

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

### Alban Church of England Academy

Silver Street, Great Barford, Bedfordshire MK44 3HZ

**Current SIAMS inspection grade**

**Good**

**Diocese**

**St Albans**

**Previous SIAMS inspection grade**

**Good**

**Date of academy conversion**

**April 2011**

**Name of multi-academy trust**

**Unity Church of England MAT**

**Date of inspection**

**2 February 2017**

**Date of last inspection**

**31 May 2012**

**Type of school and unique reference number**

**Middle deemed secondary VA 136550**

**Headteacher**

**Sue Lourensz**

**Inspector's name and number**

**Kathryn Wright 436**

#### School context

Alban Academy is a middle school (Years 5-8) which is expected to merge with Great Barford lower school in September 2017. It is currently the only school in the Unity Church of England multi-academy trust which was established in November 2016. Changes and uncertainty in terms of the age-range provision and other schools in the local area moving from a three to two tier system have had an impact on the recruitment and retention of staff. The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are eligible for pupil premium and those with special educational needs are both below average.

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

- **The Christian vision of the leadership team, particularly the emphasis on koinonia, is sustaining the school through a time of uncertainty and change**
- A re-evaluation and focus on the school's six distinctively Christian values means that the entire community is united around a common purpose and living out the values in daily life
- The highly effective leadership and teaching of religious education (RE) ensures its prominent place within the school and leads to depth of learning and very good achievement for pupils

#### Areas to improve

- To ensure biblical narratives and texts are used consistently in collective worship to enable all pupils to make links between Christian teachings and the school's values
- To take prompt and robust action on issues raised through monitoring to ensure improvements are made and impact evaluated
- To broaden pupils' understanding of the nature and purpose of prayer so that they are able appreciate its contribution to spiritual development

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

The Christian values of koinonia, trust, wisdom, forgiveness, friendship and love are woven through all aspects of the school community. They are firmly embedded so that the majority of pupils are aware of them through displays, modelling of them by staff, practical application through polices and through explicit reference to them in teaching. The values have influenced changes to the school day to ensure pupils' well-being is supported. The approach to standards, progress and attendance is rooted in the Christian belief that all are made in the image of God, and that all can succeed and fulfil their potential. As a result, pupil progress for English and mathematics over four years is good. Pupils talk about the impact of the values on their own lives in terms of being self-controlled, trusting one another and having high aspirations. However, many pupils are unable to make the link between the values and biblical teachings which means they are uncertain what lies at the heart of them. The strong commitment to a sense of community means that the school is regarded as 'one unit' where everyone works together as a supportive team, like a family.

Provision for and promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. Opportunities are provided in a range of subjects for pupils to engage with ethical issues, awe and wonder, musical celebrations and collaborative tasks. In particular, a geography lesson built on an act of collective worship and fundraising event for the people of Sierra Leone. Pupils are enthusiastic about their charity work, and talk about wanting to bring justice and help to others. RE makes a good contribution to the Christian character of the school by helping pupils understand the role and place of the local church. The RE department took the lead for a whole school day exploring the nature of the Trinity through art, music and dance. Pupils have some understanding of diverse communities and learn about a range of religions and worldviews, however opportunities for pupils to meet with and engage with people from different cultures and beliefs is limited.

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

Collective worship lies at the heart of the school which leads to a very strong and supportive community. A re-organisation of the school day has placed greater emphasis on its importance and ensured that class based worship is meaningful and well structured. A depth of engagement with Christian values and the key of events of the Church year is established through detailed planning and highly effective leadership. All members of the school community talk about the difference worship makes to them both in how they live their daily lives and in affirming and valuing them. For example pupils talk about putting forgiveness into action and making wise choices in difficult situations. The worship observed allowed pupils and staff to consider together the value of 'patience' in the wider context of learning to be wise. Pupils particularly benefit from class based worship which is shaped to meet the needs of each group. Teachers are well resourced and feel confident to use their own expertise and creativity thereby enhancing and broadening pupils' experience of worship. Nevertheless, monitoring indicates that not all acts of year group worship are underpinned by biblical material, and that some acts of worship do not allow pupils to develop spiritually.

