



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St Laurence Church of England Academy

Ashley Road
Bradford on Avon
BA15 1DZ

Previous SIAMS grade: Good

Current inspection grade: Good

Diocese: Salisbury

Local authority: N/A

Dates of inspection: 12 June 2015

Date of last inspection: February 2010

School's unique reference number: 137057

Headteacher: Fergus Stewart

Inspector's name and number: Jo Fageant 104

School context

St Laurence converted from a voluntary controlled comprehensive Church of England 11-18 school to become an academy in 2011. It has a dual foundation comprising both the Diocese of Salisbury and the Lord Fitzmaurice Educational Trust. The current headteacher took up post at the start of 2013. The proportions of students eligible for additional funding from the Pupil Premium and those with special educational needs are below the national average. Almost all students are of White British heritage.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Laurence as a Church of England school are good

- Values understood to be Christian drive a caring community which develops in students a growing confidence and sense of aspiration.
- The ethos of Christian care is demonstrated richly through the highly valued vertical tutorial system.
- Relations with local clergy add an explicit Christian presence in the school including modelling Christian friendship through the informal weekly engagement of the local Anglican vicar
- Religious education (RE) makes a significant impact on the Christian character of the school by developing understanding of the importance of belief and faith.

Areas to improve

- Develop a way to articulate an explicit Christian understanding of core values so this is consistently understood within the school and wider communities.
- Develop ways to evaluate the school's distinctive Christian character and its collective worship, using this understanding of values, so that future developments are based on robust information about responses from all members of the academy community.
- Explore a range of ways in which collective worship can be offered and use some of these ideas to ensure it is provided on a daily basis for the whole academy community.

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

The academy's interpretation of its Christian foundation in terms of *Care, Inspire, Succeed* is what consistently underpins its drive for the academic achievement, personal development and well-being of all students. This understanding gives rise to an ethos of care and high aspirations. As a consequence pupils make good progress and achieve high standards in most subjects. This understanding is also richly exemplified in the vertical tutorial system which is valued by everyone for the family feel that it engenders. It encourages senior students to accept responsibilities in relation to younger ones, for example, by giving up free time to provide lesson support and mentoring. New arrivals, whenever they arrive, appreciate the welcome and support they receive through this system and the examples set by older role models. The *head of house* and *assistant head of house* staffing structure ensures that the academic and personal needs of all students receive individualised attention. The commitment to care and success is also impressively demonstrated in the way the most vulnerable students and those needing additional learning support are provided for. The academy has a history of rising to the challenge of any difficulty to ensure a welcome for all children whose families want them to be included in mainstream education. Staff work tirelessly to understand individual needs and find solutions to barriers that otherwise would prevent these students from accessing the full range of opportunities the academy offers and achieving success in ways relevant to their future lives. A student who had difficulties in another school was keen to acknowledge that St Laurence had changed her for the better. Another example of the commitment to care and success is the maintenance of an inclusive entry policy to the sixth form so that study at that level is available to students who want it. Students recognise the commitment of their teachers saying they are always willing to help. They say they are inspired to 'grow as a person'. Provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of students, arising from its mission, is a strength of the academy. For example, for the last three years many students, about a quarter last year, have been inspired by taking part in interactive reflective activities in what the academy has called *Breathing Space*. Independent learning skills are developed through the *big idea* initiative in Year 7. A wide range of extra-curricular activities is enjoyed and trips broaden horizons and extend understanding. Talents and skills are celebrated. Activities undertaken in tutorial time engage students with important Christian values and themes that develop in them profound thinking as well as social action and charitable fundraising. RE also makes a rich contribution to SMSC development by engaging students in high level consideration of concepts relevant to their lives and helping them understand and have respect for religious and Christian diversity within and beyond their own community. The focus on *Care, Inspire and Succeed* means the academy has been successful in improving attendance and excluding very few students. Students are inspired to learn, achieve success and feel valued at St Laurence's. This was made clear by the head girl who explained that she had applied for the post because she wanted 'to pay back because the school has cared so well for me.' Whilst being successful in living out its mission, care, inspire and succeed are only understood as Christian aspirations in a very general sense. Some work has been done to link them with distinctive Christian values and Biblical teachings and these feature in collective worship. However, an explicitly, well developed Christian interpretation of this mission is not widely understood.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is satisfactory

