

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Richmond Methodist Primary School	
Darlington Road, Richmond, North Yorkshire DL10 7BH	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Methodist District	Darlington North
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	North Yorkshire
Name of multi-academy trust / federation [delete as appropriate]	N/A
Date of inspection	15 June 2017
Date of last inspection	May 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary VC 121544
Headteacher	Helen Ring
Inspector's name and number	Lyn Field 151

School context

This is a larger than average-sized school with 321 pupils taught in 11 classes. The vast majority of pupils are White British with few pupils speaking English as their second language. The school is a member of the Swaledale Teaching Alliance and the headteacher and deputy took up their posts in January 2016 following the retirement of the previous head. The proportions of pupils who are disadvantaged and of those requiring special support are much lower than average. In March 2017 Ofsted judged the effectiveness of the school to be good.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Richmond as a Methodist school are good

- This is a distinctively Christian but fully inclusive school because the Methodist principle of 'for all' shapes every aspect of school life.
- The determined leadership of the headteacher and deputy headteacher is rapidly raising standards of achievement and has revitalised the Christian character of the school so that pupils of all abilities are gaining the understanding and confidence to express their views on spiritual issues and matters of faith.
- Improvements to religious education (RE) have led to the popularity of the subject across the whole community, leading to positive attitudes to difference and diversity in society.
- Maximum use is made of opportunities to forge partnerships with other schools and Christian churches locally so that pupils develop a deep respect and responsibility for others in their community.

Areas to improve

- Agree a more streamlined approach to monitoring and evaluation as a church school so that it is a more manageable process for staff and governors that directly informs priorities for action.
- Increase pupils' understanding of worship traditions by expanding their role in planning, leading and evaluating worship.
- Continue to introduce pupils to a variety of strategies for prayer and reflection so that they become confident in making use of these for their own personal spiritual development.

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

This is a welcoming and inclusive school that fully embraces its Methodist vision of being a school 'for all'. Pupils are totally accepting of the differences between people that arise from their individual needs, background or religious faith. This is because staff give close attention to the wellbeing of pupils as well as their academic needs and pupils follow their lead in the way they care for each other. Consequently, John Wesley's principle of 'watching over each other in love' is lived out in this school and new pupils feel accepted, settle quickly and flourish. RE plays a key role in developing these positive attitudes in pupils and is a direct result of improvements to teaching in the last year. Teachers do not shy away from tackling sensitive issues around prejudice and pupils are learning to question and challenge matters of moral and religious belief in the context of modern society. Parents are impressed by pupils' knowledge and enthusiasm to discuss these topics at home. Consequently, RE takes the lead in shaping the Christian identity of the school and embraces the principles of Methodist education in creating an inclusive learning community that encourages mutual respect and understanding. A clear definition of spirituality has been agreed with the help of the Methodist minister but this is still being worked out across the whole curriculum. Although greater attention is being given to time and space for reflection, this is in its early stages and pupils have differing views of its purpose and value.

Many pupils talk openly and honestly about how they themselves have been nurtured and relate this to the Christian values of the school. Generosity, trust, forgiveness and friendship figure highly on their list. Most know that these values are shared human values but have specific meaning for their friends of different faiths. They understand forgiveness for Christians as a two-way process that now plays a part in the management of behaviour alongside the Methodist 'orbs' that reward good practice. Pupils confidently explain how Christian values make a difference: 'Miss Ring has very high standards so everyone is thinking a bit sooner about Christian values when they make choices about what is best to do.' As a result, a good culture for learning is in place and standards are rising. Disadvantaged pupils across the school are doing better and their rising self-esteem means attendance is improving more quickly than for other pupils.

Productive links with schools of different Christian denominations in Richmond and Arkengarth are helping pupils appreciate the breadth of Christianity. They have gained a valuable and lasting sense of its multi-cultural nature from the visit of a school choir from Uganda, arranged by the Methodist Church.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

