



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

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

### St. John's CE Primary School

Peel Grove  
Bethnal Green  
E2 9LR

**Previous SIAMS grade: Good**

**Current inspection grade: Good**

**Diocese: London**

Local authority: Tower Hamlets

Dates of inspection: 28 June 2016

Date of last inspection: 12 July 2011

School's unique reference number: 100953

Executive Headteacher: Terry Bennett

Inspector's name and number: Jan Matthews 855

#### School context

St. John's is a one-form entry, inner-city Church of England primary school with 208 children on roll. Located in an area of significant deprivation the proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding, is well above average. The number of pupils from ethnic minority groups is double the national average as are pupils who speak English as an additional language. Numbers of pupils with special educational needs are almost double national levels. In 2012 Ofsted placed the school in special measures. An Interim Executive Board recruited leadership support from an experienced Headteacher in a nearby Church school to become the Interim Executive Headteacher. In 2014, both schools were federated under a single governing body. St John's was taken out of Special Measures following an Ofsted inspection in November 2014.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St. John's as a Church of England school are good

- School leaders' have a passion for serving the local community and they support families to overcome disadvantage and deprivation
- The school's Christian values of koinonia, forgiveness and friendship are clearly evident in the positive relationships throughout the school
- High quality teaching of RE and its application to social justice and community cohesion prepares children well for life in modern Britain
- Pupils are highly aware of their spirituality and speak openly about matters of faith and the inner peace that this can bring

#### Areas to improve

- Make the scriptural foundations of the school's values and vision explicit to all members of the school community
- Formalise the systems used by governors for monitoring the impact of collective worship, Religious Education and the way in which the school communicates its Christian distinctiveness
- Extend opportunities for prayer and reflection throughout the school day

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

From Religious Education (RE) to collective worship; from the playground to the classroom, tolerance and respect ooze through all aspects of school life. Parents speak of St. John's as being a loving and supportive environment in which children of all faiths and of none are welcomed and nurtured. The focus on positive relationships, forgiveness and fresh starts means that children feel valued and safe to learn. They enjoy their time at school and attendance is very good. Pupil Premium funding is used very effectively to ensure equality of opportunity and gaps in attainment are closing. With attainment similar to, or slightly above national, the same is true of children with English as an additional language (EAL) and those with special needs or disabilities. The school's Christian values give the community a sense of cohesion and common purpose. Through providing opportunities for service, community involvement and social justice, the school provides pupils with very good opportunities to develop spiritually, morally, socially and culturally. RE lessons provide a safe environment in which to explore similarities and differences between people. The depth of understanding this brings adds even more to the sense of cohesion. Acceptance of diversity is a real strength of the school. Although firmly rooted in the teachings of Jesus, the Christian foundation of these values is not explicit or understood by the wider school community. Pastoral care is a strong point of the school. On speaking of the way in which care is extended to families, one parent commented, '...they are lovely people, always willing to help if you just stretch out your hand.'

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

Collective Worship is central to daily life at St. John's. Children appreciate the quiet atmosphere and the time to, 'really think about tricky things before the day starts'. Pupils speak enthusiastically about the lessons they learn. Parents report that their children often speak about assembly themes at home. Worship is thoughtfully and systematically planned and securely rooted in biblical teaching. Over the course of a year, equal prominence is given to old testament teaching, new testament teaching and Christian values. Because of this, children have an excellent knowledge of the Bible and are quick to make links between stories and everyday life. Much care is taken to provide a distinctively Anglican environment in which to worship whilst, at the same time, enabling participants feel safe to respond in their own way. Children enter the hall quietly and reverently, a candle is lit to signify God's presence and the children sing with enthusiasm. Occasionally, Biblical values, for example, peace or compassion, are illustrated using similarities and analogies from a range of faiths. Children clearly understand that many faiths share similar values. Children of all faiths are rightly proud of the excellent understanding that they have of faiths other than their own. Children as young as Year 2, see this as enabling them to be peacemakers and community leaders in the future. Children and adults benefit from time for communal and private prayer times in assembly and throughout the day but this not fully established in all classes. Children in Year 5 use a prayer box very effectively to record thoughts and worries or to write prayers for the class to read. The nature of God as Father, Son and Spirit have been explored in assembly times and older children demonstrate an understanding of the Trinitarian nature of Christianity. The fact that the executive headteacher is the worship leader demonstrates its high priority in the life of the school. Recently, children have been involved in evaluating worship times and their suggestions have been taken into account when planning the next round. School governors are involved in monitoring collective worship but have not yet established a formal system of evaluation and recording. It is a strength of the school that pupils are highly aware of their spirituality and the spirituality of others. Their time at St. John's gives them the confidence and the language to speak openly about matters of faith.