The once a week collective worship is acknowledged as an important and valuable aspect of school life. Themes are chosen carefully by the academy's spiritual development group which comprises some staff and local clergy from a number of denominations. Each of the year's six themes is developed in a variety of ways that make a strong contribution to spiritual and moral development. Worship is often led by members of the clergy team and usually includes Biblical material which contributes to students' understanding of the key messages and values. They develop an understanding of the Church year through the celebration in worship of major Christian festivals. They also encounter Christian beliefs about God and Jesus, a variety of

worship styles and have opportunities to pray. The decisions to use the auditorium of the neighbouring music centre and embed a tradition of silent entry ensure a reflective atmosphere respected by everyone. The space is, however, not conducive to an interactive format so students, other than those who contribute richly by playing music during the gathering and dismissal, are passive participants. Themes are, however, explored further in tutorial time and students and staff recognise that they give rise to profound thinking and charitable and social action. Monitoring of the weekly worship helps ensure its quality and continuing improvement. However, there is no systematic attempt to evaluate the responses to and impact of worship by engaging students in the process. Although students engage actively with key themes and values in tutorial activities they have no opportunities to lead what would be understood as worship. This, together with the failure to provide worship every day, is largely due to a very limited understanding of the wide variety of creative forms in which worship could be offered.

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

Leaders are explicit about the Christian foundation of St Laurence Academy and when the current headteacher took up his post they reviewed the mission statement in order to ensure there was a shared understanding of it. Three key words (*Care, Inspire, Succeed*) capture its essence and drive policy and practice. They have been linked with Christian values and Biblical themes which are set out on the website and shared with students in collective worship. Clergy help to strengthen a specifically Christian understanding of the values and develop an awareness of the application of Christian beliefs in different contexts. Leaders place great emphasis on the importance of collective worship which is monitored and supported to ensure high quality. Despite this there is no systematic engagement with students in order to evaluate their responses. A recent audit of provision for SMSC development, carried out by the spiritual development group, confirmed that these aspects of experience and learning are addressed in all areas of the curriculum. The tutorial system and values related activities undertaken in this context also richly support these elements. This engagement develops profound thinking, good behaviour and easy relationships. Commitment to *Care, Inspire, Succeed* results in an effective system of tracking students' progress to ensure high standards are maintained and improved and appropriate support and challenge are provided. This has enabled gaps in the achievement of different groups of students to be lessened. Leaders' decision to invest in non-teaching assistant heads of house means there are staff who specifically have time to understand and respond promptly to needs as they arise. Accurate self-evaluation has resulted in the introduction of *big question* learning in Year 7 to encourage independent learning skills and the concept of *growth mindset* to inspire attitudes of aspiration and success. Staff at all levels acknowledge that their professional development and personal well-being needs are catered for both in house and through externally provided courses. This benefits the academy as a whole because skills are developed and morale is high. St Laurence is a place where people enjoy working. The Christian distinctiveness of the academy is enriched by good relations with local churches and clergy, a number of whom lead collective worship which each time involves every morning of a given week. One vicar, who is also a governor, models Christian friendship with staff and students through informal visits during one lunch time in most weeks. Students also gain a good understanding of Christianity through RE not least of its diversity through an investigation in Year 7 of local churches. Leaders support the development of the subject and have recently increased time allocated to it so that in their study for a full GCSE course all students can achieve results which appropriately reflect their abilities. Whilst leaders have a clear understanding of how the policies and practices of the academy are informed by Christian values they have been cautious about making this link explicit. Concern to ensure and maintain the strongly inclusive, caring family ethos has prevented a sharing, other than in collective worship, of how Christian teachings inspire the way things are done. However, there has been no systematic investigation and evaluation of the extent to which this perceived difficulty represents a problem in reality.

