

**St James' Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School**

Lyme Street,  
Haydock,  
St Helens',  
WA11 0NL

**Diocese: Liverpool**

Local authority: St Helens  
 Dates of inspection: 28<sup>th</sup> February 2012  
 Date of last inspection: 21<sup>st</sup> January 2010  
 School's unique reference number: 104820  
 Headteacher: Mrs Linda Speed  
 Inspector's name and number: Mrs Diane Shaw – 709

**School context**

St James has 165 children on roll. Nearly all are white British with the majority living in the Haydock ward, one of the most deprived in the country. The proportion of children with both FSM and special educational needs is significantly above average. The school has a number of awards including Arts mark and Healthy Schools.

**The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St James' as a Church of England school are good.**

St James has a distinctive Christian ethos. Christian values and attitudes form the foundation of school life and there is a determination to further develop the school's Christian witness with forethought and sensitivity. Caring relationships within school demonstrate Christian values very well. Links with the parish church and the local community are remarkably close and mutually beneficial.

**Established strengths**

- The strong leadership from head teacher, governors and senior staff who ensure that the Christian vision extends to all people including visitors
- The Christian values that are explicit and underpins all aspects of school life
- The school's inclusive, caring, family ethos

**Focus for development**

- To ensure Governors are more widely involved in the monitoring and evaluating of the school's Christian distinctiveness
- To offer more opportunities for children to be involved in the planning and delivery of collective worship

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

There is a strong commitment to the development of the whole child within the context and environment of an extremely supportive school community. The school's inclusive and friendly ethos ensures that all children make good progress both academically and in their personal development. They feel valued and special. Their behaviour is excellent. Children take responsibility for one another very seriously. They enjoy coming to school and one child described it as a 'place where the staff care about the children' and another said, 'we're all friends'. Parents recognise the good contribution made by the school to each child's personal development. They feel that it is a church school which, as one of them put it, 'gets the best out of each child.' The secure and accepting ethos means that children feel confident in sharing their ideas and opinions. There are effective reward systems with houses based on four Christian values, love, hope, faith and peace. Parents are delighted to be able to join their children for celebrations of various aspects of their learning especially at Christmas and Easter. Creativity throughout the curriculum is central to the ethos of the school and significantly encourages, nourishes and challenges the spiritual, social, moral and cultural development of the children. They are very proud of their work being displayed all around the school and are eager to share their learning. There are times for quiet reflection during the school day and the school is developing reflective areas in and around the school grounds. Christian signs and symbols are evident in the school, celebrating the school's Church foundation and also a number of attractive displays showing what the children have been learning in RE.

**The impact of collective worship on the school community is good.**

Collective worship occupies a place of central importance in the life of the school, in particular in developing children's spirituality. Children learn about Bible stories, religious traditions and Christian values through a planned programme. The daily act of worship provides the basis for the Christian values that are so strongly promoted in the life of the school. Children understand the importance of these values in their lives. A Y6 boy said 'they teach us to respect God and all the people in the world'. Children clearly enjoy worship and join in all elements enthusiastically. A Y5 girl said that daily worship 'gives us time to thank God for all the good things in our lives'. Children are invited to participate in worship for instance by acting out Bible stories and volunteering to help the leader. Children are given opportunities to discuss how they feel about worship and one child said that they see it as 'a time when we all get together and think about God'. They recognise the importance and value of prayer as an important way to communicate with God and each class has its own reflection and prayer area. Children are encouraged to write their own prayers and these are read out regularly. Major Christian celebrations, such as Christmas and Easter, are celebrated in church. Parents appreciate the opportunity to join their children on these special occasions. Year 6 Leavers attend the Leavers' Services in Liverpool Cathedral each year. These occasions provide valuable opportunities for children to increase their experience of the Anglican Church and those who belong to it.

**The effectiveness of the religious education is good.**

Standards in RE are of a similar standard to those in other core subjects. There is a broad and effective curriculum with Christianity as the main focus. An emphasis is placed on knowledge and also understanding, to help children to develop tolerance and empathy for those of other faiths. Children enjoy RE and appreciate the balance of learning about Christianity and other faiths. The subject leader plans, delivers and assesses all the RE lessons. Her good subject knowledge and imaginative way of presenting lessons, enables work to be challenging and interesting. Children are encouraged to be open-minded and to voice their opinions. This was evident in a lesson focussing on the meaning of sacrifice when older children were discussing the similarities between Jesus and Aslan from the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. Within their talking partners Y6 children were able to recognise that they were 'both betrayed but went willingly to the sacrifice'. The Y1 children in the school were learning about signs of Spring and new life and enjoyed a 'Spring Walk'. The teacher helped them to discuss and sort objects into living and dead which was followed up with a variety of activities to reinforce the learning. As a result of good planning in RE, children's learning is good. This is evident as they answer questions about their learning and also from looking at the interesting work in their books. The marking system in place helps children to think about the quality of their work and how it may be improved. The subject leader is both effective and enthusiastic.

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

The headteacher and governors share a distinctive vision for the school as one with a Church of England foundation. The commitment to live according to Christian values strongly underpins the school ethos. The high quality of leadership by the headteacher and governors, well supported by the staff, contributes significantly to the success of this Church of England school. They ensure that Christian values remain at the heart of the school. The headteacher and governors are clear about the strengths of the school and the areas that need development. The school is keen to offer good quality training for both staff new to the school and the more experienced members of staff to ensure future church school leaders are encouraged and developed. Most of the issues suggested in the previous inspection have been addressed. Adults are good role models and have high expectations of children's behaviour. There are strong mutually supportive links with both the church and the local community. For example, children provide gifts for the shoe box appeal as well as supporting various charities such as the Children's Society. The church presents each child with a certificate and candle when they start in reception as well as marking the move to secondary school with a personalised certificate for each Y6 leaver. The vicar is a regular visitor to the school to lead whole school worship and the class Eucharist services held weekly. There are very good opportunities for children to have a strong voice through the School Council. They appreciate the fact that their ideas are not only listened to but also acted upon. The school's mission statement says that 'through God's love, we enjoy, we learn, we achieve' and this is confirmed by the loving, joyful and positive attitude towards their learning of all the children in this overtly Christian school.