

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Aidan's Church of England High school

Oatlands Drive, Harrogate, North Yorkshire HG2 8JR

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Leeds
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Date of academy conversion	Single academy 2011, Multi-academy September 2014
Name of multi-academy trust	Yorkshire Causeway Schools Trust
Date/s of inspection	18 & 19 January 2018
Date of last inspection	October 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	11-18 academy 137139
Headteacher	John Wood
Inspector's name and number	Fiona Ashton 860

School context

St Aidan's is a significantly larger than average 11-18 high school. It serves Harrogate and outlying districts. A single converter academy in August 2011, in 2014, together with six primary schools (not all of whom are church schools) it formed the Yorkshire Causeway Schools Trust. The sixth form is shared with St John Fisher Catholic School. Almost all students are White British and speak English as their first language. The part-time chaplain, although an established member of the teaching staff, is relatively new to chaplaincy. She retains some teaching commitments. St Aidan's is the lead school of the Yorkshire Teaching School Alliance.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Aidan's Church of England High School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The exceptional leadership of the headteacher, supported by senior colleagues and governors that has allowed the school to flourish in a manner appropriate to an outstanding Church of England school.
- Relationships and outcomes that support the well-being of the whole school community. These are deeply embedded in the Christian values of love, trust, respect, joy and forgiveness.
- Religious studies (RS) that is robust in its leadership, teaching, content and assessment. As a result students value their learning and apply it to the moral and ethical choices which they make.
- Students who grow in their appreciation of each other because of the Christian example and guidance that they receive from the adults who support them.

Areas to improve

- To continue developing teaching and learning in RS in order to sustain outstanding outcomes while responding to the curriculum changes being externally required especially at Key Stages 4 and 5.
- To enhance further spiritual opportunities of the school community by creating spaces for prayer and worship that are accessible and support individuals in their relationship with God and each other.

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

St Aidan's is a community where students achieve exceptional outcomes. Academic achievement, especially at Key Stage 4 is well above average. The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum with RS at its core. For a minority of students for whom wholly academic learning is inappropriate, the school makes excellent alternative provision. Equally important to the school is the social, moral, spiritual and cultural progress (SMSC) of each student. In this community where each individual is recognised as a unique child of God, all success is underpinned by an overt and utterly distinctive Christian understanding that 'From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be expected' (Luke 12:48). The headteacher is determined that both the school and the wider community understand that all decisions are bound by this and the command to 'love your neighbour as you love yourself'.

Attendance is excellent, students enjoy being in school. For the very small minority for whom attendance is an issue, the school works unstintingly to effect positive change. Exclusions are a rarity and a last resort.

Relationships are a palpable strength of this inclusive school. They are respectful at all levels and, as a result, behaviour is exemplary in this large and vibrant community. Those who might be vulnerable are nurtured so that they can both contribute and achieve to their full potential. Students speak of 'very welcoming teachers' who 'offer great support both for your work and for things you want to try'. A sixth form student described the school as offering 'unconditional love'. Students across the board are proud that theirs is a school where you can speak to anyone irrespective of year group. When issues occur, they are swiftly dealt with. Students appreciate the strong sense of justice and reconciliation that adults apply to issues and conflict resolution. They understand these concepts in their theological contexts. Parents appreciate that the strong Christian ethos that the school promotes is a reality for their children. It leads to staff going to what one parent described as 'beyond anything that I could have expected' and another as 'astonishing'. They see this as emanating from Christian kindness and compassion. Equally appreciated is the exceptional level of support and guidance that is offered to students through the school's careers provision which is nationally recognised as excellent.

St Aidan's is a richly inclusive school. While its strong Christian witness shines through, those adults and students of other or no faith feel equally part of the community. Students are enabled to appreciate other cultures and faiths through music, art and drama. There is an extensive range of trips, clubs and activities that support students' understanding of culture and diversity. The school's international links with projects in Tanzania and Peru as part of their engagement with Zawadi and with a secondary school in Sri Lanka enrich students understanding of Christianity as a culturally diverse world faith. Equally, however, students are encouraged to support charities and organisations that improve the lives of the local and national population. RS through its support for fundraising, collective worship and a range of enrichment activities makes a very significant contribution to the Christian character of the school.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is a binding strength of this church school. Carefully planned, it reflects the liturgical calendar and allows the community to respond to current issues and events. Students are consulted about worship and their ideas and opinions are used constructively. They share in the evaluation of worship. The chaplain, leadership team and local clergy ensure that worship is relevant and inspiring. The appointment of the committed and creative lay chaplain enhances the students' understanding of the breadth of the Anglican tradition because a greater number of local clergy now visit the school and lead worship. The richness of the liturgical calendar fosters formal celebrations such as Harvest Festival and Christingle. The Ash Wednesday service is part of the worship tradition of the school. Students understand the theological purpose and importance of the different forms of worship. Communion is celebrated weekly in school for tutor groups. Thus students share in the Eucharist and are invited to recognise how worship conveys the message of God's saving grace through different styles. Students particularly value that collective worship is age sensitive and helps them understand how to follow Jesus and improve their relationship with God.

