

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

### Ripley St Thomas Church of England Academy

Ashton Road  
Lancaster  
LA1 4RS

<b>Current SIAMS inspection grade</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
<b>Diocese</b>	<b>Blackburn</b>
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Date of academy conversion	1 May 2011
Name of multi-academy trust	The Bay Learning Trust
Dates of inspection	28-29 June 2017
Date of last inspection	8-9 December 2011
Type of school and unique reference number	11-18 Academy 136731
Principal	Elizabeth Nicholls
Inspector's name and number	The Revd Canon Steven Harvey 891

#### School context

Ripley St Thomas Church of England Academy is a large 11-18 academy with 1730 pupils currently on roll, including 400 in the sixth form. In 2017 the school established the Bay Learning Trust, a multi-academy trust open to both church and community schools. The school is regularly oversubscribed. The academy admits pupils from a wide catchment area and has approximately 60 feeder schools. The ability level of pupils on entry is above average. The percentages of pupils who receive free school meals or have special educational needs are much lower than average. The large majority of pupils are White British.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Ripley St Thomas Church of England Academy as a Church of England school are outstanding

- A distinctively Christian vision and set of values are deeply embedded in the life of the school and have a profound impact on the lives, wellbeing and flourishing of learners and adults.
- The school's leaders are deeply committed to the school as a church school. They articulate, from personal conviction and with confidence, a compelling Christian vision.
- Collective worship has a central place in the life of the school. It is of high quality and has a very significant impact on the lives and aspirations of the whole community.
- A very strong RE department is highly effective in promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

#### Areas to improve

- Further develop opportunities for pupils to plan and lead worship, in order to deepen their understanding of how the school's vision and values are rooted in Christian beliefs and teachings and to build their capacity for spiritual leadership.

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

The school's Christian vision and character are rooted in the belief that every pupil has been created by God and is of infinite worth and value. This belief is expressed in a commitment to nurturing the mental, physical and spiritual potential of all pupils, so that they might know life in all its fullness. The school's rich and broad curriculum, extensive extra-curricular programme and strong pastoral systems are underpinned by a vibrant and enriching spirituality which pervades the school. A range of Youth Alpha courses includes a timetabled course for all Year 9 pupils. Pupils speak appreciatively and confidently of the ways in which the school nurtures their spiritual awareness and development.

The school's Christian character has a very high profile and informs all aspects of its life and work, including policies and improvement planning. Displays and electronic screens around the school include prayers and biblical texts. Recent work by staff on the school's Christian character has resulted in 'Finding God in.....' posters for every curriculum subject. As a result pupils understand and articulate the relevance of faith and spirituality to every aspect of their lives.

The recently adopted and imaginative way of articulating the school's core Christian values has enabled these values to become even more deeply embedded. These values are at the heart of the Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) programme and impact powerfully on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils become articulate, confident, caring, responsible and resilient young people who aspire to make a difference in the world. A significant number of sixth formers have a gap year before university, spent in some form of service.

The school's Christian character has a great influence on behaviour and relationships. Behaviour is excellent, and relationships across the school are characterised by mutual care, encouragement and support. All members of the community, including staff and parents, attribute this to the school's Christian character and values. Parents speak of the school ethos having a profound impact on how pupils see themselves, others, and the world. 'Something is instilled which becomes natural', was a parental comment warmly endorsed by others.

The school's Christian character creates an environment in which pupils are challenged and supported, and contributes strongly to pupils' academic achievement. All groups of learners achieve well. In 2016, the percentage of pupils achieving at least 5 A\*-C grades at GCSE, including mathematics and English, was significantly above the national average. The attainment of disadvantaged pupils was in line with all pupils nationally. At A Level, outcomes were in line with expectations, given the prior attainment of the students.

Pupils understand that Christianity is a multi-cultural world faith. They have a high degree of knowledge and understanding of, and respect for, religious and cultural diversity. Pupils are excited and challenged by RE and recognise the significant contribution it makes to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. RE has a major role in determining the Christian character of the school, through its highly effective teaching of Christianity and its support of the themes explored in collective worship.

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

Collective worship has a central place in the life of the school and powerfully expresses its Christian vision and character. The practice of starting each day with prayer in forms, and ending each day with the saying of the Grace, has the effect of placing the life and work of each day in a spiritual context. A calm, reflective and spiritual atmosphere pervades collective worship, particularly in the school's fine chapel, and this atmosphere is taken into the rest of the day. Pupils value the time for reflection and the way in which worship nurtures their spiritual awareness, their appreciation of the value of prayer, and their knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith. Many make use of the school's beautiful outdoor chapel.

Collective worship engages all pupils and is frequently inspirational. It is distinctively Christian by being rooted in the biblical narrative and in Christian beliefs and teachings. It has a strong focus on the person of Jesus and on the Christian understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Celebration of Christian festivals gives pupils a good knowledge and understanding of the Christian calendar. Themes reflect the school's Christian values. They inspire spiritual and moral reflection and are highly effective in raising aspirations. Collective worship is also inclusive in its affirming of the spiritual dimension of every human life. Pupils of other faiths, and of no faith, are valued and encouraged in their spiritual journeying.

