

## Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

### Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School

Grammar School Road Warrington WA4 1JL

**Current SIAMS inspection grade**

**Good**

**Diocese**

**Liverpool and Chester**

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Local authority

Warrington

Name of multi-academy trust

n/a

Date/s of inspection

15 & 16 February 2017

Date of last inspection

7 & 8 October 2010

Type of school and unique reference number

Voluntary Aided 133672

Headteacher

Beverley Scott-Herron

Inspector's name and number

Barbara Easton 862

#### School context

Sir Thomas Boteler is a smaller than average, co-educational, 11-16 comprehensive school, with designated provision for cognition and learning. The proportion of vulnerable learners and those with special educational needs is higher than average; the number with English as an additional language is smaller. The school serves an area of significant social deprivation. The school was judged inadequate by Ofsted in September 2014, when the head was newly appointed, and is now under an academy order. Since that point there have been very significant changes in staffing at all levels and about 50% staff are new to the school.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Sir Thomas Boteler as a Church of England school are good

- The school's mission statement, 'Through God, we care' brings a powerful sense of accountability to the work of the school. This has prompted a journey of rapid improvement so that the school is now considered to be amongst the most improved in the country. Through this, lives are transformed.
- The renewed commitment to the vision has brought much higher standards of attainment. It supports an environment in the school which is values driven and is positive, courteous and purposeful.
- The school is distinguished by the quality of its Christian care and compassion. This has a significant impact in the lives of children and the wider school community. It models an attitude to others which is 'caught' by youngsters so that they are characterised by their concern for others and for contemporary issues.
- The resilience of the faith of school leaders has sustained the school through a challenging period. Their Christian vision and the commitment of staff have enabled them to bring necessary, radical change while maintaining a positivity and loyalty amongst the school community.

#### Areas to improve

- Continue the improvement in whole school performance in the service of the vision of lives and communities transformed by education, a vision which goes back to Sir Thomas Boteler himself.
- Ensure that worship and religious education remain a focus for leading practice, well supported and prominent in the life of the improving school.
- Ensure that new staff are as confident in delivering worship as they are in delivering the vision of the school.

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

Sir Thomas Boteler articulates a deeply Christian vision which defines its work of transforming the lives of children and young people. The school has a longstanding, justifiable reputation for pastoral care, living out its historic mission statement, 'Our School Cares'. Under new leadership the school re-framed its motto as 'Through God, we care'. This has made clear to everyone in its community that the school's mission is grounded in its sense of accountability towards God. This renewed vision has driven rapid school improvement. In 2014, when the new head took up post, the headline figure for GCSE success was 31%. Over just 2 years, that has risen to 59% which is only a fraction below national averages. In-school monitoring data, and the embedding of improvements at Key Stage 3, confirm that this is an upward trend which is set to continue. In some areas, such as maths, significant groups of children are now achieving above national expectations. However disadvantaged pupils, although well cared for, are not yet achieving in line with their peers. The prominence given to the school's vision and values resonates through its buildings and life. Since the school re-focused on its distinctive mission, other indicators have also improved. Relationships are warm, encouraging and forgiving. One visitor, familiar with the school, commented 'there does seem to be a peace and happiness here'. This is a school where all people seem to feel valued. Children conduct themselves with courtesy and dignity and show immense loyalty to the school. People at all levels speak of a sense of belonging more to a family than an organisation. The school's behaviour acronym, RESPECT, grounds 'rights' and 'responsibilities' in the 'ethos' of the school and students themselves strongly articulate the connection between values and the way people should treat each other. They have designed an anti-bullying poster proclaiming 'love heals wounds'. The school's monitoring shows that incidences of bullying and intolerance are very low, having significantly reduced over the last two years. One youngster said 'I have never seen any bullying'. The school is working very hard to improve attendance and this represents a changing, transformational view of the purpose of education in the perspective of some of the most disaffected families. Throughout a period of significant re-focusing, the school has lost none of its traditional focus on care for others. Every group spoken to treasured the compassion with which the school supports its members and the ways in which children are encouraged to embody the ethos beyond the school gates. Because of this, the values of the school are having a wider impact in the community. Sir Thomas Boteler is particularly distinguished by its charity work and this gives youngsters a wider perspective on issues of citizenship and justice. In addressing some of the issues of the past, religious education has been brought more to the fore and has a clear impact on children's values and attitudes. It strongly supports their understanding of diversity. Because of the depth of work in religious education and the pervasive, grounded ethos of the school, spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is strong.