Each day students gather to worship as a tutor group, using the 'Thought for the Day' resources prepared by the chaplain, or as a year group. This is very well led by senior and middle leaders. In a Year 13 worship, students reflected carefully on their current anxieties and pressures and the biblical instruction 'do not worry'. Year 9 students engaged fully in playing 'Simon says...' before settling to think about what God says to us. Students lead worship with considerable confidence and autonomy. This was an area for development following the previous inspection. The Year 13 Senate encouraged Year 8 to be aware of the dangers and distractions of social media by considering the benefits of 'laying up treasures in heaven' (Matthew 6:19-21). Music enriches worship in a myriad of ways. Aidan's Flame, and the school choirs, orchestra and ensembles encourage singing as praise. They enliven worship. The dedicated school chapel is well used for worship, reflection, choral praise and as a hub for Christian groups. A local church also meets in it as does the parents' prayer group that is vigorous in its spiritual support of the school community. Rock Solid for Key Stage 3 students, and the flourishing Christian Union for Years 11 to 13, are examples of how students are helped in their spiritual development and given opportunities for personal prayer. Students like that all worship always 'leaves you with something to think about' and parents value the school as a safe place for their children to share their faith and as a place where faith and diversity are celebrated.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Students achieve exceptional academic standards in RS that are far in excess of local and national comparators. All students at KS3 and 4 are able to participate in the RS curriculum because they are taught by talented and passionate subject specialists. Students' joy of learning in RS is born as soon as they join the school because they are expected to think and respond to their challenging learning opportunities deeply and creatively. A Year 7 mixed ability group made excellent progress by working together to find the meaning of new vocabulary linked to the study of Judaism. In a Year 9 lesson, the theme of temptation and choices was linked to current student priorities in selecting Key Stage 4 option subjects. The rigour of learning and pace was particularly apparent in a Year 13 lesson where the complexity and depth of students thinking and reflection was inspiring. Students appreciate that their teachers care and that they notice if someone's not engaged and respond to it immediately. They appreciate that their teachers have high aspirations for them and are always available to support them in their learning and their personal development. This is because relationships in RS are excellent and teaching and learning is always good and frequently outstanding. Students know how to make progress because assessment of their work is pertinent.

The collaboration that the head of department and her colleagues engage in through her role as a specialist leader in education (SLE), as well as, through the shared sixth form means that she, and consequently her department, are at the forefront of developments locally and nationally. She skilfully enables and develops reflective practise within her team for the benefit of St Aidan's learners. She is relentless in her pursuit of a rich and appropriate experience for students. This she achieves through careful curriculum choices that at Key Stage 4 allow for a modicum of student choice in course selection. At Key Stage 3 the curriculum allows students to develop a very good understanding of Christianity as well as other faiths. Key Stage 5 students study philosophy and ethics with significant enjoyment and value the relevance and potential impact this will have upon their decision making in adulthood.

Students recognise that their teachers make learning relevant and teachers encourage students to take their learning beyond the classroom through visits to places of worship so that they understand the broader culture of Christianity and other faiths. Equally, the department's teaching of sexual relationships at Key Stage 4 is such that it supports the schools ethos and provides a safe environment for students to ask questions in the certain knowledge that their question will be acknowledged and addressed. Through sharing in the leadership of collective worship and undertaking reading and Eucharistic ministry during school communions, members of the RS department provide a living witness to Christian values, beliefs and practices.

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

Governors are justifiably proud of this flourishing and Christ-centred school and of the manner in which it nurtures young people for lives of spiritual and emotional well-being as well as academic and creative excellence. They are robust in the challenge that they present to the school community but equally they are keen to celebrate the strengths and successes of this school that one governor describes as 'an extraordinary place'. Staff welcome the contribution that governors make and their finely balanced match of support and challenge. They appreciate that they know governors and have an opportunity to share their work with them. This is the culmination of a robust and encompassing process of school self-evaluation that involves all members of the community. It leads to development planning that is shaped by the school's Christian distinctiveness and mission. The school's success and Christian ethos are universally attributed to the strong leadership of the headteacher. He speaks with a passion for the welfare and future of the community that emanate from his own deeply held Christian beliefs. Parents appreciate the warm manner in which the headteacher speaks of staff at the school and see this warmth, respect and sense of value mirrored in the way in which their children are treated. There is a real sense that everyone is special and yet equal because they are a child of God. The appointment of a trained counsellor from a Christian organisation indicates the successful care that senior and pastoral leaders apply to supporting the emotional needs of the community in a manner appropriate to a Church of England high school.

This is a school that is on a continuous journey. As the lead school in both the Yorkshire Causeway Schools Trust and the local teaching school alliance (TSA), it promotes opportunity and excellence for all. Its Christian foundation is so deeply embedded and yet continually nurtured that it ensures that all that is unique and special about St Aidan's is constantly protected. This is evident in the vision and mission statements that governors and senior leaders have recently written but not yet shared widely with the school community. St Aidan's has an excellent tradition of growing church school leaders both for their own community and for promotion to other schools. Through the TSA they engage excellent teachers by providing them with outstanding initial training. Staff appreciate that they are valued and their development needs are prioritised. Students have a strong voice and are given opportunities to lead, particularly as sixth formers. The school meets its statutory obligations for RS and collective worship, both of which make an exceptional contribution to the community. The measure of the school's success as a Church of England high school is captured by a parent who states 'this school and its ethos allow God to come in and transform lives'.

SIAMS report January 2018 Sty Aidan's Church of England High School, Oatlands Drive, Harrogate HG2 8JR