Members of the pupils worship committee regularly lead, monitor and evaluate worship, and some actions are taking place as a result of pupil voice feedback. Pupils value the impact they are having on the increasing use of humour and questioning in worship, as well as supporting their own personal development by being part of this team. Pupils have a comprehensive understanding of the Trinitarian nature of God but are not able to make connections between this knowledge and collective worship. Through celebration of major Christian festivals, use and explanation of liturgical colours and a coherent structure to worship, pupils develop a good understanding of Anglican faith and practice. Some acts of collective worship have a significant impact on spiritual and moral development. For example, pupils were moved and reflected deeply during powerful Remembrance and Holocaust memorial commemorations.

Pupils benefit from of range of worship styles and leaders which increases their awareness of the diversity of Christian faith and practice. Pupils have a reasonable appreciation of prayer as a communal activity in collective worship, but are less secure in their understanding of prayer beyond this setting. Although a local Christian group, IMPACT, has led a 'prayer spaces' event for Year 7 pupils which they found inspiring and thought provoking, this has not been developed further.

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

Religious education (RE) has a very prominent place within the school. It is valued highly by pupils, staff and parents. Pupils talk about its importance in terms of understanding how people live, respecting others and appreciating different cultures and beliefs. Standards of attainment are good, with a significant number attaining above expectations. Assessment for learning and tracking of progress is in place, but not fully embedded at this stage. Pupils are aware of how well they are achieving and their next steps for learning. RE is very well taught by well qualified and experienced teachers who have a very good grasp of a theological and philosophical enquiry approach to learning. This approach provides an exceptionally high level of challenge. Pupils engagement in lessons is very good. They respond well to higher order questioning and like to think hard. Pupils said they liked to, 'figure things out'. Pupils' grasp of theological vocabulary is good. In lessons observed pupils confidently used terms relating to the Christian character of God such as Trinity, omnipresent, merciful and omnipotent. Pupils regularly use skills of interpretation, deductive reasoning and analysis to engage with biblical texts.

Opportunities for spiritual development are well established. For example, pupils have opportunities to reflect on how the Christian belief in humans being made in the image of God may impact on how they treat others. The curriculum is well constructed to reflect the Church of England Education Office Statement of Entitlement for RE (2016) and to ensure progression of learning about Christianity. However, the study of other religions and beliefs do not require pupils to delve deeper in their understanding. The subject is exceptionally well led. The subject leader undertakes regular monitoring and evaluation which has led to improved assessment procedures and consistently good or better teaching. Department priorities are clear and well organised through accurate self evaluation, reading and personal research into best practice. Teachers of RE are continually reflecting upon and developing their practice, often implementing new ideas and strategies from professional development training.

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

Through extremely complex and challenging times, the Christian ethos is holding the school together. The honest and transparent approach from the leadership team ensures that staff feel well supported, appreciated and nurtured. All stakeholders were involved in the re-evaluation of the Christian values. This means they all have ownership of them and refer to them in their daily lives. The leaders, staff and governors naturally refer to the values in all they do in terms of pastoral support, safeguarding, behaviour for learning as well as through the curriculum.

The local governors have a good understanding of their role in providing challenge and support. The ethos committee regularly undertakes monitoring and evaluation, and works with the collective worship and RE leaders to identify areas of development and professional learning opportunities. Nevertheless, some key issues identified by the committee have not always been followed through to ensure improvements are embedded. In addition, the collective worship and religious education policies have not been reviewed, and do not reflect accurately the practice observed. However, the statutory requirements for both collective worship and RE are met. The school self evaluation is accurate and all areas to address from the previous report have been met in full; in particular the level of challenge provided for pupils in religious education is now outstanding. Staff have benefited from professional development related to the Christian distinctiveness of the school including explanations of the biblical teachings underpinning the values, but the impact of this is yet to be evidenced.

Parents are passionate about the school, its character and ethos. They feel listened to and well informed about the current changes to the school. They particularly value the enquiry approach taken in RE which supports pupils' open-mindedness and curiosity. The active 'Friends' group supports the school value of koinonia by providing events that bring together staff, pupils and their families. Some parents use the regular newsletter to develop an understanding of values and prayer at home. Links with the local community are good. Pupils engage with events for the elderly and benefit from visits by IMPACT which particularly support their spiritual development. The partnership with the church has been strong, although the incumbent is currently on sick leave.

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