



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

### St Augustine's Academy

Oakwood Avenue  
Dunstable  
LU5 4AS

**Previous SIAMS grade:** N/A

**Current inspection grade:** Good

**Diocese:** St Albans

Local authority: N/A

Date of inspection: 19 October 2015

School's unique reference number: 138558

Headteacher: Lynne James

Inspector's name and number: Lyn Field 151

### School context

The school converted to become an academy and Church of England school in September 2012 under the new name of St Augustine's. It serves an area of high and multiple social deprivation. Most pupils are White British and the proportion supported by extra pupil premium funding is twice the national average. Similarly, the proportions with special educational needs and those who join and leave the school mid year are much higher than schools nationally. The academy is converting to a primary school, having extended the age range to include Year 5 from September 2014 and Year 6 in September 2015. The current headteacher took the post on an interim basis in January 2014 following the sudden death of the headteacher. Exactly a year ago, the school was judged to be good by Ofsted.

### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Augustine's as a Church of England school are good.

- The personal faith of the headteacher has a significant impact on achievement and wellbeing
- The vision and drive of all staff to improve the life chances of every child is rooted in biblical teaching and has a significant impact on achievement and wellbeing
- The regular pattern of Anglican worship and prayer has established the school's identity as a church school and provides a spiritual basis to daily life in school.

### Areas to improve

- Establish systems for governors and school leaders to keep a regular check on progress as a church school to ensure the current rate of improvement is sustained in the future
- Develop pupils' role in planning and leading worship both for the whole school and in their classes to enrich their spiritual development and their confidence as leaders
- Develop the use of quiet areas in classrooms to be a resource for pupils in personal prayer and a focus for class reflection and worship

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

Across the school community, adults and children are confident that the Christian ethos of the school is securely embedded and has supported the school through times of turmoil. The school presents as a well-functioning school but this belies the trauma and crises that a significant number of pupils experience in their lives. This is reflected in the size of the large pastoral team who work relentlessly to ensure pupils are safe and confident to tackle their lessons.

Children have an exceptionally good start in Reception and the foundations of good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are laid here. Close attention is given to their social, emotional and spiritual needs. They spend time outdoors discovering 'God's world' and use worship songs in learning to be quiet and thoughtful through techniques such as Godly Play. Being part of whole school for worship is, therefore, an easy transition for them. Pupils move in and out of the area during the year so helping them to trust new adults and cope with losing friends when they leave is a big part of the school's work. Staff are skilled in helping pupils deal with bereavement and the growth of its Christian ethos has helped in this, particularly following the death of the previous headteacher. Pupils who stay in the school long-term make good progress from very low starting points, even though the standards they reach are very variable in the light of their particular needs. Attendance has improved and is close to national figures. This is the result of good teaching and the specialist professional support that the school works determinedly to access, as part of the school's mission in the community. The headteacher places this at the heart of her Christian leadership and this has given members of staff the confidence to link their work directly to their personal faith.

The academy's core Christian values of trust, respect, co-operation and responsibility provide pupils with a language to make sense of the world in which they live. They explain what the values mean to them using familiar Bible stories. Over the last three years these stories have come to be reference points for pupils in their relationships, behaviour and in the sort of people they aspire to be. This is particularly relevant as the school expands to include Year 6. Pupils enjoy RE and rate its importance very highly because they are all too aware that accepting differences between people is vital for living and working alongside others. Consequently, behaviour is good and any racist or homophobic bullying is extremely rare. Excellent relationships between staff and pupils give rise to open and honest discussions and different family structures are valued. Pupils are excited by the Faith Tours to places of worship used by different faiths. These have captured their interest and governors who were present noted that the depth of their questions revealed the quality of discussion that happens back in school. Prayer is a tool openly used by pupils of all backgrounds to express their feelings and staff observe that it offers a way to help them feel safe. They make good use of times of quiet to reflect on their own actions, 'what went before and how things can change like wiping things out on a whiteboard'. These times happen mainly in worship and although reflection areas have been introduced in classrooms, pupils are unsure how to make best use of them.