Leaders desire that collective worship should effect change in attitudes, relationships and behaviour. Such an impact is clearly discernible. Pupils readily articulate the influence of collective worship on their lives, both on the way they see their own value and purpose and on their concern for others. Very considerable sums are raised each year for a wide range of local, national and international charities which the pupils choose to support.

A focus for improvement in the last inspection report was to build the capacity of staff and pupils for spiritual leadership. Very good progress has been made, not least through the range of student-led Youth Alpha courses and the impressive Emerging Christian Leaders Programme for senior students. While pupils, particularly senior students, have opportunities to plan and lead worship, several younger pupils said that they would welcome more opportunities.

The ministry of the Chaplain is highly effective and widely valued. Collective worship is also led by a wide range of people –

staff, pupils, local clergy from different denominations, and other visitors. Pupils experience a rich variety of styles of worship, not least in the end of term communion services which reflect the worshipping traditions of the Anglican churches in which they are held. Recent extended visits from the Chaplain of the academy's link school in South Africa gave pupils a global perspective and enhanced their understanding of 'unity within difference'.

Monitoring and evaluation of collective worship involve a range of stakeholders, including pupils and staff. Feedback affirms the relevance and value of collective worship, and suggestions for improvement are acted on.

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

RE has a very high profile in the school. All pupils study RE at GCSE and it is a very popular choice at A Level. Pupils make excellent progress and standards of attainment are high. GCSE results are consistently above the national average. Pupils enjoy and value RE. A Year 7 pupil said that 'RE is fun and is taught to a purpose'. Pupils learn very well. In one lesson there was impressive evidence of collaborative learning. Pupils are eager to contribute and they enjoy the challenge of developing high level thinking skills. They recognise the value of RE in enriching their personal development and they apply their knowledge and understanding to their personal reflection about questions of human existence and purpose. A Year 9 pupil said that 'RE helps you to relate teachings to your own life'. Regular lesson observations, work scrutiny and learning walks show that RE teaching is frequently outstanding and never less than consistently good. A wide range of teaching and learning activities is used, with the result that the needs of all learners are met. Assessment, by teachers and pupils, is highly effective in promoting learning.

The rich and varied RE curriculum makes a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils acquire a thorough knowledge and understanding of Christianity as a living contemporary faith. The curriculum at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 includes the study of a range of other world faiths. Pupils value the opportunity to learn about other faith traditions and recognise how their learning helps them to understand and respect diversity and prepares them for citizenship in a pluralistic world. At Key Stage 5 the provision of non-examined RE makes a valuable contribution to the development of students' life skills and their reflection about values.

Teaching in all year groups is linked strongly to the school's Christian values. For example, in RE in Year 7 all pupils work for the Archbishop of York's Young Leaders' Award. Service is a key part of this award and contributes significantly to the nurturing of the servant leadership which is at the heart of the school's Christian vision and character. Pupils' written reflections about the service element of the award reveal an impressive understanding of biblical teaching and its contemporary relevance.

Subject leadership is outstanding. Monitoring and evaluation are rigorous and result in action plans which impact strongly on standards of teaching and learning.

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

The academy is led by a senior leadership team and governing body whose members are deeply committed to, and ambitious for, the academy as a church school. The dynamic and inspirational leadership of the Principal has a profound impact on the school's distinctively Christian character. Leaders articulate and promote, from personal conviction and with enthusiasm and confidence, a compelling vision which is rooted in Christian beliefs and teachings. They understand and articulate the impact of this vision on the well-being and flourishing of the whole school community, and particularly on pupils' personal development, on their behaviour, relationships and attitudes, and on their standards of achievement.

A robust framework for self-evaluation involves all groups in the school community and addresses all aspects of provision. This evaluation enables leaders to have a thorough understanding of the school's performance and results in well-focused improvement planning. Effective use is also made of external consultancy to evaluate provision and the impact of measures taken to secure improvement. Governors are well informed about the work and performance of the school and offer both challenge and support to senior leaders.

The continuing professional development (CPD) of staff has a high priority. The CPD programme is greatly appreciated by staff and has a very significant impact on standards of teaching and learning. There is a strong commitment to preparing staff for future leadership of church schools. The Faith Leadership Programme, run by the academy's Teaching School, not only supports participants' leadership aspirations but also develops and enriches their current work and benefits the school's current leadership.

There are well-established and mutually beneficial partnerships with local churches and with the diocese. Links with schools in, for example, South Africa and Australia, are also strong. These enrich pupils' understanding of the nature and diversity of local, national and global communities and contribute significantly to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Parents and carers speak very positively of the relationship they have with the school, and of the school's readiness to listen and respond to any parental concerns.

Leaders have ensured that the areas for development identified in the last inspection report, in 2011, have been addressed effectively. They also ensure that arrangements for RE and collective worship meet statutory requirements.