

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

The Ilfracombe Church of England Academy

Worth Road, Ilfracombe EX34 9JB

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Exeter
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	N/A
Date of academy conversion	1 May 2013
Name of multi-academy trust	St Christopher's multi-academy trust
Date/s of inspection	2-3 February 2017
Date of last inspection	N/A
Type of school and unique reference number	Secondary academy sponsor-led 139553
Headteacher	Sharon Marshall
Inspector's name and number	Lyn Field 151

School context

The academy is an average-sized secondary school with 970 on roll including 170 in the sixth form. Although it opened as an academy sponsored by the Diocese of Exeter in 2013, it was not legally designated a church school until January 2015 and this is its first SIAMS inspection with that status. The headteacher has been in post since 2010. Almost all students are of White British heritage with around half coming from the local town and the remainder travelling from rural areas. The proportion of students for whom the school receives extra government funding, known as pupil premium, is above the national average. The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs is broadly average. A completely new building is under construction on site.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of The Ilfracombe Academy as a Church of England school are good

- A strong sense of hope pervades this rapidly improving school. It has a transformative impact on students that is clearly shaped by its Christian vision.
- The skilful leadership of the headteacher in managing change has made the transition to a church academy in a relatively short space of time. This has been achieved with the full commitment of senior leaders and has gained the support of all staff.
- Key directors and governors provide excellent oversight in establishing the academy's Christian character.
- Students grow into well-rounded and self-motivated young people who draw on Christian values to recognise qualities and ambitions in themselves and who believe they can make a difference in society.
- Local churches across a range of denominations are increasingly contributing to the school's development and this is benefiting all the communities involved.

Areas to improve

Sustain the current momentum of development as a church academy in moving to the new building by:

- developing a structure for local clergy in the academy to embed the growing links with local churches and create a model for chaplaincy tailored to this community
- ensuring succession planning is effective in maintaining specific responsibility for Christian distinctiveness alongside the headteacher at the centre of senior leadership
- pursuing further partnerships in the community particularly for the benefit of vulnerable students
- make development planning for aspects of the school's Christian character more precise in the links between actions to be taken and outcomes for students.

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

After just two years as a church school, a core set of Christian values is now fully embedded at every level of school life. Students and staff recognise the profound effect of these values on relationships and the specific ways in which they have improved behaviour. The language of Christian values is widely used and acts as a template for resolving tensions or arriving at difficult decisions. Each subject department has adopted a value and agreed the rationale for how this value will shape teaching and learning in the classroom as well as the content of lessons. The focus on integrity in maths and on trust in drama, for example, adds a powerful dimension to the whole culture for learning because values are seen through the lens of Christianity and constantly kept at the forefront of students' minds. As a direct result of this, students' progress is rapidly improving from being lower than schools nationally at GCSE. Results at A level have been stronger at slightly above average. Exclusions have dramatically reduced and attendance has drawn level with the national average. Any form of bullying is now at a very low level, including any signs of racist or homophobic prejudice. In spite of this positive picture, there is no hint of complacency and whatever their role in the school, members of staff leave no stone unturned in order to tailor support to individual needs. Decisions are informed not just by performance data but by detailed knowledge of students' ambitions, mental health issues and family backgrounds. Rigorous monitoring by senior leaders shows that disadvantaged students, a group of particular concern last year, are clearly doing better. The difference between their achievement and that of other students is reducing and the most vulnerable students are coping well enough to remain within the school system.

Leaders are building the Christian character of the academy in careful stages and have wisely chosen to embed the Christian values as a first priority. Although the values have a very positive bearing on the quality of discussion around spiritual, moral, social and cultural topics, the school has yet to define its understanding of spirituality in a Christian context.

The creation of a department for religious education with personal and careers education (PCRE) has been an innovative and successful move. An ambitious and demanding curriculum has been devised by the subject leader and is delivered by a team that includes five specialist RE teachers. For the first time all students follow the GCSE full course. Students fully support this decision because they say the deeper discussion of values in the context of religious belief has challenged some traditionally held views and aspects of stereotyping. They feel well prepared to live as part of diverse communities in the future because the subject 'opens doorways in the mind'. Many develop leadership skills through the impressive range of opportunities on offer. These include organising sports events for feeder primary schools, ethical business projects and sustaining the school's support for a school in Swaziland.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

