

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Gabriel's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Wilworth Crescent,
Blackburn.
BB1 8QN

Diocese: Blackburn

Local authority: Blackburn

Dates of inspection: 9th October, 2007

Date of last inspection: 10th-17th September, 2003

School's unique reference number: 119501

Headteacher: Mrs Belinda Haigh

Inspector's name and number: Mrs Carol Berry; NS324

School context

St Gabriel's is a primary school situated on the edge of the town of Blackburn. 14% of pupils are from ethnic minorities, predominantly from Muslim families. The number of pupils with special needs is 5%, which is lower than the national average. The turnover of staff has been very low and this has provided a stable background for all concerned with the school.

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

Christian commitment and respect for individuals are values at the heart of this happy caring community. Exciting worship and the quality of relationships result in a school which enables pupils to reach their potential academically and personally.

Established strengths

- Caring Christian family ethos.
- Teachers and support staff who demonstrate Christianity as a living faith.
- Commitment to offering pupils a faith to live by alongside respect for pupils who have different beliefs.
- Vibrant worship enriched by the school's strong musical tradition.

Focus for development

- To raise standards in RE through improving expertise in assessment.
- To involve pupils in evaluating collective worship.
- To include pupils, staff, governors and parents in self-evaluation of the school as a Church school.

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

Excellent relationships founded on the Christian values of love and respect for each individual result in a happy caring community where pupils are able to develop their full potential. As a result, achievement is good and personal development is outstanding. Many parents praise the concern demonstrated by the school for their children, linking this to the school's strong Christian ethos. They say that older children care well for younger ones and that children love going to school. One parent commended the way in which the school had supported her child following bereavement and several parents spoke warmly of the provision for pupils with special needs. The school environment provides thought-provoking reminders that this is a Christian school. All classrooms display something about Christianity, including celebrations of God's creation and a display based on Psalm 21 entitled 'Where do you find God?' Children feel valued and know that their achievements are appreciated. This is demonstrated by the relationships between staff and pupils, by the worship which celebrates pupils' achievements and by displays. The entrance hall includes a collage of tiles celebrating individual members of the community alongside words of Jesus and the school's aim to feed minds and hearts. The school is committed to offering pupils a faith to live by, both through explicit teaching about the Christian faith and through the way in which it is exemplified in the lives of individual staff members. Staff are willing to share personal experiences with pupils, including some of the challenges they face as Christians. Pupils are encouraged to ask searching questions. As a result, pupils have a mature understanding of what it means to live a life of faith and parents say they often discuss Christian issues at home. The school is committed both to offering faith and to showing respect for different views. This means that pupils have a positive attitude to investigating Christianity and they learn to value people even when they don't agree with them. Differences are acknowledged and discussed, with pupils of all faiths feeling confident about speaking of their own beliefs.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Vibrant worship is enhanced by the school's excellent musicians. Choirs and the large orchestra regularly participate in worship, supporting the pupils' enthusiastic singing. Pupils' views and needs are considered by the adults who lead worship with the result that they greatly enjoy worship. For example, a list of pupils' favourite hymns is compiled each year. Pupils talk informally to teachers about worship and their ideas are used to improve worship. The worship environment provides pupils with many visual images to direct their thoughts. There is a beautiful frieze celebrating the use of hands for worship, a 'wow wall' made by pupils and a worship table with a children's painting of St Gabriel and a candle. On one occasion, pupils were captivated by recalling the smells and tastes experienced by the whole school when a class baked bread. Beliefs about Jesus as the bread of Life were clearly communicated through memories of this exciting experience. The close relationship with the local church enriches worship. Pupils visit the church for special services such as Christmas, Easter and the patronal festival. The clergy or other members of the congregation take worship every week as well as on special occasions. Pupils gain understanding of the Eucharist through the communion services held each year. The clergy have developed very good skills in communicating to children and pupils were able to recall and explain the meaning of some of their illustrations, for example, the use of Lego men to illustrate the power of the cross. Worship sometimes takes place within individual key stages or in classrooms, allowing the needs of pupils of different ages to be met. There are very good opportunities for pupils to develop as leaders through worship. Sometimes individual pupils take class worship, giving a talk about a Bible passage and leading the class in prayer. Developing prayer is a strength of the school and pupils often write prayers for use in worship. There is a prayer tree in one classroom and in other classes pupils are encouraged to share thoughts in prayer at the end of the day. Open prayer is also a feature of the 'Little Fishes' club, where pupils explore Christianity through fun activities. Excellent support is provided for staff leading worship through the co-ordinator and a very helpful worship file. The high quality of planning for worship and recording of worship by the headteacher ensure that the presentation of Christian themes is firmly embedded in everyday experiences, enriched by a wide range of hymns and Bible stories. However, there are no formal procedures in place to monitor or evaluate worship.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

RE has a significant impact on pupils' attitudes. RE provides opportunities for pupils to talk about their own faith. It promotes respect and understanding for Christianity and other faiths. Imaginative implementation of the Blackburn Diocesan syllabus means that pupils gain a good understanding of Christian teaching as well as learning about Islam and Judaism. In one lesson, understanding of the Bible was communicated through the illustration of a gift being unwrapped and the presentation to each pupil of a spoon. Pupils enjoy the varied activities used in RE and the opportunity to share their views. Activities in RE include group work; creative work; exploring religious artefacts; talking to Christian and Muslim visitors; visiting Christian and Muslim places of worship. Pupils often use artwork to express their beliefs and feelings. RE benefits from a good allocation of curriculum time with the result that pupils have time to explore ideas through exciting activities. The school has invested in 'Godly Play' resources which are being incorporated into the scheme of work. The training provided for each class teacher in the use of these resources is enhancing pupils' spiritual education. The expectation that pupils will listen to each other is established early, for example, the Reception class gained an excellent understanding of the concept of belonging through a 'circle time' discussion. These ideas were developed further through play activities and creative tasks. Written work in RE is often used to develop pupils' literacy skills. The RE levels achieved in written work are satisfactory overall, however the tasks set for older pupils do not enable them to achieve level 5. There are currently no formal procedures in place to assess the standard of pupils' work. As a result the school does not know which levels their pupils are achieving. There have been no training opportunities to enable the whole staff to gain expertise in the use of levelled assessment in RE.

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

There is excellent leadership from the headteacher. Her vision and inspiration, combined with the contribution of the experienced and committed staff team have resulted in the positive experience of the Christian faith offered by St Gabriel's. The Christian vision is clearly communicated through documentation such as the prospectus and school policies. Planning to develop the school's Christian character is included in the School Development Plan. Christian relationships are an important part of the school's vision. The staff are very supportive of each other and one teacher gave a moving account of the love shown to her by other staff at a difficult time. Effective links with the local church have benefited both the Church and families, for example, through an 'Alpha' course and a 'Family Time' course which took place in school. The church and school would like to develop further opportunities to talk with parents. The governors are very supportive of the school but are not actively involved in monitoring or evaluating the school as a Church school. Parents have provided feedback on the school's Christian character when responding to general questionnaires but there are no self-evaluation procedures in place to ensure that pupils and parents regularly provide feedback on Christian issues.

October 2007 St Gabriel's Church of England Primary School, Wilworth Crescent, Blackburn.
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