

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

The Venerable Bede Church of England Academy

Tunstall Bank, Sunderland, SR2 0RX

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Diocese

Durham

Previous SIAS inspection grade

Outstanding

Date of academy conversion

January 2013 – Single converter academy

Name of multi-academy trust

The Dayspring Trust – November 2014

Dates of inspection

29 & 30 June 2017

Date of last inspection

March 2012

Type of school and unique reference number

139184

Executive Headteacher

Gill Booth

Head of School

David Airey

Inspector's name and number

Fiona Ashton 860

School context

The Venerable Bede CE Academy, originally a single converter academy, became the lead school of The Dayspring Trust in November 2014. This includes one other secondary church academy. The previous headteacher is now the executive headteacher and the head of school is the former deputy headteacher. There have also been changes to the leadership of RE and collective worship since the previous inspection. The overwhelming majority of students are White British with a significant proportion (27%) supported by pupil premium funding. Despite falling rolls locally, the academy remains oversubscribed. Ofsted judged the academy Good in May 2016.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of The Venerable Bede Church of England Academy as a Church of England school are outstanding

- As a result of the deep theological understanding of Christian values that is promoted, the academy is a community that cares about each other and nurtures everyone. This stems from the visionary and generous leadership of the executive headteacher, the Head of School and their senior colleagues.
- Collective worship is carefully planned and exceptional for the impact that it has upon the lives of the whole community. It is inclusive and enables individuals to build relationships with each other and God.
- Religious education (RE) engages and challenges young people so that they think deeply about a range of beliefs and practices. This promotes pupils' academic success and their significant respect for Christianity and other faiths.
- The needs of each pupil are carefully considered in the light of the academy's motto 'Soar to the heights together'. As a result, decisions are made in the very best interests of the individual so that he/she is enabled to succeed as a child of God in, and beyond, the academy community.

Areas to improve

- Develop opportunities for pupils to engage in planning collective worship, so that it continues to enrich and empower the spiritual journey of the academy community.
- In RE, ensure that new programmes of study are challenging and promote pupils' religious literacy so that they use religious terminology with accuracy to express their knowledge and understanding.

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

Jesus and his example are at the heart of this academy. This is evident when you read upon entering the building that 'Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.' Mark 9:37. Parents appreciate this as a clear indication of the way their child will be treated. In conjunction with the school motto 'Soar to the heights together', it embodies the approach that is taken to ensuring the social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of the whole community. Both staff and pupils value that they are journeying in partnership. This builds upon, and draws strength, from the academy's overt sense of being a Christian family. The knowledge and understanding of the potential, and needs, of each pupil ensures that he/she is nurtured as a child of God and therefore flourishes. Christian values intrude passionately upon the academy's approach to inclusion. Forgiveness and reconciliation are at the core of the behaviour policy. A member of staff explained that whenever behaviour leads to a conversation about forgiveness, pupils, because they understand the Biblical basis of forgiveness, respond with greater sincerity. Relationships are respectful, honest and warm; they are modelled by all adults and expected equally of adults and pupils. The Learning Zone provides significant support for pupils with specific needs. It deftly combines advancing academic progress with pastoral support and behaviour management and so, learners thrive. Key Christian values are used to reflect the priorities for year groups. For example, 'joy' for Year 7 at their new beginnings and 'perseverance' for Year 11 as they tackle the demands of GCSEs. Pupils know and understand the appropriateness of the value, how it applies to the way the academy supports them and also the theology that underpins it.

The recent dip in academic outcomes for pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 was largely because pupils admitted mid key stage had underachieved prior to entry. Where gaps in pupils' attainment exist, the academy has taken decisive action to address the causes. The new three year Key Stage 4 curriculum enables pupils to learn more deeply and successfully. Gaps in achievement between groups of pupils are now narrowing at a much faster pace than previously. RE contributes significantly to the wider Christian distinctiveness of the academy through modelling Christian values and proactive support for collective worship. The subject and its teachers have a high profile throughout the academy. The department ensures Key Stage 4 outcomes that are consistently among the best in the academy and frequently better than other core areas. RE results compare favourably with national comparison data. It is widely understood that pupils need to attend regularly and punctually to succeed. The academy's creative approach to improving attendance by linking it to the season of Lent and 'doing something extra' indicates how the Christian character impacts throughout the academy. Attendance has improved and is in line with national averages. Staff and a small group of Year 10 pupils visit an Anglican community in Lesotho each year. This, together with support of local and national charities, ensures that throughout the academy there is a mature appreciation of cultural and spiritual diversity.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is exceptional. Reflecting the liturgical calendar, it engages the whole community in recognising Christian values both theologically and as a practical way of living. The academic year commences with all members of staff celebrating the Eucharist at a local parish church. Consequently, staff acknowledge feeling included and of having an understanding of the importance of prayer and worship to the academy community. As with staff, when pupils celebrate the Eucharist, the liturgy invites each person to receive God's blessing. As a result the celebration unites the academy. Similarly, events such as Prayer Spaces and academy worship in local churches and the minster ensure that the community grows in its appreciation of the breadth of worship in the Anglican tradition. Use of the Anglican liturgy for formal worship consolidates the community's understanding of its place within the church. Through its strong Biblical foundations, worship enables pupils to have a better understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Worship is carefully and collaboratively planned by senior leaders, the head of RE and the associate ordained chaplains. Worship is engaging, age appropriate and introduces pupils, many of whom have little previous experience of worship, to the person of Jesus and his values and impact. Through a buddy system, support from the head of RE and the associate chaplains, staff are encouraged in their leadership and facilitating of worship. Therefore, it is a rich, empowering and sustaining experience for all. Worship is rigorously monitored and evaluated. Staff and pupils are involved in the process. It always has a focus on enabling adults and pupils to further their relationship with God. A member of staff explained how academy worship brought him from a position of 'indifference to a developing relationship with God'. Likewise, a Year 9 pupil explained the lasting impact of Prayer Spaces as 'you feel more complete because you know that God is with you'. Associate chaplains are a significant strength of collective worship provision. Their remit extends to providing pastoral care of the community both on an ongoing basis, and in times of particular need. One chaplain described this as being 'a visible and approachable support for everyone'. Planning for worship ensures pupils and staff experience worship in different settings and groups while reflecting in different ways upon the common theme of the week. Excellent worships on the value of trust, encouraged pupils to reflect on Isaiah 40:31, lean on God, think about the value of trust and consider who they might trust most. In particular, form group and Bistro worships encourage pupils to participate in confidently leading worship. However, pupils' participation in planning worship is underdeveloped. Pupils' reflection journals are used respectfully and honestly to capture the impact of the worship.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

