

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Saint Aidan's Church of England High School

Cartgate, Preesall, Poulton-le-Fylde FY6 0NP

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Blackburn
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Local authority	Lancashire
Name of multi-academy trust / federation [delete as appropriate]	N/A
Date/s of inspection	1 & 2 March 2017
Date of last inspection	December 2011
Type of school and unique reference number	Secondary VA 119789
Headteacher	Andrew Smith
Inspector's name and number	Lyn Field 151

School context

Saint Aidan's is a smaller than average-sized secondary school with 784 students on roll from 11 to 16 years. The oversubscription criteria for admissions places residence in local parishes ahead of family membership of local churches. Around half of students come from the rural area of Over Wyre with the remainder travelling from local towns. The vast majority are White British. The proportions of students for whom the school receives extra pupil premium funding and who have special educational needs are both below average. The school is part of the Ripley School Teaching Alliance.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Saint Aidan's as a Church of England school are good

- The strong, insightful leadership of the headteacher has ensured the Christian character permeates the life of the school. This has the full support of staff and governors.
- Student leadership is of a high calibre because students develop their skills in the context of Christian values and live them out in service to the school and wider community.
- The vertical tutor system is highly valued by the whole community and nurtures students in a family atmosphere.
- Important decisions have been taken to raise the profile of both religious education (RE) and collective worship. Improvements can be seen in both areas but developments are still at too early a stage for the school to be graded outstanding overall.

Areas to improve

- Maintain the pace of development in RE towards outstanding by continuing the effective partnerships with other diocesan schools.
- Develop the confidence and skills of staff and students in delivering acts of worship and making use of evaluations in planning.
- Retain the significant impact that chaplaincy has in the school by developing a model for the future in response to the forthcoming change in funding.

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

The last four years have seen a significant growth in the Christian character of the school. It is now embedded at all levels of leadership and learning, and other indicators have consequently improved. Values are strongly promoted through the daily pattern of worship and the explicitly Christian interpretation they are given has led to a much deeper understanding of respect, trust and friendship. Relationships are, therefore, warm, encouraging and forgiving. Students are offered a variety of avenues to explore their own spirituality across the curriculum. The chaplain has made a vital contribution to this by developing the chapel into a place that is readily accessed by students of all abilities and backgrounds. RE equally contributes through the 'Archbishop of York' award in Year 7 and through the RE leader who seizes every opportunity to work with other departments on joint productions and personal development days. Consequently, students gain a mature understanding of the place of religion in society and are highly articulate in challenging any form of prejudice or social injustice. Students are adamant that racist or homophobic bullying has no place in the school. They explain how Christian values have challenged their personal outlook on moral and cultural issues and helped them understand that the whole process of forgiveness is about 'wiping the slate clean'.

Student leadership is of the highest standard because it is developed progressively through the school and students relate what is expected of their conduct to Christian values. This is successful because there are not only systems in place to expand their skills and experience but also to acknowledge their achievements. The '16 by 16' challenge that includes aspects of Christian service, for example, is clearly a route towards appointments as Proctors (senior student leaders) and Diocesan awards. Students talk of feeling they have a purpose and that learning to debate, analyse, manage, listen and build on others' ideas helps to solve problems. A typical comment was, 'You learn to make decisions not just for your own benefit, but so you can benefit others.' Much of this is achieved through vertical tutor groups which are overwhelmingly popular with staff, students and parents. Staff are exemplary role models for students as are older students for younger students. This is important for their spiritual and social development because they share key moments in life, the joys and difficulties, in exactly the same way as a family. Students understand the motto 'Aspire Believe Succeed' to have a personal meaning for every individual student. Every one of them believes they are a priority for the school and that this emanates from its Christian foundation. Leaders believe that each child is created in the image of God and is of equal worth so tailoring support to each individual is of paramount importance. Students' mental health and emotional wellbeing are taken very seriously. The school invests heavily in pastoral support and the chaplain has a role in this team. As a result, attendance has risen to above average and fixed term exclusions remain well below average. Academically, the current predictions for 2017 indicate that the dip in 2016 results was a temporary halt to an otherwise upward trend. Disadvantaged students are continuing to reduce the difference between their achievement and the results of other students.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

The chaplain has played a key role in establishing the more public face of the Christian ethos through a daily pattern of worship. Leaders are secure in the knowledge that form time worship is now consistently delivered to all groups even though the level of interaction with students varies. This is a major step forward from the last inspection and is the result of monitoring by senior leaders as well as the quality of material now produced by the chaplain. Students say the content challenges them to reflect on their own conduct: 'It equips us to work with people of all faiths and backgrounds.' 'It acts like a camera on life.' As a result, students play an active role in charity work to support communities locally and globally, often linked to Advent and Lent.

