



CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL  
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

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

### St Aldhelm's Academy

Herbert Avenue  
Poole  
Dorset  
BH12 4HS

#### Diocese: Salisbury

Local authority: Poole  
Dates of inspection: 18/19 March 2014  
Date of last inspection: N/A  
School's unique reference number: 136206  
Headteacher: Cheryl Heron  
Inspector's name and number: Lyn Field NS151

### School context

St Aldhelm's is a smaller than average-sized secondary school. It opened as an academy in September 2010 jointly sponsored by the Diocese of Salisbury and the University of Bournemouth. The predecessor school was not a church school. The proportions of pupils with special educational needs or disabilities and of those eligible for free school meals are higher than in most schools. The proportion from minority ethnic backgrounds is lower than usually found with some pupils from settled traveller families. A major building project has just been completed.

### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Aldhelm's as a Church of England academy are satisfactory

- The vision and commitment of academy and church leaders in establishing the chaplaincy is making a significant impact on the whole community
- The Christian character of the academy is making a difference to the achievement and wellbeing of young people in this community particularly through the work of the chaplaincy
- The religious education adviser and governors working on behalf of the diocese have had a practical impact on the pace of improvement
- Relationships reflect Christian values and create a calm and orderly environment

### Areas to improve

- Develop efficient systems for gathering feedback on the impact of worship in order to understand where action is most needed
- Raise standards in religious education (RE) by embedding accurate methods of assessment and utilising the subject expertise of the chaplaincy team
- Ensure a cycle of self-evaluation is in place so that clear priorities are identified that link directly to the key issues facing the academy
- Revisit the Christian vision for the academy to recognise the progress made and in order to set new aspirations and provide clear benchmarks for governors in holding leaders to account

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

The Christian character of the academy has grown since it opened and it is now in the foreground rather than the background of daily life. The chaplaincy has been instrumental in this process and is more firmly established than perhaps has been recognised in some reviews. One student summed up the views of many in saying, 'Chaplaincy is not just about God, it is about all of your life'. Although students still struggle to explain the Biblical origins of the academy's values, they readily describe the respect and love that they experience and recognise these as Christian values. The values that now characterise relationships are several steps on from the original vision for the academy and this is now in need of urgent review. The overwhelming view of regular visitors to the school and members of the local community is that the Christian ethos has changed how young people behave and conduct themselves both during the school day and in the community. No-one is suggesting that the work is done but there are signs of transformation and stories are told of academy students impressing community leaders through their voluntary work in local events. Students are referred to as 'young people' and this reflects the attention that is given to their wider needs and development. The chaplains work alongside the Inclusion team. This has broadened the range of support available and has successfully helped many young people to stay engaged in their education. Senior leaders and governors are determined never to give up on the young people in their care. Their policy of forgiveness and fresh start is rooted in Gospel teaching and no-one is permanently excluded, although this is not explained in the Behaviour Policy. Fixed term exclusions, although high, are reducing through a wide range of strategies that include access to the chaplaincy and the Compass Centre (setting young people in the right direction). Young people are attending school more regularly, particularly those who have been persistent absentees but attendance still falls short of the national average. Although attitudes to learning are far more positive and results are set to improve again this year, achievement overall is still too low. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness of young people is developing through worship and lessons in philosophy and ethics. Students from a range of faith backgrounds attend the Christian Union and find it a helpful forum in which to raise difficult questions. Training for staff has prompted useful discussions about the place of religion in many topics and this is slowly raising students' understanding of faith issues.

