



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

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

### The Thomas Coram (Voluntary Aided) Church of England School

Swing Gate Lane  
Berkhamsted  
Hertfordshire

HP4 2RP

**Previous SIAMS grade:** Good

**Diocese:** St Albans

Local authority: Hertfordshire

Dates of inspection: 7 November 2014

Date of last inspection: September 2009

School's unique reference number: 117559

Headteacher: Rob Halls

Inspector's name and number: Jo Fageant 104

#### School context

The Thomas Coram Church of England School reopened on 1 September 2013, when it was re-designated as a 7-11 junior school from a 9-13 middle school as part of the reorganisation of schools in Berkhamsted. There are currently 256 children on roll with two classes in Years 3, 4 and 5 and 4 classes in Year 6. Fewer than the national average have special educational needs or qualify for additional funding through Pupil Premium funding arrangements. The majority of parents describe themselves as being Christian (61%). The headteacher has been in place since September 2013 having previously been deputy headteacher.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Thomas Coram as a Church of England school are outstanding

- Leaders have established, and sustained, a deeply embedded and widely acknowledged Christian ethos that means the school's values have a clear impact on behaviour, attitudes to learning and pupils' enjoyment of school.
- A Christian belief in the value of each person results in a careful interrogation of data and the development of effective strategies to support the achievement of all pupils.
- Collective worship, shaped by Anglican tradition and valued by all, is memorable, inspirational and influences behaviour in and beyond school.

#### Areas to improve

- As part of the planned strategy in support of religious education (RE), ensure units of work build on one another so that the curriculum overall is a coherent learning journey from Year 3 to Year 6.
- Teachers should ensure that reflective work, which they refer to as *learning from religion*, is as demanding as the challenge pupils enjoy in developing their understanding of religions and religious concepts.

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

The Thomas Coram CE School has rapidly established and embedded an influential Christian ethos in a school comprising predominantly new pupils. Investing in their involvement in selecting core values has resulted in pupils understanding the significance of *respect, responsibility* and *friendship* for their own learning and personal development. The values have been imbued with Christian significance through collective worship and RE where they are linked with Biblical stories and teachings that exemplify them. As a consequence, pupils talk easily and unprompted of how they have learned about friendship from the examples of Ruth and Naomi, David and Jonathan. All three values and their impact are frequently and naturally referenced in conversations with people from all parts of the school community. In a wide variety of ways, they richly promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. An illustration of this is how pupils worked with understanding, imagination, sensitivity and cooperation to design and help create a beautiful outside prayer space of which they are very proud and appreciative. Excellent relationships and behaviour result from a thorough understanding of the values. Positive attitudes to learning, and teaching, arise from the way everyone understands personal responsibility. For leaders and teachers this means pupils' generally high levels of attainment and progress are carefully and accurately analysed so that strategies are implemented to ensure they all make good or better progress. An excellent example of this is the recent introduction of a programme to improve writing when it became clear this was an area in which pupils were under-achieving. For pupils it results in an enthusiasm to accept roles of responsibility such as sports and reflective leaders, maths and reading buddies, peer mentors and school councillors. They are proud of the skills they develop and the contribution they make to the school. Parents report that they notice the skills and values being applied outside of school. Pupils develop a strong social awareness which drives significant fund-raising initiatives. Although the school community does not include much ethnic or religious variety pupils develop an understanding of and respect for diversity, particularly through their enthusiasm for learning about variety in religion in RE. Pupils develop a strong sense of self worth and confidence as well as appreciation of others through initiatives like 'star of the week' and in Year 6 the new 'hands of kindness' display. Attendance is good because pupils enjoy school and parents are enthusiastic about the learning and Christian pastoral care it provides.