The chapel, now sited in a much larger room, hosts a variety of activities. Students from a range of backgrounds readily access these because the chaplain has achieved a careful balance between a place to enter into a rigorous debate about faith and a safe place to seek prayer and support. Engaging with Christianity is now an accepted part of school life with which students feel comfortable because at no stage are their personal beliefs compromised. This includes the termly services of Eucharist where an unusually high number of students (nearly half) choose to receive bread and wine. Combined with their lessons in RE, worship helps students gain a sound understanding of Anglican tradition and key Christian beliefs including God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Year group assemblies offer a different and more formal experience of worship and prayer in larger groups. In spite of their more passive role, students still value this time for its regular focus on the school's Christian values.

The team of worship champions is a new initiative to involve students in improving worship. They have already made an impact through sharing their evaluations with the chaplain and seeing the subsequent changes made to the content of form worship. However, the level of both student and staff leadership of worship is out of step with the way leadership has developed in all other aspects of the school. This is not due to lack of encouragement but, in spite of training and 'masterclasses', there is a surprising lack of confidence to take on this role. In complete contrast, the introduction of 'small services' each half-term for parents, staff students and governors to worship together has proved extremely popular and better reflects the overall positive attitudes to worship.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

There have been significant changes to RE under the current headteacher that reflect the higher profile now given to the school's Christian character. The changes address the issues raised by the previous inspection and they also respond to curriculum and examination changes nationally. For the first time, all students will take full course GCSE in 2017. Teaching time has been increased to manage this and the department now has a second specialist teacher. Managing all these changes concurrently has been daunting but the subject leader is passionate about her vision to place RE at the heart of students' learning. RE is part of the faculty of humanities and this has proved to be critical for managing change. The excellent support and oversight of the head of humanities has resulted in a good level of development. The diocesan adviser has brokered support from an outstanding RE department in another church school and staff make maximum use of this alongside working with schools in the teaching alliance to moderate assessment. These networks have helped to keep developments on track and provide a measure of progress. As a result, students are experiencing a more cohesive curriculum diet. This is not limited to preparing for GCSE as students in Key Stage 3 make use of 'Illuminating Pathways'. Students of all abilities will now take the GCSE examination and current tracking suggests that, whilst results will be slightly lower than other core subjects in this first year, many students will make good progress and a significant proportion achieve the highest levels. The quality of teaching is good because the department benefits from a leader who consistently models exceptionally good practice. Students engage well with lessons and are keen to contribute without prompting. They respectfully challenge each other's opinions because relationships are excellent. Good communication within the faculty leads to professional development for staff 'in house' which means the three non-specialist staff are able to apply their generic skills in the context of RE. The quality of questioning is improving overall but the pace of learning varies because it is not always clear exactly what students are meant to learn from each activity. However, there is a very professional environment in RE classrooms where displays challenge students' thinking and remind them to use precise religious language. Staff have a detailed knowledge of students' skills and potential that is used well to organise lessons and match tasks to their abilities. Use of the electronic resource Edmodo has been introduced to make it easy for students to access material and work independently. It is too early to gauge the impact of this but important to note that the school has made provision for all students to access this facility.

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

Being a church school is not an end in itself for the leaders of Saint Aidan's but the vehicle by which it serves the needs of this rural community and improves the life chances of young people. Four years after the headteacher's arrival, the Christian ethos is embedded. It is described as 'systemic' because it pervades all aspects of the school whilst retaining the commitment of the exceptionally stable team of teachers and support staff. They have embraced the change and speak readily about the school's moral purpose in developing compassionate and well-rounded young people with the confidence and skills to make the transition into more diverse communities. Parents are highly appreciative of the way the school tailors its curriculum and pastoral care to the needs of their children. Its reputation has grown and places for Year 7 students are now oversubscribed. Saint Aidan's is a forward thinking and self-improving school. This is due to the clear direction given by the headteacher and has a greater impact because the strategic vision is shared with the key group of the deputy head, chair and vice-chair of governors. Their common purpose is expressed in the verse from John 10:10 for students to experience 'life in all its fullness'. This informs decisions about the curriculum by not automatically following new trends and remaining focused on the needs of staff and students. The decision that all students should take a full GCSE in RE demonstrates the importance the school places on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The strategy group has an insightful knowledge of the school's work. It anticipates the long-term implications of changes in order to ensure that nothing of the Christian ethos is lost. This currently means exploring an alternative to the existing successful model of chaplaincy when funding changes in 2018. The governors' ethos committee has the same standing and terms of reference as other committees but its work is strengthened by the addition of student members and the advice of the diocesan adviser. Student voice is taken very seriously and governors have a regular presence in the school to monitor the progress of development planning. However, this has sometimes been distracted by the inspection agenda and does not always identify what has been most successful, or where barriers to improvement remain, in order to set manageable priorities for action. Partnerships with the diocese and other church schools have proved beneficial in raising the profile of RE and collective worship so that they go well beyond meeting statutory requirements. The head of RE from Archbishop Temple School has been invaluable in helping managing changes to RE. This support has been doubly effective because the school makes a significant investment in time for middle leaders to implement new initiatives. Maximum use is therefore made of training in aspects of Christian leadership. Leaders have an accurate perception of the stage the school has reached. They are rightly confident about the measures they have taken but recognise that the scale of changes requires more time to make the desired impact and be graded better than good overall.