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

A wide range of leaders deliver worship to different groups throughout the week. This has been an important factor in establishing the Christian character of the academy. The chaplain's vision is that the responsibility for embedding the Christian character will be shared at all levels (in the same way as Jesus commissioned his disciples) and this is happening in the context of worship. However, systems for monitoring the impact of worship have not developed quickly enough to inform leaders about the priorities for action. The involvement of young people in worship is growing. Although many lack confidence to read Bible passages and prayers, there is genuine appreciation from other students for the efforts they make. Young people appreciate the time for silent reflection and are learning the skills to make good use of this time because they are always given a clear focus for what they might think about. Themes for worship are taken seriously because they are followed through into the 'Thought for the Day' that happens in smaller groups throughout the week. These occasions are meaningful to adults and young people especially when teachers find time for further discussion. A particularly striking example of this was where a teacher talked about Joseph, the father of Jesus, in the context of being a step father and related this to his own experience and that of some students. As a result, young people recall these acts of worship many months later and it is possible to see how it has shaped the way they think about the big issues they face in life. All material prepared by the chaplaincy team for worship is rooted in Biblical teaching and consistently unpacks the meaning of specific texts. As a result, young people are slowly beginning to connect Christian values with the teachings of Jesus. Similarly, they are gaining an understanding of key Christian beliefs but their knowledge is not yet secure. Worship reflects the style of services that young people will experience in the local churches. Their broader understanding of Anglican traditions is being enriched by visits to a wider variety of churches including Salisbury Cathedral.

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

RE is seen as a core subject and is now known as PHET (Philosophy and ethics). This change has been well received by young people who perceive lessons to be more about the relevance of religion in contemporary society. All students continue the subject to GCSE and the vast majority follow the full course. This reflects the commitment of leaders to the Christian ethos of the academy. RE has been taught as part of humanities and consequently the subject knowledge of teachers has varied. Schemes of work have lacked a clear focus on religious concepts and inaccurate assessment led to grades predictions being far higher than actual results last year. The timely involvement of the diocesan RE adviser helped senior leaders to see where changes were urgently needed. A new subject leader is in place who brings a passion for the subject and significant experience in raising standards in RE. She has a clear vision for how the learning of all young people can shape their spiritual and moral development and has rapidly made changes to improve results. A much brighter picture now exists for PHET. Teaching is mostly good and improving. Lesson planning takes account of the difficulties young people face in reading and writing and teachers provide good models for them in using religious language. The chaplaincy team regularly support lessons and their subject expertise is helping to plug gaps in students' understanding. Every effort is being made through revision classes to prepare Y11 students for their exams this summer. They have very positive attitudes to learning, enjoy lessons and are confident they can reach their targets. Although assessment shows that results are almost certain to be better than last year, leaders acknowledge that these will still fall well short of other schools nationally. In younger year groups it is clear that the introduction of the 'Discovery' programme to support the existing Dorset Syllabus has improved teaching and progress is accelerating. Assessment data shows that achievement in PHET is on track to continue to improve year by year.

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

The initial vision for the academy set a clear and realistic approach to establishing its Christian character in the face of much local resistance. The determination and resilience of senior leaders has successfully established a culture where the place of Christian principles is recognised, accepted and valued. Central to this has been the establishment of a chaplaincy providing practical and spiritual support to both adults and young people. It is the result of a fruitful partnership with the Archdeacon and local churches to provide an ordained priest and team of part-time chaplains. There is now a seamless presence of the Church in the academy. This is a fine example of the Church serving local communities through its schools, something highlighted by the Chadwick Review (The Church School of the Future 2012).

Diocesan appointments have strengthened the governance of the school. The chair of governors shows great insight into how forces external to the school are affecting its progress and the nature of support now required. In September, a diocesan consultant (and governor) led a training session for staff. It proved to be a watershed in enabling them to see their role in supporting the Christian ethos, whatever their personal beliefs. The calibre of these governor appointments ensures that Christian principles regularly influence strategic decisions. The challenge and support of the diocesan RE adviser has made a significant impact on the curriculum. Some of these positive actions, however, have taken too long to happen and it is not clear how well they can now be sustained. Although a series of reviews and monitoring visits have been instigated, there is little cohesion in how they inform the Diocese, as sponsor, about what is working well and where support is most needed. Much work has gone into the academy's self-evaluation as a church academy and it paints an accurate picture of the progress that has been made. However, the systems in place for monitoring and gathering feedback do not form enough of a cycle to identify exactly what the next steps should be. The priorities for action do not directly engage with the main issues facing the academy, for example, the urgent need to raise standards. This is partly because the Chaplaincy Plan and the current Academy Development Plan are separate documents and do not reflect the massive impact that one has on the other. There is danger of the development of the Christian character losing momentum if these issues are not promptly addressed.