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

Worship holds an important place in the daily life of the school and is making a difference to adults and children alike. Regular services in church have built the confidence of families to attend worship and has stimulated pupils' interest in other places of worship and church buildings in the town. A special sense of place is created in the school hall for worship. Displays and a worship table confirm the school's new Christian status. At first, this was a tentative move but, with the clear direction from the vicar and the headteacher, the rate of progress has speeded up. All staff have made the adjustment and, because of their examples, pupils' engagement in worship is impressive. Even the youngest children know the words of familiar prayers and Christian songs so there is a strong sense of a community coming together and enjoying worship. A simple Anglican pattern is well established because the same familiar responses are used whichever member of staff or clergy is leading. Careful thought is constantly given to making worship directly relevant to pupils' lives. Prayers sensitively acknowledge

difficult events facing pupils whilst songs lift spirits, raise aspirations and motivate pupils to support others. At harvest, for example, families generously supported the diocesan appeal for disabled children in Uganda and pupils understand exactly why their help is needed. Pupils willingly help in acting out stories and write prayers that are often used in worship, with their agreement. Staff and pupils have gained confidence in responding to spiritual ideas and using the language of worship. There are suggestions that the time is right to explore occasional classroom worship with pupils taking the lead and this demonstrates the impact that worship now has on the whole community. The use of feedback about worship is at an early stage but, now that pupils have a deeper understanding of worship, they are able to carry out more detailed recording and evaluation. Diocesan training has been acted upon and the staff rota, for example, has been adjusted to ensure there is continuity in how themes are developed throughout the week. This enables teaching about the basis of Christian values in Bible stories to be regularly consolidated. Pupils therefore have a secure knowledge of Jesus Christ and the Gospel stories that relate to the Trinity. They can link the school's strapline 'Where we all shine' to the description of Jesus as 'the light of the world' and the words of the song 'Shine Jesus shine'.

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

Explicitly Christian leadership plays a key role in this effective school even though there are gaps in the formal systems for strategic planning as a church school. The clarity of vision and the deep personal faith of the current headteacher have built on the foundations laid by the first headteacher. As a result, the distinctively Christian character of St Augustine's is making a significant impact on the lives of pupils and adds an extra dimension to the professional work of adults in the school. Wise decisions have been made about where action was most needed to bring about improvement in pupils' achievement, personal development and wellbeing. The pastoral team has expanded and the culture is one where all members contribute to ensuring every child 'can shine' and know they 'count in the eyes of God'. The biblical story of the Lost Sheep captures the commitment of all staff and governors to holding pupils' safety and wellbeing at the centre of their work. Work is underway to formalise this vision in the wording of school documents but there is no doubting of how it drives the work of staff and governors. Consequently, new members of staff are able to follow the exemplary role models of the headteacher and existing staff in living out Christian values. Changes made to the pattern of collective worship have set down clear markers for the Christian distinctiveness of the school. As a result, Christian teaching encapsulated in Bible stories filters through the whole curriculum to provide pupils with a spiritual and moral framework for life. RE is firmly established in the curriculum but training for teachers and monitoring of lessons is at an early stage so improvements are not embedded. Informal feedback from governors on visits to the school notes that pupils show a genuine curiosity about spiritual issues and talk spontaneously about God. However, there are no systems in place to make use of this and other valuable feedback to inform strategic planning. Although the written evaluation of progress as a church school is shared, governors are too dependent on the headteacher in setting priorities for action. Public confidence has grown in the school as a church school following some initial resistance. Positive links have always existed with the church but the change in status brought the Christian ethos to the fore and the vicar now has a clear role in school as a governor and supporting the curriculum. The Active RE sessions in church are popular with all pupils. Expectations for behaviour, and the actions taken when these are not met, are clearly explained to everyone concerned, using the language of Christian values. This has played a key role in embedding the Christian character of the school and is welcomed by parents who feel this helps them manage behaviour at home.

SIAMS report October 2015 St Augustine's Academy Dunstable LU5 4AS