

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Holywell School

Red Lion Close, Cranfield, Bedfordshire, MK43 0JA

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Good

Diocese

St Albans

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Good

Date of academy conversion

October 2012

Name of multi-academy trust / federation [delete as appropriate]

N/A

Date of inspection

22 November 2016

Date of last inspection

20 and 21 September 2011

Type of school and unique reference number

Academy 138844

Headteacher

Peter Haddon

Inspector's name and number

Jo Fageant 104

School context

Holywell is a larger than average middle school comprising 609 pupils between the ages of 9 and 13. It became an academy in 2012 and is considering the establishment of a multi-academy trust. It serves the parishes of Cranfield and Wootton and surrounding areas. New buildings were added to the school in 2014/15. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage with a significant minority of Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus. There are fewer than the national average of disadvantaged pupils but more than the national average of looked after children. Higher than average pupil mobility is associated with parental engagement with the nearby post-graduate Cranfield University.

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

- The obvious faith and sincerity of the headteacher and governors create a Christian ethos within Holywell School which has a positive impact on relationships, behaviour and attitudes to learning.
- A Christian commitment to the worth of every individual and the development of strategies that reflect this in practice have given the school a reputation for succeeding with children who have struggled in other schools.
- The focus on values within collective worship helps pupils to understand links between biblical teachings and their everyday experiences of life.
- The skilled leadership of religious education (RE) ensures the subject provides personal and academic challenge, developing in pupils a secure understanding of aspects of Christianity and other religions represented in the school. In this way, the subject reflects the school's inclusive Christian ethos.

Areas to improve

- Drawing on the clear Christian commitment of leaders, clarify, articulate and share a vision for the school which is expressed in explicitly Christian terms. Ensure it is used to inform and evaluate all policy and practice as well as considerations relating to the possible development of a multi-academy trust.
- Establish strategies for evaluating the impact of collective worship which enable the views of adults and pupils throughout the school community to inform positive planned future developments.

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

The school's strong focus on values is acknowledged by all to have a positive impact on relationships, behaviour and attitudes to learning. The values are understood to be Christian values and also appreciated because they are shared by people of other faiths and those with no religious affiliation. In this sense, they both help to define the character of the school as Christian whilst also creating an entirely inclusive ethos. There are reminders of them around the building and pupils speak easily of the influence they have on day to day life and learning. They claim they help to ensure there is very little bullying or unpleasantness. They are so well-known that 'acts of kindness are done as the norm'. They are the reason 'we have a really strong community'. Less clear is pupils' understanding of how central the values are to Christian living. However, RE helps to develop this understanding. Pupils recognise the important role that RE plays in developing in them an understanding of and respect for similarities, diversity and difference. They say it's good to understand other people and why they do what they do. Some specifically value the opportunity to mix with pupils from different backgrounds.

Central to the school's Christian ethos is the worth it attributes to every individual. This means pupils' progress is carefully tracked and appropriate, well-targeted support is provided as necessary. Many attain standards higher than the national average. A wide range of sport, music, drama, residential and day trip opportunities is made available to engage and excite everyone. In addition, to build self-confidence and a sense of responsibility pupils have, and enjoy, many chances to accept leadership positions. All these opportunities give rise to rich spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development even though there is no strategic planning for its provision. The importance attributed to all individuals is especially sharply seen in the excellent success the school has in supporting children who have particularly challenging lives and those who have been excluded from other schools. The transformation they experience is the outworking of a Christian commitment to their worth and to a willingness in everyone to 'go the extra mile'. The high quality of academic and pastoral support means learners know they are cared for and enjoy school so levels of attendance are high.

Provision is made for pupils who want to explore their Christian faith. There are two, age-related groupings supported by teachers, a youth worker and a representative from the Milton Keynes based Bridgebuilder Christian charity. Pupils who attend these sessions speak of their importance and the difference they make in comments like: 'It gives me confidence about my faith', 'It makes me feel good in my own skin.'

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Pupils and adults alike speak positively about worship in the variety of contexts in which it takes place. It is through worship that the Christian significance of the school's values is most fully explored. Pupils explain that through the 'thought for the week' and themes in year, key stage and house gatherings values are linked with biblical teachings. Planning shared by school staff, clergy and regular visiting contributors helps pupils understand the continuing relevance of the Bible and the values that arise from its teachings. The strong focus on values inspires significant social and charitable action. Pupils also explain that it influences relationships and behaviour throughout the school. For these reasons, worship is seen as an important aspect of the day to day life of the school. However, the school does not have a systematic approach to evaluating the impact of collective worship which involves all members of the school community. As a consequence, there is an over-reliance on assumption which potentially limits opportunities for the best possible future developments.

