



Inspection under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Featherstone Purston St. Thomas Church of England VC Junior School
George Street
Featherstone
Pontefract
WF7 5BG
Diocese: Wakefield
LEA: Wakefield
Dates of inspection: July 10th 2006.
Date of last inspection: 13th -15th November 2000
URN: 108249
Headteacher: Mrs. D. Randall (Acting)
SIAS Inspector: NS 170 Mrs. L. Alvy

School context

St. Thomas is a larger than average junior school situated in Featherstone, one of the Five Town Districts in Wakefield. The area has a higher than average level of unemployment. The pupils come mainly from two infant schools in the immediate area. Few pupils are from minority ethnic groups and there are average numbers of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The school is currently led by an Acting Headteacher due to the long-term absence of the substantive Headteacher.

Summary Judgement

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St. Thomas as a Church of England school is good overall. Despite the recent challenges due to staff disruption and illness the school has maintained a strong Christian ethos, its commitment to inclusion and the provision of high quality pastoral care and support for its pupils.

Established strengths

- The school's commitment and dedication to develop the 'whole child' within the nurture and care of a church school.
- The school's effective partnership with parents and carers in fostering excellent behaviour resulting in confident, caring and mature learners.
- Positive and active links with the local church and the community that extend opportunities for children to play a fuller part in the life of the school and provide an added dimension to their learning and growing.

Focus for development

- Introduce strategies to evaluate the impact of Collective Worship, involving staff, governors and the views of learners.
- Raise the profile and awareness of the distinctive nature of the school further through its regular inclusion in the school improvement plan.
- Develop the role of the governors in the formal monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of the school as a church school.

How well does the school, through its distinctive Christian Character, meet the needs of all learners?

The school, through its distinctive Christian character is good at meeting the needs of all learners. St. Thomas is fully committed to the development of the whole child and learners are eager to tell visitors how much they like their school. They know the teachers help them to 'learn how to be better people, that they learn all the time but don't really know it because it is so enjoyable'. Collaboration and co-operation based on mutual trust and respect for each other are clearly at the heart of the school's Christian ethos. Parents and carers say that 'good values and an all round approach' are key factors in their children's education. High quality opportunities for pupils' personal development and well-being are strengths and applauded by parents as part of the Christian nature of the school. As a result their children blossom into confident individuals with a healthy respect for themselves and others. Learners are encouraged by the staff to make a positive contribution to the community through involvement in local schemes and through many fund raising activities. The school council are proud of their part in helping to make their school a happy and safe place through 'buddy systems', 'issues box' and fund raising to develop the school environment for instance. This is a 'listening school' where in the words of a learner 'teachers are nice, we have different approaches to learning and a lot of sports and games' so we are fit and healthy'. Behaviour as a result is excellent and effective systems such as learning mentors provide good support for more vulnerable learners. Within a culture of strong Christian care and pastoral support the school is now back on track to strengthen academic guidance alongside the other exciting opportunities in art, drama, music and sport for instance that support learners spiritual, moral social and cultural development so well.

What is the impact of collective worship on the school?

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good. Collective Worship is effectively planned and carefully considered to promote spiritual growth and emotional development and well-being. It is central to the life of the school and is effectively supported by the partnership between church and school. Collaborative discussion between staff and the local clergy has led to more child-centred and meaningful worship. Children share in lighting church candles to denote the end of school notices and the start of Collective Worship. There is a clear distinction between the atmosphere created by this simple act and children are ready to listen and take part reverently. Behaviour is exemplary and thought provoking questions using their personal experiences challenge and deepens their understanding of the gospel message. Parents are impressed by 'the thoughtful way religious views are expressed' acknowledging the careful consideration given to those learners of other faiths and none. There is always a high level of participation from children and parents in the church services planned by the school. Through accurate self-evaluation the school is aware of the need to monitor the impact of worship on the learners. Christian values and principles are explored and reinforced through other areas of the curriculum such as Religious Education and Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education. Pastoral care is clearly linked to church teaching and reinforced by the strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural curriculum taught by the school.

How effective are the leadership and management of the school as a Church School?

The leadership and management of the school as a church school are satisfactory. The last inspection praised St. Thomas for its strong sense of identity as a church school and this principle remains steadfast and at the heart of its administration. Throughout this period of disruption staff and governors have held the school together with a belief and determination to uphold the Christian principles of care, guidance and support for all its learners. Parents strongly appreciate what the school does for their children and numbers have increased in the last few years. Analyses of parent's questionnaires that include questions about spiritual and moral development for example, show their confidence that the school supports their children well. A productive partnership exists between the church and the school. In particular the support of the local clergy in questioning and developing the spiritual ethos and distinctive nature of the school and practically in the provision of an after school church club run by Foundation Governors for example. Recently formal action plans for both Collective Worship and Religious Education have been implemented and acted upon. Whilst governors including Foundation Governors are practically involved in supporting the school they have yet to develop sufficient involvement in evaluating the impact of these initiatives and in the strategic planning and monitoring of its work as a church school.