



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

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

### **Gunnerside Methodist Primary School**

Gunnerside  
Richmond  
DL11 6LE

**Previous SIAMS grade: Good**

**Current inspection grade: Outstanding**

**Circuit: North Yorkshire Dales**

**District: Darlington**

Local authority: North Yorkshire

Date of inspection: 3 March 2016

Date of last inspection: October 2010

School's unique reference number: 121542

Headteacher: Gordon Stainsby

Inspector's name and number: Lyn Field NS151

### **School context**

Gunnerside Methodist School is part of the Reeth and Gunnerside Federation led by one headteacher. Its 12 pupils come from villages and farmsteads across Swaledale and are taught together with those of Reeth on two school sites. Small numbers means that the nature of pupils' needs varies from year to year. Most Reception and Key Stage 1 pupils work at Reeth and Key Stage 2 pupils at Gunnerside. One day a week they all work together. The Methodist circuit superintendent acts as chaplain and a local Methodist minister is a member of the joint governing body.

### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Gunnerside as a Methodist school are outstanding**

- The school is highly successful in engaging with all families in this widely spread community. This reflects its Christian vision as a Methodist school.
- The headteacher has had a transformational impact on the school's effectiveness and in cementing Gunnerside's Christian character within the federation.
- The Methodist chaplain has a significant impact on the spiritual life of the school through her leadership of worship and creative arts activities.
- The consistency and creativity with which the staff team delivers collective worship and religious education (RE) results in pupils' outstanding spiritual and moral development.

### **Areas to improve**

- Increase pupils' understanding of Methodism by incorporating this into the scheme of work for RE.
- Governors should ensure that the Methodist character of the school is clearly articulated in order to sustain this in the future.

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

The Christian ethos of the school ensures that the needs of children and families come first. Flexible arrangements for teaching make optimum use of the space and staff available in order to overcome any barriers to pupils' learning. Excellent relationships mirror that of a family especially in how lunch is served so pupils experience a seamless transition between home and school. This emphasis on learning as a community strongly reflects the Methodist view of education. Since his arrival 18 months ago, the headteacher has made necessary changes to improve behaviour for learning and to accelerate progress. The impact has been rapid because all members of staff work together as a highly effective team. They constantly evaluate practice and take immense pride in their work. Pupils' attainment on entry varies considerably but, because extra support is tailored precisely to their needs, they all make good progress and flourish both academically and in their personal development. Their success builds their self-esteem, so attendance is very high.

Christian values are deeply embedded in the school because they are regularly explored in RE and collective worship. Good liaison with the onsite nursery means that the values are promoted right from the start. Consequently, pupils can link them to their own behaviour, relationships and attitudes to others. The youngest children talk knowledgeably about the current focus on self-control because they can link it to the story of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness. Older pupils develop this theme in more depth by using The Good Samaritan to explain that 'you must not be influenced by how someone looks or where they come from; it is the inside that matters'. Consequently, any form of bullying is rare.

Pupils have a strong sense of belonging to a Methodist community but this comes mainly from their experience of worship and special activities led by the Methodist minister. Their knowledge of John Wesley, for example, is less secure because learning about Methodism is not included in schemes of work. In spite of this, RE makes a significant contribution to the Gunnerside's Christian character. Spirituality days, the *Spirited Arts* initiative and 'chapel days' are thoroughly enjoyed by pupils. They remember the visit to the Methodist art exhibition in Leyburn and the work that followed. Godly Play techniques are used with all classes. This extends their skills of reflection and helps them to make use of reflection areas independently of adults. Spiritual and moral development, therefore, flows naturally from the school's Methodist ethos even though it is not always recognised as such. It is constantly seen in the emphasis placed on self-discipline and skills of enquiry. Leaders recognise that developing an understanding of other religions and cultures poses more of a challenge. However, visits out of school have successfully given pupils opportunities to engage with people living and working in very different contexts. Talking to those who work in a York mosque and in York Minster, as well as interviewing tourists outside, has left a lasting impression on pupils.

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

Worship provides an important rhythm to each week and to the year through the celebration of Christian festivals. Pupils appreciate the changing seasons and the hills, dales, flocks and rivers that surround them so they have an inherent understanding of the imagery in so many biblical passages. They draw on this to talk about key Christian beliefs and how they understand God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The chaplain works with pupils in both schools but regular worship in chapel for Gunnerside pupils enables them to retain their sense of a special identity as a Methodist school. She is an excellent role model for staff in the way she leads worship and uses language to help pupils understand spiritual concepts. As a result, they are confident to interpret these ideas in the context of Bible stories and apply them to situations in everyday life. Members of staff find the chaplain's approach extremely helpful. It acts as professional development that raises standards in the quality of the planning and delivery of worship and of spiritual focus days. In particular, the regular pattern of spoken responses and lighting the candle holds a special meaning for pupils and the youngest pupils talk of 'changing the light' and the smoke as 'God going with them into the rest of their day'.

The staff have taken maximum advantage of the school being a small school to develop an impressive consistency and coherence to the themes for worship. Each day, the stage that has been reached in developing a theme is shared with the leader for the following day. This means that points can be revisited to consolidate understanding or taken to a new level of challenge to retain the interest of older pupils. Consequently, worship constantly engages the interest of adults and pupils alike so the impact is exceptionally high over time. Everyone is confident and eager to lead and contribute so there is an ongoing dialogue. Pupils volunteer to lead prayer and, because they have been so attentive and are confident in using spiritual language, the content of these prayers is relevant and meaningful to everyone. Music in worship is of a quality rarely seen in such a small school. Singing is joyful and conveys a strong sense of belonging because it is taken very seriously. For example, the school is soon to take part in a Fishy Music day that is planned as a joint activity with other schools and anticipated with great excitement. Worship is constantly evolving as a result of regular discussion and feedback between the chaplain, staff and pupils. It stimulates a genuine interest in spiritual matters and has an integral role in the whole curriculum.

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

The headteacher has had a transformational impact on the federation of Reeth and Gunnerside schools and, consequently, the communities they serve. His passion for schools in rural communities, and the vision to be a church school for all, means that he finds ways to engage with all families across the catchment area. Relationships are characterised by greater openness and trust. Flexible and creative ways of organising teaching groups meet the needs of all pupils and governors constantly check that what pupils experience is distinctively but not exclusively Christian. The headteacher's strategic vision has done much to protect Gunnerside's future as part of the federation. Numbers are rising and, with plans in place to expand Early Years provision for the area at Reeth, it has a continuing role in tailoring Christian education to the needs of the community.

Although the distinctively Christian vision for Gunnerside has a low profile in school documentation, the reality in school is very different. Gunnerside school is built on Methodist ground so, in every sense of the word, it is rooted in Methodism. Parents and older generations value the regular use of the chapel for fortnightly worship as well as special times in the year. The circuit superintendent has taken the role of chaplain to the school and has established herself as a familiar and popular figure. This development has had a significant impact on the partnership between the school, the church and the wider community. The chaplain's input into the curriculum for collective worship and RE has strengthened the Christian character of Gunnerside as well as enriching the way that both schools meet their respective statutory requirements for these areas.

The school's self-evaluation of its Christian distinctiveness is cautious and underplays its impact. This is partly due to a lack of clarity among governors about its distinctively Methodist character. However, this is completely outweighed by the significant impact of the close links with Gunnerside church and the work of the chaplain. Aspects of leadership are now delegated effectively. The knowledgeable subject leader for RE and collective worship has developed the skills set of the whole staff so that spiritual and moral development is a strength of the school and enriches the federation. Pupils have a strong sense of being Gunnerside pupils and talk proudly of its distinctive character.

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