A regular pattern of Christian worship is now in place and provides a good platform for worship in the new building. This is significant because there is currently no space large enough to hold all students and so there is no tradition of worshipping together as a whole community. However, the Christmas service for the whole school held at a local holiday venue proved to be a moving occasion and revealed a readiness of staff and students to engage with worship. This is because, as in other areas of its development, the academy's leaders have taken carefully measured steps to establish the Christian character. They know exactly the elements that are still lacking and the potential the new hall offers. Consequently, there are clear strategies for how worship will look in the new building and a genuine excitement for how music and drama can enrich the experience. Year group worship each week strongly promotes Christian values and students recognise the distinctively Anglican features of worship, especially when led by members of the clergy. This means students have a growing awareness of the place Jesus Christ has in Christian worship and the importance of the Trinitarian concept of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Prayer has an increasing role in school life although many students are cautious about making use of this for their own benefit. Local clergy have a regular presence in the prayer room but changes to personnel have meant there is no clear structure to their role or any model emerging for how chaplaincy might be managed. Themes for worship are relevant to the stage students have reached in their lives and often motivate them in community action or charity fundraising. This is because leaders often make adjustments to the material and speak from personal experience. Students, therefore, engage with worship and their behaviour is excellent and appropriate to the occasion. Sixth formers receive an equal entitlement and one that is amended to reflect their growing maturity as young adults.

Since becoming a church school, a new element has been included in tutor time called 'Reflections'. All tutors are willing to deliver these sessions without compromising their own faith positions because of the quality of the prepared material and of the support and training available. Key slides from the presentations are projected throughout the building for the rest of the week as a useful reminder. Christian values are given prominence and Bible quotes clarify the key messages. Reflection has rapidly become an important feature of the school and has

contributed to a better culture for learning in classrooms. A typical comment was, 'It reflects back on us and makes me think that maybe I could do big things.' Students are in no doubt, therefore, that, although formal worship may be at an early stage, worship seen as a whole now defines the school as a church school.

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

The academy's vision states: 'We serve and support our community, providing a child-centred education that reflects Christian values.' This is exactly what it now delivers. This was the initial vision of governors and senior leaders that prompted them to seek the sponsorship of the diocese. The growing success and popularity of the academy shows that it has now moved a step beyond this because the values are now given gravity by being rooted in biblical teaching and express the school's identity as a church school. Parents appreciate the orderly and principled environment for their children and the town's positive perception of the academy's church status is seen in the rise of applications for places. Both senior and middle leaders enthuse about the impact of Christian values on the professional culture in the school. This represents a significant achievement in a comparatively short space of time and standards are improving.

The ability of leaders to manage change is excellent and this has been a key factor in firmly securing the academy's Christian character. The calibre of senior leaders, particularly the headteacher and the chairs of directors and governors, is extremely high. They have made wise and measured choices about the timing of new initiatives by ensuring they are first established at root level and built from the ground up. Self-evaluation is insightful and succinct because the outcomes of monitoring are carefully analysed. However, although leaders set rigorous termly targets for raising academic standards that are regularly monitored by governors, the same precision is not applied to aspects of the school's Christian character. Development planning for collective worship, RE and spiritual and moral education tends to focus too much on provision and does not give enough attention to the outcomes for students.

The Christian vision has led leaders to make courageous decisions about the curriculum that change the life chances for young people in this isolated community. In particular, it continues to offer an unusually wide range of academic and vocational options to sixth form students in spite of the implications this has for the academy's overall performance data. The vision is never compromised as it now sits at the heart of the Christian character and every possible effort is made to help students achieve qualifications and personal skills to pursue their ambitions. Leaders have seen the potential of working with local organisations and businesses to support vocational courses and are keen to pursue these links as the academy's reputation improves.

Partnerships, especially with Exeter Diocese and local Christian communities are consistently of mutual benefit. They are strengthening the school at the level of middle leadership as well as improving the achievement of students who struggle to gain qualifications. The increasing involvement of non-Anglican foundation governors has improved communication between church communities. The support of the diocesan adviser and the headteacher's work with diocesan secondary headteachers have made sure the academy's development retains momentum. Important new initiatives are emerging through the links forged by the youth worker and local clergy with church communities. Interviews, for example, are being held for church members to act as personal mentors for students in order to expand an already successful initiative with existing staff.

RE and collective worship meet statutory requirements because the leadership of both areas, and of Christian distinctiveness overall, is given a high profile to sustain the pace of development as a church school. The RE leader is regularly released as a lead teacher for the Diocese and has been awarded a Farmington Fellowship for research in the next academic year. The assistant headteacher who has played a key role in the growth as a church school is about to retire. Succession planning is underway to ensure that this area of responsibility remains at the core of the senior leadership team at a crucial time of moving into the new building. Leaders have carefully avoided any sense of just waiting for this moment to happen. They are determined that the current pace of development will ensure a seamless transition into an environment that has been specifically designed to fully embrace the ethos of a church academy.

SIAMS report February 2017 The Ilfracombe Church of England Academy Ilfracombe EX34 9JB