Pupils have opportunities in different contexts to plan and lead worship. They enjoy this active participation and responsibility. They speak positively about how vicars and a representative from the Bridgebuilder charity make worship fun and easy to understand. Pupils and adults appreciate the way in which prayer and reflection are included in all worship in an invitational way, allowing all to respond in line with their own beliefs. Since the last inspection, major Christian festivals are now celebrated in church. This is successfully developing pupils' familiarity with and understanding of traditions of Anglican worship and the importance of Jesus for Christians. In this mixed community, some families exercise their right to withdraw children from these occasions. Pupils are aware of the language of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit used by clergy. Year 8 pupils who have learned about the Christian concept of the Trinity in RE are able to speak about it, acknowledging that it is difficult to fully understand.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Religious education benefits from the skills, knowledge, enthusiasm and energy of its subject leader. She uses up to date and ongoing developments in the subject, liaison with upper school colleagues and diocesan guidance to review and revise the RE curriculum. In addition, she takes account of whole school learning and teaching initiatives to ensure that RE contributes well and is in the forefront of developments. The English department, for example, acknowledges the positive contribution RE makes to the development of pupils' extended writing skills. At this time when national guidance about assessment in RE is in flux, the subject leader has developed and is trialling a new

system. Early indications suggest this supports pupils to attain high standards and make good progress. The subject leader is aware that revisions to the system are necessary to ensure assessment is always both robust and reliable. A mix of teacher, peer and pupil reflective marking helps learners understand how well they are doing. The majority of teaching is good with some outstanding practice. The best questioning skills challenge thinking. Lessons engage pupils in a wide variety of activities which develop a range of higher order skills. Different pupils are challenged with different tasks so all can make progress from their starting points. However, this sometimes involves the most able pupils having to complete unnecessarily easy tasks before they move on to appropriately challenging questions. The main RE classroom is well-presented with displays that stimulate thinking and celebrate pupils' work. The well-planned curriculum ensures pupils develop a secure understanding of key aspects of Christianity and the other religions studied. Pupils are happy to share their own views and experiences in a well-established atmosphere of mutual respect. In this way, they learn from one another about the impact of religious beliefs and practices on the lives of adherents. This open ethos of sharing enables learners to understand similarities and differences between religious traditions and significantly enriches their SMSC development and their understanding of the school's values.

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

It is obvious that the 'lens of Christianity' guides the leadership of the headteacher and governors, all their decisions and their policies. Their sincerity and faith clearly inform their work. Governors begin meetings with prayer because they say this conveys the seriousness of their work. However, their 'common understanding' of a vision for the school is assumed rather than explicitly articulated in a way that can clearly and sharply inform self-evaluation. Despite this, their strong commitment drives a good understanding of the school's strengths and ongoing areas for development. In addition to their other responsibilities, governors regularly review and challenge aspects of the school that help define its Christian character. They have an obvious passion for ensuring the needs of every individual are met. This arises from their Christian-inspired conviction about the unique value of every person. It informs decisions such as the inclusion of a counsellor and a nurse in the school's staff. It offers a welcome to children who have failed to succeed in other schools and ensures appropriate support for both staff and pupils. As a consequence, the school's Christian ethos is recognised and respected within the local community, by other schools, parents and diocesan staff. Expectations relating to this ethos are made clear to new staff. They are reinforced with all staff through training and Monday briefings which include time for quiet reflection and prayer. Work on the embedding of influential Christian values has been successful. These many value words adorn the building, for example in engraved windows, making them a very obvious feature of the environment. Everyone is aware of them and can give examples of their impact on the daily life of the school. The consideration given to linking particular values with certain seasons of the year enriches their relevance and significance. Good examples are the link between 'equality' and Black history month, 'courage' and Remembrance. SMSC development is an obvious strength of the school. Collective worship and RE, both of which meet statutory requirements, contribute richly to this aspect of school life. Leaders have responded well to the challenges set out in the last inspection for the improvement of collective worship. The appointment of and support for a skilled and highly motivated subject leader for RE has invigorated this area of the curriculum, raising its profile and celebrating its value across the school. Since the last inspection, links with the local church have been additionally strengthened with major Christian festivals now celebrated in the church. Mutually beneficial links with charitable organisations, in particular Emmaus, inspire generosity of spirit and inform pupils about the plight of those less fortunate locally and further afield.

SIAMS report November 2016, Holywell School, Cranfield, MK43 0JA