

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

**Alban Church of England Academy**  
**Silver Street**  
**Great Barford**  
**Bedford**  
**MK44 3HZ**

**Diocese: St Albans**

Dates of inspection: 31 May 2012  
School's unique reference number: 136550  
Headteacher: Lorraine Dougall  
Inspector's name and number: Jo Fageant 104

### School context

Alban Church of England Middle School became an academy in April 2011 in response to the threat of a proposed local reorganisation to primary and secondary schools. In converting to an academy, Alban was required to continue to develop its Church of England character and a broad and balanced curriculum in accordance with the principles, practices and tenets of the Church of England both generally and in relation to religious education and collective worship in particular, having regard to the advice of the Diocesan Board of Education.

### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Alban Academy as a Church of England Academy are good.**

Alban Academy proclaims its Church of England foundation clearly in signage, website, displays around the building, the atmosphere of respect, care and nurture for everyone and a commitment to unlocking the potential of all members of the school community reflecting the love of God for all.

### Established strengths

- The positive attitudes to learning throughout the school
- The nurturing and valuing of all pupils which is translated into a commitment to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and well-being and high quality learning experiences
- Very positive links with the church and local and wider communities which are valued by pupils, staff and parents.
- A beautiful and well cared for environment which celebrates pupils' achievements

### Focus for development

- Governors and senior leaders should review their understanding of the Christian character and values of the academy so they can be clearly and unambiguously shared with stakeholders in a way which ensures sustainability
- Governors and senior leaders should monitor and evaluate the impact of collective worship in order to inform future planning and development
- Teachers should continue to receive support for their teaching of religious education (RE) so as to ensure pupils are appropriately challenged and the marking of their work consistently helps learners understand what they have achieved and their next steps for improvement.

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

The academy's focus on valuing and celebrating pupils and their achievements is seen clearly in the 'wow' wall in the headteacher's office and in beautiful displays throughout the building. Pupils speak very positively about their 'school' including its Christian ethos. They understand the impact this has on collective worship and the status of RE. They are appreciative of the efforts of teachers to make lessons interesting and engaging and of the very wide range of clubs available to them. They speak with great enthusiasm about their experiences and anticipation of trips out such as those to Snowdon, the Normandy beaches, Norfolk, St Albans and the RE 'Faith Tour'. They also value involvement in initiatives such as 'Show racism the red card'. Pupils are satisfied that they have a voice and influence through the Alban Pupil Forum. They demonstrate their awareness of need in others and their care through fundraising activities for causes often identified by them. Some go as far as to say they can't think of anything wrong with their 'school'. Governors, senior leaders and staff in general show a commitment to 'not giving up' with pupils. The academy has a high rate of success with 'fresh start access'. The Pupil Support Unit provides effective help for pupils with a range of needs such as anger management and bereavement. Careful tracking of progress in all subjects enables the provision of intervention and additional support where it is needed. Parents appreciate the ease with which they can approach the school with any concerns and be assured of a welcome. They speak of how well the academy prepares their children for successful transition to and continuing education and development in upper schools. They value the Christian ethos which is shared with but not imposed upon their children. Close partnership with local clergy has enabled the school to facilitate confirmation classes for those pupils who request them. There is a strong commitment to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and well-being. Staff explicitly include these foci in their planning following training from the diocesan officer. Provision for and care of pupils is driven by a strong and open commitment to a Christian ethos which is recognised by almost everyone. Key policies such as one on behaviour make reference to Christian values but understanding of these is implicit because there is no agreed and shared identification of what they are.

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

The planning for collective worship is thorough, meticulous and organized around themes which are displayed throughout the school to ensure widespread awareness. Pupils speak positively of the relevance and influence of these themes which they explore in a variety of contexts including key stage, year group and class collective worship. The degree to which pupils are able to participate actively varies with the context. Opportunities include discussion in class worship, groups leading year-group worship and the composition of prayers for special occasions celebrated in church. A focus on the Christian year, the regular involvement of clergy and services held in the church all help to familiarise pupils with Anglican tradition and practice. They speak with understanding about the display in the hall of Christian life and symbols as well as the changing liturgical colours used as the background for a wall-mounted cross. In conversations during the day of inspection pupils admitted to finding some times of collective worship more interesting and engaging than others. Governors and senior leaders have not sought the views of members of the school community about collective worship in order to understand its impact and to inform future planning and development.

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

RE is well led by an enthusiastic subject leader who has made very good use of diocesan support to review planning and assessment in response to the introduction of a new local syllabus for the subject. New schemes of work have been developed retaining the best aspects of previous plans and new criteria for the assessment of pupils' attainment and progress have been introduced this year. These developments have been carefully planned but are not yet fully embedded. Past records indicate that the attainment and progress of pupils in RE is comparable with that in other subjects. Where teaching and learning are best they are characterised by well-structured lessons, good questions that stretch pupils' thinking, active learning strategies, varied activities organised within time limits to ensure engagement and pace, differentiated tasks, partner talk and marking, imaginative use of resources and shared success criteria. Where learning is less successful tasks do not reflect the shared learning objectives or the levels of attainment at which tracking information suggests pupils should be working. The best marking identifies what pupils have done well and poses questions or sets targets to indicate the next steps towards improvement related to relevant levels of attainment. This style of marking is not used consistently with all classes. In the lessons observed during the day of inspection pupils worked with obvious interest and enthusiasm and were reflective and respectful of the beliefs of others. Pupils and parents speak with particular enthusiasm about the 'Faith Tour' experience, which is an RE trip involving visits to several places of worship including a gurdwara and a mosque, through which understanding of and attitudes towards minority faiths are improved.

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

In the recent past governors and senior leaders have been preoccupied with decisions about and changes related to the conversion to an academy. Confident that the Christian ethos was secure and understood by the community they have given little explicit attention to reviewing and developing it. However, recent recognition has been given to the need to explore and refresh the Christian vision and values of the academy and these are scheduled for discussion by the governors this term. Governors and senior leaders speak with passion and commitment about the Christian foundation of the academy and the difference it makes to their thinking and practice. For example the celebration of opening as an academy included a Christian blessing. The foundation and ethos are made clear in the appointment of new staff but the valuable induction programme does not explore how they will be expected to influence their work. Governors are strongly committed to the academy and actively supportive. There are excellent links with the church and diocese as well as local and wider communities. Through the Pinnacle Trust the academy works closely with local schools to ensure the best learning experiences for pupils across all three tiers. Senior leaders have a good and accurate understanding of the academy's strengths and the aspects it needs to develop further thereby ensuring a sound foundation for rapid progress.