



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

The Gryphon School

Bristol Road Sherborne Dorset DT9 4EQ

Previous SIAMS grade: Outstanding

Current inspection grade: Outstanding

Diocese: Salisbury

Local authority: N/A

Dates of inspection: 2 December 2015

Date of last inspection: November 2010

School's unique reference number: 138471

Head teacher: Steve Hillier

Inspector's name and number: Jo Fageant 104

School context

This larger than average secondary school is the only maintained secondary school in Sherborne. It draws students from a wider area, some of whom join the large sixth form. There are fewer than the national average of students eligible for free school meals, diagnosed as having special education needs (SEN) or speaking English as an additional language. Most students are of White British heritage. The school became an academy on 2012. There is a church space at the heart of the campus used by St Paul's Church.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of The Gryphon School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- Values described and promoted as explicitly Christian, as well as relevant to all, have a profound impact on relationships, attitudes and behaviour throughout the school.
- The Christian care of leaders for every individual results in detailed interrogation of data to inform strategies which address the learning needs of students and professional development of staff.
- This Christian care looks beyond academic and professional issues to pay supportive attention to personal and spiritual wellbeing through systems of excellent pastoral care.
- The high profile of and respect for the chaplain is a strong demonstration of the school's Christian foundation and character.

Areas to improve

- To inform the future planning and development, ensure that the evaluation of worship involves all staff and students and uses questions that focus on the impact of worship.
- Explore a variety of interpretations of collective worship in order to develop strategies that will make it possible for worship to happen in a wider range of contexts with consistency across the school.

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

A consistently expressed view is that the school's Christian values are firmly embedded and influence relationships, attitudes and behaviours. As a consequence, there is widespread acknowledgement that there is a welcoming, friendly and supportive atmosphere throughout the school. Teachers observe that behaviour inconsistent with these values is often challenged

by students themselves. There is very little bullying of any description and students and parents report that any incidents are dealt with speedily and effectively, some recognising that their management is informed by Christian values. Students say that the Christian foundation of the school is 'not hidden' but 'not forced on you'. They readily report that all are welcomed and people are not judged for their beliefs. However, a respect for and understanding of diversity, supported by the religious education (RE) curriculum, results in an openness and willingness to discuss and explore issues of faith. The chaplain, held in high regard by everyone, demonstrates a Christian approach to relationships and the school's values. She sends cards, which are appreciated and include a clear Christian message, to all Year 7 students just before they join the school and older students before public examination time. She is valued as 'someone you can trust', 'someone who listens' and, as such, makes an important and defining contribution to the pastoral care provided for staff as well as students. The outcome of this is seen in above average attendance levels and below average exclusions. Christian care for every individual means successfully tailored approaches to learning and support are created. A nurture group in Years 7 and 8 is taught by primary specialists who praise the school for the care it provides. Students who have been part of it speak of the difference the learning support centre has made for them. Apart from for a very few students with particular issues, academic results are in line with or better than national averages and students appreciate the efforts and support of their teachers. The importance given to spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development means these are areas of strength. Good examples are found in the school's engagement with the United Nations' *Rights Respecting* initiative and the mindfulness course accessed by many students and especially valued in preparation for examinations. Students engage with the student council structures of the school to make a difference. The school council is chaired by student governors who take issues raised to governors and contribute to their meetings. RE makes a strong contribution to students' SMSC development by providing a forum in which different ideas about faith and belief are explored, developing in them an understanding of diversity within Christianity around the world and of other religions. They all study for a GCSE examination and some continue their studies in the sixth form. They value the subject for the ways in which it challenges their thinking and prepares them for living in a society of mixed beliefs, views and cultures. Recognising that attributes other than academic success are very important the school provides a rich variety of opportunities, for example, in drama, art, music and sport. The breadth of achievement is recognised and rewarded in celebrations for each year group.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Great importance is accorded to collective worship. Those times named as 'collective worship' are always distinctively Christian in character, drawing on biblical teachings and emphasising the importance of Jesus to Christians. The annual evaluation survey reveals that students recognise and show understanding of how these times explore all of the school's values from a distinctively Christian perspective. Even students who are less interested in Christianity from a personal point of view readily acknowledge that the themes explored are engaging and relevant and often inspire social and charitable action. They keep the chosen Christian values alive and in evidence within the school, supporting spiritual and moral development. Traditional Christian language of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is used in prayers and the celebration of Christian festivals and is familiar to students. They have opportunities to contribute to planning; for example writing prayers for this term's carol service in Sherborne Abbey. There are also celebrations of achievement for each year group which include traditional elements of Christian worship. These sorts of occasions, a variety of worship leaders and the use of music, images and film develop in students a familiarity with a diversity of styles of Christian worship. In response to students' suggestions leaders have developed styles which involve interaction and participation. Although not all students are enthusiastic about explicitly Christian worship they recognise that the school 'does not force religion on us'. In addition to the times the school names as 'collective worship', which happen once a fortnight for each year group, there are year group 'assemblies' and tutor periods which provide opportunities to explore the 'thought for the fortnight'. The chaplain creates

material which can be used in these sessions. However, there is no whole school approach to its use or evaluation of its use and impact. Inconsistencies across the school in these contexts means that worship, in any of the ways it might be understood, is not provided on a daily basis for all students.

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

Leaders, including governors, have a very clear, consistently promoted, understanding of how the school is distinctive in its Christian character whilst being entirely inclusive as the only maintained secondary school in the town. There is a focus group of governors which specifically focuses on this aspect of the school's development. The distinctiveness is firmly embedded through a selection of values. Through the work of senior leaders, the chaplain and foundation governors in particular, these are interpreted from an explicitly Christian perspective. They are understood to be important in the development of students as responsible citizens who have an understanding of social diversity. They create a harmonious learning community in which every individual is valued. A Christian belief in the worth of each person leads to detailed and accurate analysis of information about students' progress and learning needs, the professional development needs of staff and the wellbeing of all. As a consequence, leaders have a thorough understanding, in all aspects of school life, of strengths and areas needing development. This means effective strategies and interventions are put in place to support learning and wellbeing resulting in good or outstanding outcomes against almost all measures. Appropriate training opportunities are provided for staff. A good example is support with analysis of data and middle leadership skills provided for teachers new to leadership responsibilities in RE, thereby supporting their professional development and growth. The focus for development points set out in the last SIA(M)S inspection report have been addressed. An example is how attention has been given to ways in which the values contribute to and are supported by all areas of learning and extra-curricular opportunities. The provision of mindfulness training for students, staff and parents richly supports spiritual development. The chaplain undertakes an annual evaluation of collective worship with staff and students which has ensured themes are relevant. However, questions used in this process focus too much on what is provided rather than the impact it has. This evaluation only addresses times which, using a narrow understanding, are specifically called 'collective worship' by the school. There is no strategic planning, monitoring or evaluation from a whole school perspective of whether, or what, worship might be provided in other contexts on other days. As a consequence, the school fails to meet its legal obligation to provide some form of collective worship for all students every day. Recognising the need, there is a plan in place to review collective worship throughout the school. Involvement with the local community is strong. Student and staff initiated social and charitable action addresses local, national and global issues. Members of St Paul's Church, which is sited on the school campus, support students, staff and the whole school community in a variety of ways. For some this has led to involvement in the church. The school's Christian outreach enables the Little Gryphons nursery on site to make use of facilities such as the school's library with weekly visits for a story-reading session. The school also actively engages with the Town Council in relation to local issues.

SIAMS report December 2015 The Gryphon School, Sherborne, DT9 4EQ