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

As a result of strong leadership, standards in RE at St. John's are very high. Children speak enthusiastically about RE lessons. They like the fact that their opinions are important; they can think 'deeply' and that there are many opportunities to respond creatively rather than always writing. This said, the standard of writing in RE books is high, often higher than in other subjects. Children's work is systematically marked using the school's green and pink pen system. Much of the marking encourages children to think deeper about the subjects covered. This is particularly effective in upper Key Stage 2 which results in exceptionally good progress. The enquiry based *Discovery* scheme of work was adopted two years ago. It has since been supplemented by *Festival Matters* which adds more Christian content to the curriculum. There is a significant emphasis on understanding how faith shapes both individuals and communities. Children speak confidently about matters of faith and are comfortable with the concept of themselves as spiritual beings. They are exceptionally aware of how better understanding of each other is needed in order to promote respect and tolerance between communities in Bethnal Green. Through strategic use of learning through festivals, pupils understand the Trinitarian nature of Christianity but need more exposure to the vocabulary needed to talk about this. Due to ongoing support from the subject leader, the standard of teaching in RE is at least good with much of it outstanding. From Reception, where children excitedly work out the lessons learned from Jonah's experience with a large fish, to Year 6, where children quietly debate amongst themselves about how the Pillars of Islam contribute to the quality of a Muslim's life, children are skilfully questioned and encouraged to think for themselves. Where there are weaknesses, these are being tackled through support, training and the timetabling of experienced staff.

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

The heart, care and protectiveness the school leaders have for the children in their care is a real strength. Driven by Christian values and a passion to give children the best possible start in life, many highly effective strategies and policies have been put in place. For example, a commitment of time and resources to pastoral care results in good attendance, good behaviour and few exclusions; a comprehensive programme of cultural activities and links with a university widens horizons and raises aspirations. Children, their families and the wider community benefit from a range of partnerships such as lessons for adults with EAL and working with homeless families. Although not explicitly Christian in nature, they follow Jesus' example of serving society's most vulnerable and disadvantaged. As a result, parents of all faiths support the school's Christian ethos. Productive links to St. John's church, the deanery and other local churches also enhance the children's experience of the established Anglican church. Since being subject to Special Measures in 2011, the new school leaders have worked relentlessly to rebuild the school and regain the trust of the community. Every aspect of the school's work has been evaluated and effective strategies have been put into place. As a result, change and improvement have been rapid. Standards in core subjects are rising steadily. The school fulfils statutory requirements for RE and collective worship and both areas command high priority for timetable space and resources. Both are well led by senior members of staff. Due to the difficult journey that the school has been on, staff turnover has been very high. This has been used as an opportunity to train more leaders and provide for the future of the school. The federation with St. Paul's, Whitechapel, the shared governing body and the shared clergy has resulted in highly effective and targeted support being directed to where it has been needed. As St. John's has grown stronger, the relationship between the two schools has become more mutually beneficial. Leadership of this school as a church school is not outstanding because, although the ethos and vision of the school is firmly rooted in Christianity, this is not always clear to the wider school community. The governing body's systems for monitoring and evaluating RE, collective worship or the distinctively Christian ethos of the school has not been formalised.