deprivation indicators and pupils supported by additional funding known as the pupil premium are all much higher than the national averages. The school federated with two neighbouring schools in September 2015, with St Mark's headteacher becoming executive headteacher.

**The distinctiveness and effectiveness St Mark's Ce (VA) Primary School, Shelton as a Church of England school are outstanding**

- Christian love, care and nurture makes every child in school feel special, valued and included and this extends to embrace their families.
- The strong and dedicated leadership of the executive headteacher, supported by staff and governors, together embedding Christian values and relationships in all areas of school life.
- The Muslim community which is welcomed, included and celebrated without compromising the Christian love and values at the heart of school life.
- Strong links with the local church that enriches the school's spiritual life.
- Strong and well-resourced leadership of religious education (RE) and worship.

**Areas to improve**

- Include the school community in monitoring and evaluating the impact of collective worship and work with pupils to further enrich their experiences and involvement.
- Accelerate progress by ensuring that work in RE supports and stretches all pupils' abilities.
- Provide further opportunities to enrich RE by exploring the diversity of belief and visiting different places of worship.

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

### **learners**

At St Mark's CE Primary School pupils, staff and parents are included and valued and staff explain that the needs of pupils are 'paramount in all that we do'. Explicit Christian values underpin all areas of this school where the school motto 'Loving to learn, learning to love' is lived out. The overarching core value of respect is exemplified by the acrostic values of responsibility, equality, spirituality, perseverance, enthusiasm, commitment and trust. Each of these is clearly rooted in a Bible verse and in consistent and explicit teaching which has its roots in the values in Jesus' teaching. They are also seen as shared values to which Muslims in the school community can fully aspire. These values are embedded in all key school policies and documentation, and described as the DNA of the school. Children's welfare and spiritual development are given the highest priority. The school's powerful vision is owned and modelled by the whole community, meaning that behaviour is consistently excellent. Pupils have a real pride in their school and speak with passion about the school's mission to promote respect and equality. Forgiveness and an assurance of a fresh start are key to the strong relationships which ensure pupils see the school as a safe and secure place to be. This work is underpinned by close links with outside agencies to ensure that safeguarding and the 'Prevent' strategies to avoid any danger of radicalisation are robust. The underpinning Christian values help to break many of the barriers to learning. Progress data, tracked from pupils' entry to the school is very strong and pupils are very well supported on their learning journey to speaking English, literacy and equality of access to a full and engaging curriculum. The curriculum is effective in actively promoting pupils' spiritual and moral development. Children feel confident to debate the 'big questions' and to discuss how Christianity and Islam inter-relate. Adults know children extremely well and plan work which is effectively matched to children's individual needs. Standards are very high and many attain well above expectation. Achievements are valued and celebrated very well. The school is seen as 'a fun place to learn', while another pupil explained that 'lessons aren't too complex so we understand and they move us on'. Pupils feel loved and supported and confidently link this care to the Christian character of the school. They rise to the challenges that life at St Mark's offers and are great ambassadors for the school, realising that they are offered 'life opportunities' through their learning. Children are taught to develop as responsible citizens, including sharing in opportunities for generosity and service and involvement in the work of 'Sanctus', which they see as 'helping those who are less fortunate than we are'. Reflective areas are a valued feature of all classrooms and pupils speak of their own contributions to what is placed there.

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

Collective Worship has an important place in the life of St Mark's and has a strong role in developing pupils' personal spirituality. A range of whole school and class worship experiences ensure that the content is relevant and age appropriate. The school's Christian values are constantly referred to within worship times, to reinforce their importance and root them within biblical teaching. Individual acts of worship are carefully planned by staff and the church team, who regularly worship. Their contribution is appreciated by pupils. Experiences offered range from the lively and interactive to quiet and reflective moments, although opportunities for pupils to plan and lead are limited. Pupils particularly enjoy joining in singing. The school's diverse character leads to an emphasis on social and moral outcomes, with less focus on the central position of Jesus. However, pupils have a good understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity, explaining that Christians know God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, while for Muslims, Allah is one. They have a good knowledge of the principal Christian festivals, enjoy celebrating St Mark's day, and are aware of the use of liturgical colours to mark the church's year. Older pupils are able to discuss how, for Christians, Easter is linked with resurrection and hope, while Muslims do not accept that Jesus did indeed die. This aspect leads to a mature and informed debate on the place of Jesus in both faiths. The school values the place of prayer and reflection, offering a number of opportunities for personal prayer, and inviting pupils to take up their own prayer positions in shared worship. Pupils use these opportunities well, with many examples of written prayers to God and Allah. The 'Rainbow prayer room' is also well used both for more prayer and for reflection by all. Anglican liturgy is used sparingly, but some families share in services in the church, including some Eucharistic celebrations. Pupils are able to worship in the church building each term, as well as visit it within their curriculum work. As yet there are few opportunities to explore the diversity of Christian worship.

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

Religious Education is well planned and taught, and is an ongoing focus for development. Pupils are very positive when discussing their learning in the subject and demonstrate a good knowledge of the Christian and Muslim faiths and some understanding of Judaism. The best teaching is characterised by an interactive approach where children are active learners and confident risk takers. Lessons explore 'big-life questions' through informed debate and discussion. The experienced co-ordinator makes use of assessment data, showing that pupil progress in RE is good, especially considering the range of attainment on entry and language abilities of the pupils. The inclusive ethos in all classrooms means that every child feels valued and able to achieve according to their abilities through religious education. Recent initiatives connected to the launch of the city's locally agreed RE syllabus have enabled a group of Year 5 pupils to attend an event from which they have returned as very enthusiastic 'RE ambassadors' keen to share new activities and approaches. Plans are underway to enhance long term plans to ensure that staff all have a secure subject knowledge in order to teach the concepts at the heart of the faiths that are studied. This will enable them to lead exploration of the diversity within faith and how beliefs are actually lived out, especially in regard to the diversity found in the faiths represented in the school community. Monitoring and evaluation by the dedicated RE co-ordinator, in conjunction with the link foundation governors, should ensure the capacity for increased and sustained improvement.

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

The team of committed staff and strong and knowledgeable governing body led by an inspirational executive headteacher ensures that leadership is strong and inclusive at all levels. The team share a very clear vision for the school as a community reaching out to all with Christ's love. Dedicated staff, who mirror the school's diverse ethnic and faith make up, work hard to ensure that the vision becomes reality. The school's Christian values, strong church links and Christian foundations are clearly proclaimed. The senior leadership team are fully supported by the extremely professional and skilled new executive governing body who are involved in the school's self-evaluation process and who also take a role in strategic planning for the school's future. Staff are supported very effectively and given good opportunities to develop professionally. The church works extremely closely with the school. Staff speak of a strong level of spiritual care available for themselves as well as for pupils and families. The vicar and many other church members actively participate in school life, and pastoral care for staff and families is given high priority. Parents speak extremely highly of the care given by St Mark's school, not only to the pupils, but to the whole family, especially at particularly difficult times. Stories of practical support in bridging the gap in reaching social organisations and health care are shared enthusiastically. Muslim families are able to talk of 'our church' as they feel supported and included, as they are taught that Jesus loves and can relate to everyone, whatever their faith. Families from Eastern Europe speak of the welcome they have received, resulting, in some cases, in baptism and full membership of the congregation. Many parents affirm that every pupil is seen not just as a child, but as a unique individual and speak of how the school is a special, loving community, under the highly valued leadership of its executive headteacher. Links with the Diocese are extremely strong and staff and governors benefit from the training and resources.

SIAMS report April 2016 St Mark's CE VA Primary, Shelton, Stoke-on-Trent ST1 4LR