

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

### Accrington St Christopher's Church of England High School

Queens Road, Accrington, Lancashire, BB5 4AY

**Current SIAMS inspection grade**

**Outstanding**

**Diocese**

**Blackburn**

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Date of academy conversion

September 2011

Dates of inspection

1-2 December 2016

Date of last inspection

November 2011

Type of school and unique reference number

Voluntary Aided - 137421

Headteacher

Richard Jones

Inspector's name and number

Pamela Draycott (161)

#### School context

This popular academy has a range of ability levels across Years 7 to 13. The percentages for whom extra funding is received, due to social disadvantage, and those from ethnic minority backgrounds are below the averages. The percentage with a statement of special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) is above the average. Since the previous denominational inspection the religious education (RE) department has gained top RE Quality Mark status and the sixth form is well established. A voluntary chaplaincy team continues to support worship. A Christian Union is part of the wide-ranging extra-curricular activities on offer.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Accrington St Christopher Church of England High school as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The clear Christian vision of the senior management team (SMT), ably led by the headteacher and well supported by governors and the director of spirituality, ensures that the academy is a caring and inclusive community in which learners flourish as 'children of God'.
- Attainment is high and progress is very good. This clearly demonstrates the positive impact of the academy's ethos on learners' excellent behaviour and on strong, mutually respectful relationships.
- The annual spirituality day for each year group alongside their year and tutor group communion services contribute effectively to the religious, spiritual and moral development of learners.

#### Areas to improve

- Revisit the distinctively Christian and inclusive nature of the sixth form so that this underpinning provides a springboard for ongoing improvements and developments. This includes extending opportunities for general RE through the tutor programme and other initiatives.

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

The academy's Christian foundation is embedded across all aspects of its life including through the exemplary behaviour of learners and the strong relationships in evidence. It also leads to high aspirations. Attainment is above the national average. Pupils make at least good progress, from their various starting points. Overall, the attainment of boys is below that of girls. In response, there are appropriate long- and short-term plans firmly in place to close this gap. Students in the sixth form make strong progress and attain very well. Christian teaching expressly underpins, for example, the code of conduct and the strong pastoral support. This means that learners are happy and feel safe. Consequently, attendance is very high. Learners rightly recognise that their personal development and wellbeing is given a high priority and that this expressly supports their learning. In those few instances where attendance or behaviour gets in the way of learning, staff work compassionately to resolve issues. Consequently, fixed term exclusions are rare and there has been only one permanent exclusion in 10 years. RE and worship commendably support the academy's mission and its core Christian virtues of forgiveness, friendship, hope, justice, love, peace, trust and wisdom. These areas also effectively support the very good spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development opportunities provided. Charitable fundraising is expressly seen as an outworking of the academy's Christian basis and integral to the character development of learners. 'Caring for others and being aware of their needs is important not just for them but for the person doing the giving. It makes me a better person,' as a Year 10 pupil reflected. The Archbishop of York's Young Leaders scheme supports Year 9 pupils' SMSC development very well. Recognising that the grounds do not have a 'spiritual place', a group of pupils have initial plans to develop an outside prayer and reflection space. RE makes an excellent contribution to learners' respect for difference and diversity. It also helps them gain an appropriate understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural world-wide faith.

**The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding**

Daily worship is central to academy life. Accordingly, it contributes effectively to its Christian ethos and to the community's spiritual and religious development. The importance of worship in the sixth form is rightly recognised and is supplemented by 'thoughts for the day and week' which students regularly access electronically. Biblical material and an understanding of the importance of Jesus for Christians are fundamental to worship. This means that learners have a detailed knowledge of Christian belief and worship practices, including Anglican aspects. They have a good, age-appropriate appreciation of the Christian concept of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Daily worship is admirably extended through regular communion services and by an annual spirituality day for each year group. These days focus on topics of religious, spiritual and moral concern and always include a communion service. The Lord's Prayer is said regularly and along with the school prayer is included in pupils' yearly planners. This means that it is known and its importance for Christians aptly recognised. Learners know that prayer is 'communicating with God, speaking as well as listening'. They know that they can go to some staff or their chaplain or to some of their peers for prayer in difficult situations. Local clergy or church leaders commendably support worship by acting as voluntary year group chaplains. Worship is enhanced through regular singing of Christian hymns and songs. This is well led by a learners' choir and band. The programme themes and biblical focus is devised by the director of spirituality. A team of learners contribute to and support worship in class and for special services. However, they do not have sufficient opportunity to contribute regularly to planning worship. Learners have opportunity to evaluate worship and some suggestions made have been acted upon to refine the programme.

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

Standards are high and learners' progress is very good as evidenced by the examination success at both GCSE and A level. RE successfully fosters and nourishes learners in their spiritual journey. It does this, for example, by helping them to engage well with faith and consider how to become active citizens understanding and serving others. 'RE is important because it helps you think about life and living and helps you connect spiritually with God,' as a Year 11 pupil commented. This means that pupils enjoy RE and see its relevance to their own lives. For example, Year 8 sensitively address issues surrounding religious extremism and explore 'What happens when you die? Years 9 to 11 gain insights into religious perspectives on moral, ethical and social issues through their GCSE course. As one Year 10 pupil said, 'RE is really interesting and it makes you think about things deeply and in different ways'. The sixth form A level course in religious studies is excellently taught and addresses issues at a challenging level. This leads to increasing numbers choosing to follow the course. General RE in the sixth form supports students' personal development well with strong links to the worship programme and tutor periods. However, the time allocated to explicit general RE in the sixth form is limited. The RE curriculum is very well planned and delivered. Teaching is regularly outstanding and consistently good. Learners engage deeply in discussion, debate and through written tasks. Assessment is focused and encourages learners to improve and make progress. The RE department is competently led. Staff are well aware of local and national developments in RE and indeed often contribute well to some of these developments.

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

The academy is rightly proud of its Christian and inclusive foundation. Biblical teaching successfully and expressly drives forward its Christian service. Since the previous denominational inspection the mission statement has been refined and core Christian virtues have been introduced. These are encapsulated in the Jesus words that he came to, 'give life in all its fullness'. Thus the SMT and governors are clearly driven by the imperative to support both learners' academic and personal development. The recent restructuring of the governing body has led to establishing an ethos group and a wellbeing group. These indicate the academy's priorities and are impacting positively on its Christian vision and care for its learners and staff. Under the headteacher's effective leadership, well supported by senior colleagues, governors and the director of spirituality, there is a strategic vision for continued improvement and development. The Christian vision is well known and shared enthusiastically by staff at all levels as well as by learners and many parents. Staff induction and continued professional development is given a high priority. This includes some staff taking part in a regional diocesan course for developing leadership skills within the church school sector. The academy's regular monitoring and evaluation leads to accurate development planning impacting positively on supporting the needs of all. Consequently, learners flourish. The academy has rightly identified the need to refresh the sixth form's distinctively Christian and inclusive ethos in order to improve the effectiveness of its service further. Parents are well informed about their childrens' progress. They are effusive in their praise for the academy seeing its Christian foundation as being pivotal to this. Links with local Christian communities, are strong, especially through the work of the voluntary chaplains. This provides significant benefit in supporting the academy's life and work. Appropriate opportunities are taken for diocesan training as well as effective involvement in national developments, training and groups. Areas for improvement outlined in the previous denominational inspection report have been well addressed. RE and worship meet statutory requirements.