

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Mary's Church of England Academy			
Address	Trinity Avenue, Bury St Edmunds IP28 7LR		
Date of inspection	11 March 2020	Status of school	Academy inspected as Voluntary Aided
Diocese	Norwich	URN	137419

Overall Judgement	How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?	Grade	Requires Improvement
Additional Judgements	The impact of collective worship	Grade	Requires improvement
	The effectiveness of religious education (RE)	Grade	Good

School context

St Mary's is a primary academy with 413 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Few pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is above national averages. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above national averages. There have been significant changes in staff over the past eighteen months, including all of the senior leadership team. Six of the class teachers are newly qualified.

The school's Christian vision

We promise to shine together.
'Let the light of your face shine upon us' Psalm 4:6

Key findings

- Although the academy's Christian vision was reached through a process of consultation, there is a general lack of understanding of its theological foundation. Consequently, it has a limited impact on the life of the academy as a whole and pupils in particular. Leaders relate their aim for all children and staff to 'shine' by flourishing academically, socially and personally, but parents and pupils do not make this connection.
- The systematic focus on the academy's selected Christian values within collective worship ensures that pupils gain a depth of understanding of each and its relevance in their lives. Although all classrooms have an area for reflection, pupils do not clearly understand its purpose and therefore their engagement is limited.
- Significant volatility in staffing has resulted in a relatively inexperienced team and the ambitious plans of leaders not progressing as intended. Governance has remained strong throughout this period but governors have not been sufficiently involved in the process of self-evaluation and development planning.
- Robust action has been taken to raise pupil achievement. Considerable investment has been made in ensuring that provision for pupils with additional needs is effective, enabling these pupils to flourish.
- There is a legacy of high-quality religious education (known at the academy as 'beliefs and values'), which is set to continue under the new subject leader. The well-established and effective enquiry-based approach spills over into the new approaches to other foundation subjects.

Areas for development

- Strengthen understanding of the academy's vision and its theological foundation so that its impact can be seen across all areas of the life of the academy.
- Equip and empower the newly formed pupil faith council so that pupils contribute to the planning, leadership and evaluation of collective worship and the outworking of the academy's vision.
- Strengthen pupils' understanding of the value and purpose of reflection and prayer and their opportunities to access areas set aside for this purpose.

How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?

Inspection findings

The academy's Christian vision is relatively new. All stakeholders were involved in its formation. It has a high profile on the website and around the buildings. Parents and pupils recognise its importance but struggle to explain what it means for them beyond the aspect of working together. This is also the case for the Bible verse from Psalms. Therefore, the vision has little impact. However, the six selected Christian values are explored in depth within collective worship. Pupils can also cite Bible stories related to the academy's values. Consequently, their influence can be seen, for example, in strategies for managing pupil behaviour. Adults model the values in action and pupils follow their example in their relationships with one another. There are also instances of the value in focus being incorporated into the curriculum, as in 'can a Gruffalo be forgiven?' Within beliefs and values (RE) lessons pupils also explore how followers of different world faiths approach attitudes to values such as forgiveness.

The newly formed senior leadership team has set aspirational targets for pupil achievement. Indications within pupil workbooks are that significant progress has been made to raise pupil attainment so that it is at least in line with the national average. As an expression of its inclusive Christian ethos the academy welcomes all pupils. Parents testify to the effectiveness of the additional support provided for pupils with additional needs. Provision includes a family support worker, pastoral provision and a 'Thrive' practitioner focussing on pupils' mental health. This results in vulnerable pupils gaining confidence as well as making good progress. Little connection is made between these imperatives and the Christian foundation of the academy as expressed in its vision. There are a significant number of small rooms set aside for additional provision, however these contain little visible evidence of the Christian vision or values. Nevertheless, the commitment of staff for all pupils to make the best possible progress cannot be questioned. The newly introduced 'learning challenge' curriculum has served to enthuse both pupils and staff. Strategies which have been successful within beliefs and values (RE) have been employed across other subjects in order to stimulate pupils' natural inquisitiveness. However, leaders recognise that it will take time to realise the full benefits of this initiative. Progress with this and other plans for improvement has been hampered by significant changes in staffing. The six newly qualified teachers are being supported well. Leaders recognise that continuing to develop consistent high-quality teaching and learning is an imperative if all pupils are to 'shine'. Parents express their confidence in both the teachers and the leadership team. The new beliefs and values (RE) subject leader has infectious enthusiasm for her subject and is developing her expertise across the whole primary age range. She has produced an ambitious action plan for the subject which includes increasing the frequency of visits and visitors linked to the subject. However, an enforced period of absence has resulted in slow progress against the priorities she has identified. Within lessons teachers pose challenging questions encourage discussion and respect for each other's ideas and opinions.

There is a self-evaluation document focused on Christian distinctiveness which is detailed and includes clear priorities for improvement. Not all of these are currently incorporated into the academy's development plan. Governors have not been involved in this process. This has a negative impact on their ability to focus their monitoring and evaluation activities. They do, however, visit the academy frequently and offer robust challenge to senior leaders as well as supporting the whole staff team. The extent to which the academy has drawn on the advice and training provided by the diocese is also limited.

The parish vicar reports how the partnership between the academy and the church has 'blossomed' in recent years. She has worked closely with staff to develop 'trails' for pupils, exploring themes such as God's creation, The Lord's Prayer and the Easter story. As well as celebrating major Christian festivals together, all pupils visit for class worship in turn across the year. She and other local Christian leaders share in the leadership of collective worship.

Worship is regarded by staff and pupils as an important part of the day. There is an appropriate focus on teaching from the Bible and the life of Jesus. All pupils listen attentively if somewhat passively. Songs are carefully selected to reinforce the Christian value in focus. Pupils' opportunities to plan, lead and contribute to the evaluation of worship is at a very early stage of development, with the formation of the new faith council. On the day of the inspection the commitment of a large number of pupils who are 'young carers' for someone within their family was recognised. However, the opportunity to make a link to either the academy's vision or to a relevant Christian value was lost. Every classroom has a focal point for reflection and prayer within which the current value is prominent. Recently a further such space has been created within the library. However, beyond the reception classes, pupil understanding of when, why and how they should use these spaces is limited. Consequently, little

impact is made on their spiritual development. Pupils see the variety of local, national and international charities the academy supports as an application of their Christian value of compassion. The pupil council plays an important part in selecting both the charities supported and the fundraising activities. Pupils are actively involved in community led projects such as the local food bank, which give them opportunities to apply lessons learned about social responsibility. Although they gain respect for people of different faiths within beliefs and values (RE) their appreciation of people of differing cultural and ethnic traditions within the United Kingdom is limited.



The effectiveness of RE is Good

Despite the relatively inexperienced profile of the staff, teaching and learning in beliefs and values (RE) is good. Pupil workbooks indicate that teachers plan with creativity and high expectations with the result that pupils make good progress. Marking is detailed and frequently includes additional questions which generates a learning conversation between teacher and pupil. Assessment indicates that pupil achievement is broadly in line with English and mathematics.

Principal	Lynne Stabler
Inspector's name and number	Graham Lancaster 713