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

The school has a long history of high quality collective worship. Evaluative records show that this has been sustained through the period of transition with everyone recognising its positive impact on each school day. Worship is carefully planned to include a focus on the Church year and the Bible as well as a selection of Christian values. As a consequence, there is widespread understanding of the seasons of the Church year and its festivals. Christian symbols are also well understood because the school has invested in a selection of artefacts that provide an inspiring visual stimulus for worship. A variety of leaders, including teachers and clergy, provide a diversity which is enjoyed. The material used, together with traditional prayers and blessings, helps pupils develop an increasing understanding of the importance of the person of Jesus and the Christian concept of God as three in one. Although explicitly Christian in nature, everyone feels included because leaders ensure messages and values are relevant for all. Time for prayer and reflection is valued in all worship contexts. Pupils have a good grasp of different types of prayer and everyone contributes to a collection of prayers for their own class which is then used in worship. There are plenty of opportunities for pupils to contribute to planning, leading and evaluating worship in different contexts. Those who are reflective leaders take on additional responsibilities which include summarising the evaluative comments of others. Their reports are very mature and contribute to the ongoing development of worship. For example, they suggested that pupils need more time to prepare for class worship to make sure 'that there is always a clear message and the use of questions helps pupils to reflect.' They sum up the impact of worship: 'All worship, and particularly the use of multi-media clips, helps to inspire us to try harder in life and think about our core values of respect, responsibility and friendship.' In addition to the outstanding daily worship, pupils and staff also have the opportunity to participate in a weekly Eucharist held in the small chapel which has been created within the school. Although the numbers attending are few, for those who do, it enriches their experience of worship and strengthens the relationship between school and church.

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

This is because, given the context of the school, all the good systems and practices have not yet had the full

impact intended of them. For example, new RE planning, based on a number of sources, has been devised. This provides teachers with a great deal of detail to support their lessons. However, its use is still experimental because it has not yet been used in its entirety to discover if each stage builds on the ones before in a coherent learning journey. There is some evidence to suggest that the challenge of reflective work is not equal to that of pupils' engagement with new religious knowledge and concepts. Assessment of pupils' progress was the issue identified in the last inspection as needing attention. The school addressed this well. At the time RE was largely taught by specialist teachers. In the new junior school context teaching is undertaken by class teachers many of whom are relatively new to the RE challenge. There are varying degrees of subject expertise and of experience using the assessment criteria. This means there are inconsistencies across the school. In addition, the subject leader is unable to judge how well pupils are making progress because they have all been in school for little more than one year. Against this background of change it is easy to see that there is capacity for rapid improvement. Most of the key issues for development are being addressed. The school is fortunate to have been able to appoint a RE specialist to lead in this area. Senior staff have provided support to develop her skills in the monitoring of lessons. She has audited staff training needs and colleagues are very appreciative of the well-targeted support she provides in response. A process of moderating teachers' assessments is newly in place to develop a consistency across the school. Pupils are enthusiastic about RE and enjoy learning about different religions. They have developed a good understanding of Biblical stories and teachings that illustrate the school's core values. Focus RE days build on and deepen their interest. In these ways RE makes a very strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

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

In preparation for and during the transition from a middle to a junior context, leaders skilfully reviewed how a distinctively Christian ethos had and would continue to define the school. Christian motivation and vision were key elements in the management of what was, for many, a period of considerable concern. Parents speak of their appreciation for the way in which the headteacher and his senior colleagues dealt with anxieties and resistance to change. As a result of their willingness to listen, compromise where appropriate and explain clearly, the school gained the trust and loyalty of new and returning families. A shared sense of ethos has been established as a result of all members of the new school community being involved in selecting the core values, acceptable to everyone, which now so successfully underpin all aspects of school life. Leaders understand these from a distinctively Christian perspective. This interpretation is not made explicit in the revised statement of vision, values and aims available on the school's website. However, it is the widespread common understanding amongst parents and staff. This perspective is explored very effectively in the high priority areas of collective worship and RE. The values found across the curriculum and in the wider life of the school make a very strong contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. For leaders, *respect*, *responsibility* and *friendship* are a way of expressing in simple terms their commitment to the unique value of every individual. This belief ensures there are rigorous strategies for self-evaluation leading to accurate analysis and prompting appropriate responses in support of pupils' learning and staff professional development. The school's Christian foundation is made clear throughout all aspects of the staff appointment process. Training is provided to ensure all members of staff and governors understand the expectations associated with working in this Christian school. The impact of this consistency is that staff feel welcomed and value the caring and supportive atmosphere in which they work where colleagues thank one another and acknowledge each others' successes. The core values spill over into relationships with parents many of whom are keen to support the school actively through the Friends of Thomas Coram. They are extremely appreciative of the ways in which the school communicates with them and of the accessibility of senior leaders. There are also strong and mutually beneficial relationships with the church and the wider local community. A very positive innovation has been the introduction of a weekly Eucharist. Although at present only pupils and staff participate, this is registered as a parish service offering the possibility of wider attendance. Pupils from the school contribute to some church services and clergy support school worship every week and RE occasionally. All the evidence available verifies that not only do Christian vision and values inform policy and practice but, in a less formal way, they are explicitly and recognisably lived out by the leaders of this school.