



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

### St Francis of Assisi Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Lowfields Avenue  
Ingleby Barwick  
Stockton-on-Tees  
TS17 5GA

**Previous SIAMS grade:** Outstanding

**Current inspection grade:** Outstanding

**Diocese:** York

Local authority: Stockton-on-Tees  
Dates of inspection: 22 April 2016  
Date of last inspection: 7 July 2011  
School's unique reference number: 132810  
Headteacher: Paul Bramley  
Inspector's name and number: Jane Kent  
National Society QA: Lyn Field 151

#### School context

St Francis of Assisi school opened fourteen years ago serving a very large housing estate. The school has grown significantly and now has over 300 children on role with a nursery of 39 places. Children are mainly from a White British background with approximately 13% of other ethnic groups. The proportion of children eligible to receive free school meals and those with a statement of educational or health need are significantly below the national average. The executive headteacher, who opened the school and retires in July, holds other roles with the Department for Education and the National College of Teaching and Leadership.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Francis of Assisi as a Church of England school are outstanding

- Children and adults share a deep sense of friendship and love for each other brought about by the distinctly Christian characteristics of the school's vision and values. They have a strong desire to share this care with other schools and communities locally and globally.
- Children are keenly aware of the importance of Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit for Christians and the place of prayer in creating a special relationship with God.
- The shared leadership and personal development of all staff brings substantial benefit to the school's overall strengths and sustains its distinctive Christian vision and values.
- Leaders are continuously ambitious in raising standards as a Church school setting themselves targets more challenging than those usually tackled by schools (see area to improve below).

#### Areas to improve

- Enhance current resources by identifying stages of spirituality maturity to support journeys of personal faith. Follow this with a range of appropriate activities for both adults and children.

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

An atmosphere of peace, joy and worship is apparent throughout St Francis of Assisi school. Its distinctive Christian values are explicit, deeply embedded and understood by all. Opportunities for reflection and spirituality run as a thread through all areas of learning. The school's distinctive Christian character has a significant impact on children, staff and families. Children attribute their high standards of behaviour to their Christian values making strong links between their attitudes to others with what they have learnt from the Bible. Peer mentoring and reconciliation are key approaches in creating highly positive relationships. The children attribute the school's Christian character to the success of these approaches. Older children refer to 'the great commandments' saying 'Jesus says "love your neighbour as yourself" so we don't really have any bullying here'. As a result, behaviour is always exemplary and standards and progress of learning are consistently above national expectation. Religious education (RE) makes a significant impact on children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development, they are fully aware that the Christian faith is one of diversity and a multi-cultural world faith. Children from different ethnic and religious backgrounds respond confidently to the school's encouragement to share their family traditions and religious festivals. Those of different faith or no-faith are equally respected and valued. Children are clear how the school's values and their learning through RE helps them understand how to treat other people whatever their differences or disagreements. Close partnership with the local church enable the school to share its vision and distinctive Christian values into wider communities both locally and globally. Children volunteer their services at the church nursery group and lunch club for the elderly. They take their charity and voluntary work seriously saying 'we try and help people as much as we can, it brings everyone together'. Children have been recognised for their commitments through the Diana Award. The school's Christian character including its rich, vibrant curriculum ensures attendance is always high. There has been no persistent absence or exclusions in the school's history. This school is highly valued by its families.