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

Worship at Sir Thomas Boteler secures the school's motto, 'Through God, we care' in the hearts of children and staff. School life shows the marked impact of this: children are noted within and beyond the school community for their courtesy and consideration of others. Core Christian values such as peace and endurance form a consistent thread throughout the worship programme. Because of this, learners are able to speak thoughtfully about the application of the values in their lives, becoming confident and compassionate future citizens. As a result of the constant reflection on what it means to care 'through God', worship stimulates extensive charitable social actions for the local and world community. Youngsters, often from significantly disadvantaged backgrounds themselves, take pride in their capacity to serve and give to others. During whole school worship children are attentive and well behaved, warmly supportive of their peers who are taking part. In form worship they are willing to engage more actively and respond respectfully to the opportunity for prayer. Forms lead year group assemblies on a rota system and on these occasions, which tend to be less theological, there is a good level of involvement in the planning and delivery. Worship is rooted in the Christian tradition with frequent reference to biblical material and the celebration of the weekly Eucharist, the 'Sharing of the Supper'. It grounds children's understanding of the school's values in an approach to God as Father, Son and Spirit. There is a good range of resources available through the Way to Worship programme, but not all staff currently have the confidence to handle them with assurance and creativity. The major services of the liturgical year, held in different local churches, have a particular impact and are widely appreciated within and beyond the school. Members of the school spoke particularly of the powerful Remembrance worship and of the service for Inauguration, which marks the passage from primary to secondary school: 'it sends shivers down my spine'. Worship, and reflection on the Christian root and meaning of the values, is an integral part of the school's work with primary schools. This means that those youngsters who transfer to Sir Thomas Boteler are already inducted into the school's way. The school has made a virtue of necessity in compensating for the lack of consistent chaplaincy by strengthening links with a greater range of local religious community leaders, giving children greater familiarity with the diversity of the Christian tradition. Students speak respectfully of the outdoor reflection garden and the indoor reflective space shows the development of a more imaginative and engaging approach to spirituality. Evaluation of worship is honest and ambitious, and draws

strongly on the views of staff and youngsters, leading to dynamic and ambitious future planning.

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

Standards of attainment in Religious Studies (RS) at GCSE are significantly above national expectations and have been for a number of years. As GCSE results across the school have risen, the department has continued to lead amongst its peers, with in-school residuals showing almost half the cohort achieving approximately one grade higher in RS than in their other subjects. The evidence of progress is promising and there are strong indications from robust internal monitoring that the current Year 11 will achieve at least as well as in previous years. There is headroom to be gained amongst disadvantaged learners, although performance here is slightly better than in the school as a whole. Students' attitudes to learning in religious education are positive. They enjoy the subject and say it challenges them and makes them think. They are inquisitive about religious issues, engage thoughtfully and, on the whole, learn well. The issues covered challenge their understanding of Christianity and other faiths, so that they are gaining a breadth of perspective and becoming reflective and evaluative in their views. They talk with interest about how their learning has changed their thinking about contemporary moral issues and the youth worker particularly commented on Boteler youngsters' noticeable desire to engage and 'willingness to get to grips with questions of belief'. The new head of department has introduced the diocesan syllabus at Key Stage 3 and the school is a pilot for 'Understanding Christianity', with the result that youngsters are experiencing a more coherent curriculum diet, giving better opportunities for building knowledge through enquiry and for reflection on what it means to be religious in the modern world. The best teaching is confident and challenging, with an infectious enthusiasm. Non-specialists are well supported so that the purpose and intentions of quality RE are well understood across the team. Subject leadership is dynamic, creative and energetic. Although new in role, the head of department is working well to consolidate all aspects of departmental leadership and management through more effective monitoring, evaluation, planning and delivery. She has a good vision for how she can extend the existing programme of visits and engagement beyond the school; the RE rooms are testimony to the lively and creative approaches which have already been embraced.

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

The valiant Christian leadership of the headteacher is cherished across the whole school community. Parents, children and staff acclaim her servant leadership, styled on an internalisation of the model of Jesus in John's gospel, the good shepherd who gives everything for the sheep. In this she is ably supported by the commitment of her Deputy, the leadership team and the strengthened governing body. Together they have bravely recalibrated the school's understanding of its purpose and mission to embrace the challenge of significant change. Throughout, they have not been deflected from the school's values but rather drawn strength from the vision on which the school was first founded, of transforming lives through the power of education. This has enabled the school to make dramatic and visible improvements which are appreciated within the school community and beyond. Because of this, the school is one of the most improved in the country such that children, who often join the school with above average disadvantage and vulnerability, are achieving within half a percent of national averages. Leaders are unafraid in their self-evaluation. They know the school exceptionally well and this has enabled them to make honest judgements and take sometimes painful actions to move the school forward. However, they have managed to do this in a principled way which maintains and models the Christian ideals of the school rather than undermining them. Staff have embraced this renewal and speak readily about the school's moral purpose, understanding their mission of one of transformation. Despite the changes, the school has lost none of its prowess in pupil care. Families speak passionately about the ways in which staff 'go the extra mile' and give moving examples of the impact of this in the lives of young people. Learners who have struggled in other schools often find that the persistence of Boteler's care enables them to make a success of their fresh start. The work which is done around Year 6/7 transition is particularly highly regarded. The school has rightly identified the contribution that worship and religious education can make in underpinning their renewed direction of travel. Each of these is now given a prominent role, meeting statutory requirements and making an increasingly effective contribution to the strength of the school's ethos. The school gives high priority to initiatives which support the wellbeing both of pupils and staff. Staff value the confidence shown in them and many have flourished in challenging roles. Several have completed leadership training and the head and deputy benefit from a post graduate qualification in Christian School Leadership. The link with the local church for worship is strong and adds a real impact to the key services of the school year. Because of staffing turnover, it has been difficult for the parish to sustain consistent chaplaincy in the school. However, the recent appointment of a chaplain is already showing the capacity for strong and creative work. The Dioceses have been actively involved in the school's journey of improvement and are represented on the active governors' interim executive committee. Due to the perceived strength of the school's distinctive character it has been identified as lead school on ethos in the proposed academy trust.