A regular pattern of daily worship is well established in the school. This has long been the case but in the last eighteen months has received a fresh look and is now more distinctively Christian without losing any of its inclusive nature. Consequently, pupils of the Christian, Jewish and Hindu faiths as well as those who follow no religion feel equally comfortable to be present for worship. Prayer has an increasing role in the school day and plays an important part in pupils' spiritual development. For some, this is central to their personal beliefs but for others it is a new experience. Pupils agree that 'Prayer helps you express your feelings, not everyone believes but prayer time includes everyone.' The school is beginning to explore with pupils different ways in which they can make use of quiet time for reflection. This work is in its early stages but it has captured pupils' interest and they talk with great maturity about what they have found helpful. It has clearly enriched their ability to reflect on the implications of Christian values and provides them with a vocabulary to express their emotions and spiritual ideas. This emerges very clearly from the prayers they write and which are frequently used in worship. The recent focus for developing worship has been on pupils' personal responses but the opportunities for them to contribute to the routine delivery of daily worship extend little beyond singing together and answering questions. Singing, however, is strong and the leader for music is building a good repertoire of worship songs that are greatly enjoyed by pupils and adults. Leaders are already aware that there is an appetite for pupils to take an active role in planning, delivering and evaluating worship. Pupils are eager to make a start because they have a broad knowledge of Bible stories that they are confident will be useful. They have a good understanding of why Jesus is so important to Christians and are aware that God is understood as both Father and Son. They are less confident to talk about God as Holy Spirit because although their knowledge of the life of Jesus is good, they are less familiar with the stories of the Ascension and Pentecost.

Pupils have a rich experience of Christian traditions even though not everyone is sure about how worship varies for different denominations. The whole school visited a local abbey with their school house last summer and this left a lasting impression that pupils and adults still talk about. Within school, local Christian churches provide a number of clergy and visitors to lead worship and this means biblical teaching is a strong and a regular part of worship. This is an example of where issues from the previous inspection have been addressed. Christian festivals are celebrated with the Methodist church and these occasions are increasingly being given an imaginative interpretation. The Christmas service on the theme of angels ended with all children receiving a knitted angel made by members of the church. Pupils, therefore, have a strong sense of being part of the family of this church.

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

The arrival of the headteacher and deputy in January 2016 proved to be a pivotal point in the school's development. Their uncompromising determination to drive improvements in teaching and learning has raised standards of achievement for all groups of pupils. The focus of their attention has extended beyond academic progress to the nurture of pupils' wellbeing and personal development. This has revitalised not only the Christian character but the Methodist principles that are the root of the school's foundation. The ability to develop this ethos was a factor in the recruitment of the new senior leaders and is kept under close scrutiny by knowledgeable Methodist foundation governors. This has led directly to a productive working relationship between senior leaders and the Methodist Church. Initially, it produced far greater clarity in what the school stands for as a Methodist school 'for all'. This has since shaped important decisions at governor level and is a regular agenda item for governor business together with a time for prayer and reflection. In spite of being set out clearly on the website, this distinctive vision has not filtered through to the community. Parents have complete confidence in leaders and perceive the school to be a highly inclusive school where 'all' are welcomed and where pupils who may have struggled elsewhere now flourish.

The Methodist minister plays a key role in this process and continues to be very active in monitoring and in the much appreciated care of staff. The process is underway to appoint a Methodist school and family worker for September and this underlines the very strong commitment of the Methodist church to its school.

Since taking up their posts, the headteacher and deputy have worked relentlessly to tackle issues on all fronts and the last year has seen the school adopt a large number of new initiatives. Whilst these are all making an impact, the process of monitoring and evaluation has not been refined enough to provide a manageable tool for strategic planning. This is because the intended outcomes of actions taken do not provide a clear focus for monitoring activities and the valuable amount of time senior leaders and governors allocate to ensuring the best provision for pupils is not always maximised.

The value of the rapidly expanding partnership with schools and churches in Richmond is improving current leadership as well as enriching what pupils experience. On a practical level, it provides venues where the school can hold services and concerts as a whole school. Unfortunately, refurbishments to the building mean that fire regulations limit the capacity of the school hall and whole school worship is only possible when special arrangements are made for fire wardens to be present. Although the school meets statutory requirements by meeting as classes or key stages, it means pupils only occasionally experience worshipping together as a whole school community. The RE leader is part of the senior team which gives the subject a strong profile and has enabled her skilfully to improve the impact of RE on pupils. As a result of her leadership, there is a cohesive curriculum emerging that includes aspects of personal and spiritual development. Increasingly, this enables pupils to make connections between issues of faith and their everyday lives. This is seen in a wide range of community events such as this summer's 'Getting Together' day in memory of MP Jo Cox, the bell project at St Mary's church, and support of the food bank run by the Influence church.

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