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

All members of the school place significant value on collective worship. Themes and reflections are continued beyond collective worship with numerous opportunities for everyone to explore their own spirituality. Parents describe how children share their reflections and experiences at home, for example, using ideas from the spiritual garden at school in their own gardens, singing worship songs at home and encouraging the family to share grace before a meal. Children have a deep understanding of the teachings of Jesus and are able to explain and apply them in their everyday lives. They talk with an impressive degree of understanding about God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and identify how the three wick candle used for worship helps them focus on the three persons of God. Placed at the start of each day collective worship instils a sense of peace appreciated by all. Year 2 and 3 children describe collective worship as 'a mode of peace'. They talk with joy about how they sing and pray about 'how amazing God is and how he looks after us all the time and how much he loves us'. Children deepen their understanding of the things they have experienced in worship as they reflect on messages and teachings. They are inspired to apply them to personal behaviour and attitudes throughout the day. Collective worship includes a wide range of activities, a variety of settings and engages different visitors and leaders. It maintains a distinctive structure including prayerful reflection, stories and teachings from the Bible and clear Anglican rituals and traditions. Children and adults willingly engage in prayer and spiritual reflection including joining in communal prayers and blessings by heart. There is a highly developed interpretation of spirituality across the school community. Leaders are keen to expand on the detail of this by identifying stages of spiritual maturity to support journeys of personal faith. Children of all ages are actively involved in the planning and leadership of collective worship. They use their free time to prepare resources and materials. Staff give careful consideration to children's suggestions to improve and reshape acts of worship. Children say they believe their evaluations are valued and listened to. Collective worship

makes a significant contribution to the distinctive Christian character of the school.

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

RE is highly regarded across the school and is considered as an exciting and engaging subject by the children and staff. There is consistent recognition from everyone that it plays an essential part in sustaining the school's distinctive Christian character. It enriches and influences the provision and planning of most other curriculum areas. Leadership includes excellent levels of subject knowledge and ambitious aspirations for all children. As a result, the majority of teaching is outstanding and never less than good and the quality of work is of the highest standards. Action plans are rigorously devised and hold a place of importance within whole school improvement. Monitoring and evaluation are robust and includes careful tracking of children's standards and progress. Rich curriculum resources provided by the diocese have contributed to the successful development and improvement of RE. Children's attitudes and responses in lessons demonstrate deep and profound thinking. Parents also express their regard for RE saying 'children come home asking questions, telling us new things, they are inquisitive about religion'. Children's enthusiasm and engagement are nurtured from the earliest stages of learning starting in the nursery; the rich curriculum excites children in all year groups, they learn exceptionally well. Children make direct links between learning activities and real life situations. For example, a Year 2 child understood his contribution to cleaning the classroom ready for a Shabbat celebration as valuable saying 'well, if you think carefully about what you are doing now you can do it really well for the celebration at home'. Year 6 children are impressive in how they use creativity and original thinking to pose questions and state opinions. For example, in analysing religious art a group of children decided the dark colour 'might represent the sin that all the world has committed and Jesus is saving us from it'. Teachers respond appropriately to children's questions and curiosities. They are not afraid to tackle sensitive and difficult concepts, for example bereavement, terrorism, or the refugee crisis, and do so with great sensitivity and skill.

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

The vision, ethos and aspirations of the school are deeply rooted in distinctive Christian values. Leaders are explicit in how the school's values support every child and adult to flourish as a child of God. The executive headteacher, with the head of school, senior leaders and governors place staff professional and spiritual development as one of the school's highest priorities. All staff feel highly valued. They agree that the status of the school as a Church school 'is the most important facet of their professional lives'. Leaders enable all staff to contribute to school development, share skills and expertise generously and take on leadership responsibilities. This has created a strong team spirit and shared commitment to the effectiveness of the school. As a result everyone expresses great confidence in the school vision and consistently uphold its Christian values. Self-evaluation and strategic planning is insightful and highly effective. Everyone understands the systems and processes required and all members of the school's community are given opportunities to contribute to self-evaluation and school improvement. As a result, the unified team commitment has a direct impact on high standards of achievement for all children and a strong sense of wellbeing and happiness for everyone. The school is well prepared to sustain its Christian character and high standards beyond the executive headteacher's retirement in August. The staff team view the school's work in supporting other schools, including those in South Africa, as being part of their Christian mission. The local church is a key partner and valued by everyone as such. It continues to play a significant role in supporting and shaping school development. Parents say that the school has been highly successful in sustaining its Christian character during its steady growth. They recognise the contribution of the local church in playing a significant role in doing that and are clear that the close relationship has resulted in substantial mutual benefits for the whole community.