RE is impressively led and managed and makes a significant impact upon the Christian distinctiveness of the school. It challenges pupils to think deeply and independently about Christianity and other faiths and is a strength of the curriculum. RE, studied to GCSE by all pupils, is allocated adequate time and resources to deliver an exciting and engaging curriculum to students. As a result, pupils enjoy and value their learning in RE. It is taught by RE specialists who use their excellent subject knowledge to deepen pupils' understanding of Christianity and other faiths. In lessons, pupils listen to the opinions of others and know that their own opinions are equally valued. They tackle 'big questions' with determination and maturity. Pupils are able to do this because the teaching in their lessons is always good and frequently outstanding. As a consequence, pupils get involved in their lessons and thrive academically. Members of the department make excellent use of Philosophy for Children approaches to stretch pupils in their learning and understanding of themes within RE. In a Year 9 GCSE lesson on the theme of Ramadan, pupils, showing a deep respect for the faith and practices of Islam, asked astute and challenging questions because they are continually encouraged to do so. One pupil commented that she loves RE because 'you are made to think in depth and everyone's opinion is important'. In another GCSE lesson, pupils praised the confidence that they gain from knowing that they are expected to articulate their ideas and discuss them in a respectful atmosphere. In Year 7, a pupil made a clear link between the concept of Christian stewardship and the commandment to 'love your neighbour'.

Pupils are highly appreciative of support that they receive. They like that their work is regularly assessed and that they know how to make improvements. Pupils recognise that everything builds towards examination success at GCSE. This nurtures pupils' confidence. The subject leader, working collaboratively with the deputy headteacher, monitors standards in RE regularly, rigorously, with insight and in the light of national data for RE. The department is accurate when it assesses pupils' work because it moderates work externally. As a result, teachers know that very good progress is being achieved. When underachievement is identified, interventions occur swiftly and are highly effective. Pupils are proud of, and enjoy, their learning in RE.

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

This is an academy with a big vision to support the community that it serves. Academy leaders are unapologetic in promoting Christian values. They are energetic and enthusiastic in the way that they share the vision with staff, parents and pupils. Academy directors, and the executive headteacher, are clear that every decision and action is for the positive benefit of pupils and rooted in the mission and values of the Anglican church. They are determined that the Venerable Bede offers to pupils and adults the 'opportunity to be part of a Christian community'. They are never complacent and make excellent use of thorough, critical and inclusive self-evaluation to plan strategically for continuous improvement. The school motto, regularly reviewed, is retained as 'Soar to the heights together' because it continues to articulate the aspirations, not only of adults for pupils, but of adults for each other, and pupils for their peers.

Christian values underpin policies, are publicised on the website and made explicit in the application process for posts. You understand at once that membership of this community demands that you respect and model its values. New staff commented that you immediately sense that you are part of a team and that Christian values shape everything. The executive headteacher and head of school are clear that by making the academy's vision and values 'explicit at times of calm, it sustains you in times of turbulence'. This is a leadership team where servant, ethical leadership is deeply embedded. Within the Dayspring Trust, and as a member of the local teaching schools alliance, leaders help to train future teachers and leaders for church schools. They ardently promote an understanding of what it is to be part of a church academy. All staff regularly undertake Christian distinctiveness training. This renews the appreciation of the academy's vision and priorities and promotes the sense of collaboration that is a strength of the staff team. The impact of the academy's Christian distinctiveness can be seen in the adoption of its values by a local non-church school. Partnerships with the local worshipping community are robust. In this, the role of school leaders in nurturing the associate chaplaincy model is exemplary. The academy is a visible presence in the local community because it engages with traditions such as marching as miners once did and attending key church services such as Remembrance Sunday. Relationships with parents are honest and supportive. Many see the academy as a vital partner in raising their child.

One parent commented that 'I cannot praise this school highly enough for all that it has done to help my child and support my family.' Another spoke of being 'overwhelmed by the compassion and care and attention to the needs of each child that is shown'. Yet another spoke of how their child 'walked through the doors in Year 7 and has never looked back'. Pupils become responsible, respectful young adults, in a large part because this Christian community has nurtured them to be so. Pupil responsibility roles include School Council representatives, prefects, subject ambassadors, mentors, and anti-bullying ambassadors. The process by which roles are appointed to, and the roles themselves, provide for pupils an understanding of democracy, success and disappointment and prepares them for life. The academy directors and senior leaders, through appointments, training and example make excellent provision so that RE and collective worship meet statutory requirements. As a result, the community understands what it is to be Christian. The Venerable Bede provides an inspiring experience. 'I am meant to be here' is how a member of staff acknowledged this.