



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St James' Church of England Voluntary Controlled Junior School

Wellington Row Whitehaven Cumbria CA28 7HG

Previous inspection grade: Outstanding

Current inspection grade: **Good**

Diocese: **Carlisle**

Local authority: Cumbria

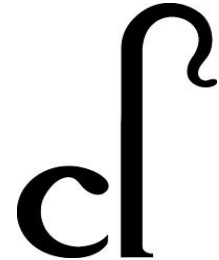
Date of inspection: 5 November 2015

Date of last inspection: 23 September 2010

School's unique reference number: 112298

Headteacher: Moira Maughan

Inspector's name and number: Ruth Wall NS 548



Diocese of Carlisle
Growing Disciples

School context

St James' is smaller than most primary schools (177 pupils) in a remote west Cumbrian coastal town on the edge of a rural area. Pupils come from mixed social and economic backgrounds. Almost half of the school population lives outside the immediate catchment area. Very few pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is lower than that found nationally. The proportion with special educational needs is slightly above the national average. Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher and a new deputy headteacher have been appointed. The vicar was appointed in September 2015.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St James' as a Church of England school are good

- Senior leaders, governors and staff are committed to providing an inclusive education, based on Christian values, which underpin the very good relationships between all members of the school community.
- The strong link with St James' Church which impacts positively on pupils and promotes the Christian character of the community.
- Children's broad learning experiences contribute very effectively to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Areas to improve

- Leaders and governors to work together to ensure that self-evaluation contributes effectively to strategic planning of church school distinctiveness, including collective worship.
- Ensure that effective use is made of training opportunities for the development of governors to support the leadership of the school as a church school.
- Find ways to involve parents in church school evaluation to broaden their engagement in church school issues.

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

Children say the values of honesty and respect are special and link these to how Jesus treated people. One child explained that their school is distinctive 'because we have a different outlook – we follow Jesus'. The school has a strong commitment to Christian service in supporting a range of charities. For example, children made the decision to raise funds for a local hospital. This provides a very good foundation for their future as useful and responsible members of their community. Adults in the school are good role models who all seek to promote an ethos of forgiveness and reconciliation. Pupils know that any issues are dealt with promptly and fairly. As a result they are confident and they feel valued. Children's efforts and achievements are acknowledged and celebrated. In consequence, their behaviour and attitudes to learning are very good; therefore, most children are making good levels of academic attainment and progress. The school is diligent in putting in place intervention strategies which are effective in meeting the individual needs of the children. There is a broad and rich curriculum which contributes fully to the children's social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. Activities include appreciating the awe and wonder of God's creation in their local surroundings and visits further afield to broaden their understanding of the wider world. Religious Education (RE) supports the Christian character of the school. Schemes of work enable learners to explore Christianity and other cultures, beliefs and practices very effectively. Children are made aware that Christianity is a world-wide faith through a range of activities. These include a focus on the various ways in which Christians around the world pray and celebrate harvest. Visits to other local places of worship enable them to understand different traditions of Christian worship. Christian symbols and displays around the school promote the school's Christian character although this has not been made explicit throughout the website and all documentation.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Children say they enjoy collective worship. Planning includes exploring Christian values, the Bible and major Christian festivals. Teachers say they appreciate the time for worship and quiet reflection with the school family, particularly in the weekly visit to St James' Church. Demonstrating how the school has moved on since previous inspections, the children are involved in planning and leading worship on a regular basis. They say, 'Our research helps us to learn more', 'it builds our self-confidence', and, 'a child talking to other children makes it easier for them to understand'. Children enjoy singing and this enhances the worship experience. Parents speak highly of the harvest celebration in church: 'It showed that children had ownership of the service'. Children have a very good knowledge of the life and person of Jesus and a developing understanding of the nature of God. A child explained, 'The Holy Spirit can help us get through challenges'. The close partnership with St James' Church enriches worship. Children say that the governor (retired vicar) and the Lay Reader, 'make it interesting and fun – they always explain things clearly'. Evaluation of worship has not yet been formalised to include all stakeholders and lead to strategic planning. Prayer is a very important aspect of worship. Prayers are said in class during the school day and teachers say that children are developing confidence in sharing their own prayers in class worship. A foundation governor and the Lay Reader were instrumental in placing prayer trees in the school. They explained, 'If children have something in their hearts this gives them a place to put it ... their prayer leaves are private, between them and God'. Support and input from the parish church has resulted in a detailed plan for a prayer week of interactive activities. Their aim is made clear: 'To give time and space for children to experience faith and the nature of God, personally'.

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

The headteacher has a clear Christian vision for the school which she lives out in action. Governors say they 'continually observe the outstanding care and love she has for the

children'. Her colleagues agree that she gives clear direction, whilst promoting a strong team spirit. The school's vision statement and aims were reviewed in September by staff and governors. Children are proud of the strap-line they recently developed: 'With exploring minds and faith we achieve our challenging goals'. Support from the diocese has led to a stronger focus on Christian values and teaching. Issues raised at previous inspections have been fully addressed. Governors are pro-active, using their skills effectively to support the school. The school's Christian character is central in promoting the wellbeing and achievement of all members of the school community. The clear set of priorities in school action plans focus on continuing to raise the academic achievement of all learners. Governors are involved in regular monitoring and in supporting RE teaching. Diocesan training has resulted in a clearer understanding of what is meant by the Christian characteristic of the school. Governors say they would appreciate more training in church school governance. They have recently formed a committee to take responsibility for developing formal procedures for strategic planning in church school issues, including collective worship. The school values its relationship with parents. They are active in their support for school events, including attendance at the school's church services. However, parents do not have a role in evaluating the Christian distinctiveness of the school. The partnership with the parish church and community is outstanding. Important celebrations are shared events. Children take their responsibilities seriously and are proud of the contribution they make to decision making through the school council. The new vicar visited a council meeting and was 'very impressed with the sense of order and purpose'.

SIAMS report, November 2015, St James' Junior School, Whitehaven CA28 7HG