

## Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

<b>St James' Church of England Primary Academy</b>			
<b>Address</b>	High Street, Isle of Grain, Rochester, Kent, ME3 0BS		
<b>Date of inspection</b>	8 October 2019	<b>Status of school</b>	Academy – The Medway Anglican Schools Trust – inspected as Voluntary Aided
<b>Diocese</b>	Rochester	<b>URN</b>	138974
<b>Overall Judgement</b>	<b>How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Additional Judgements</b>	<b>The impact of collective worship</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Good</b>
	<b>The effectiveness of religious education (RE)</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>School context</b>			
<p>St James' is a primary academy with 142 pupils on roll and 34 in the on-site nursery. The majority of pupils are White British. The proportion who speak English as an additional language is well below national averages. The proportion of pupils considered to be disadvantaged is above national averages, as are those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). In the previous five years, the academy has experienced significant turbulence including several changes of leadership and other staff as well as a serious fire. It joined its current Trust in January 2019.</p>			
<b>The school's Christian vision</b>			
<p>'We grow together through God' is our school vision. It is deeply rooted in the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13.31-32). In all aspects of our school life, we give our pupils opportunities to grow personally, morally and spiritually. We want our pupils to be ambitious and to grow into lifelong learners. Our associated values that underpin our vision are: courage, respect, self-control, perseverance, hope and trust.</p>			
<b>Key findings</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The senior leadership team is stabilising and growing the academy's life and work. The focus on implementing its newly introduced vision, based on the Parable of the Mustard Seed, is emphasising well both personal and academic growth. A very recently introduced revised and creative curriculum is enhancing provision.</li> <li>• The Medway Anglian Schools' Trust (MAST) is providing good oversight and the local governing body is supportive. However, vacancies on the local governing body mean that formal and rigorous monitoring of school developments, including of the impact of its Christian distinctiveness, is less well developed.</li> <li>• The academy's vision and associated values are effective in ensuring that pupils are making good progress, and pupils' attitudes and behaviour are steadily improving.</li> <li>• Collective worship and religious education (RE) are rightly recognised as being of central importance to the school's life and work.</li> </ul>			
<b>Areas for development</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that the newly introduced vision is embedded and consistently drives growth across all areas of school life.</li> <li>• Fill vacancies on the local governing body in order to enhance its effectiveness in systematically supporting, monitoring and evaluating school life, including the impact of the Christian vision and associated values.</li> <li>• Embed the very recently introduced creative curriculum, ensuring that its global citizenship and sustainable developments aspects are well linked with approaches and opportunities to also deepen learning in RE.</li> </ul>			

**How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?**  
**Inspection findings**

Since the previous denominational inspection, there has been a period of significant instability. This has included weak academic standards and substantial staffing changes. Also, there was a serious fire. This led to most pupils having to be educated in a school some miles away, whilst refurbishment and rebuilding was completed. In addition, the school has moved from one multi-academy trust to another. The headteacher worked part time in the school from February 2018 and came into the post full time in May 2019. She is successfully building a stable team, that is strongly committed to improving the experience of and outcomes for pupils as they journey through the academy. The impact of this is being felt through improved behaviour and positive attitudes to learning. A significant driving force for this improvement is the recently introduced aspirational and inclusive Christian vision. This is based on the concept of growth as reflected in the Parable of the Mustard Seed, and demonstrates an appreciation that God desires the best for all. Consequently, the Trust, senior leaders and governors, ably supported by the staff team, have a clear focus on the importance of pupils' academic and personal growth. Drawing on its vision, the development of staff at all levels is increasingly being considered in order to promote their growth as professionals, serving the pupils and their families. Thus, they are well supported for working within the Trust. Leaders are ensuring that focused short and longer term planning is in place and that such plans reflect and support the academy's Christian vision.

Many pupils enter with attainment and personal development below national expectations. Throughout their time in the academy, progress is solidly good for all groups, including for the most vulnerable and those with SEND. This reflects the positive pastoral care that they receive. The wellbeing of pupils, and indeed of staff, is an important feature of the implementation of its vision. Academic attainment has improved for the younger age groups and is now broadly in line with national expectations. Whilst progress is good for older pupils, attainment has been hindered, due to the turbulence of recent years. This led to some significant gaps in knowledge, understanding and skills. However, attainment is beginning to show signs of improvement. This is because of consistent approaches to teaching and to earlier targeted intervention to fill gaps in learning. Consequently, pupils are developing more self-confidence and resilience and are keen to learn.

The academy's Christian vision is supported by the associated values of courage, respect, self-control, perseverance, hope and trust. These are used well to support the personal and academic growth referenced in the Parable of the Mustard Seed. These values were carefully chosen, bearing in mind the academy's context and pupils' needs. They impact positively on pupils' actions and responses to everyday situations.

The curriculum has broadened through the very recent introduction of a creative and thematic approach. It addresses global citizenship and sustainable development which have potential links with the RE curriculum. These are not capitalised on currently. The curriculum is complemented through an increasing range of extra-curricular experiences. Membership of MAST, and the use of its mini-bus, are providing opportunities for pupils to work and play with their peers in the Trust academies. This, along with the creative curriculum, widen pupils' outlook and support them in deepening their appreciation of difference and diversity in God's world.

There is a shared understanding of the importance of spiritual development which the academy is summarising as ABCDE (awe, belief, consideration, discussion and empathy/emotion). This approach is beginning to guide curriculum planning and providing a range of appropriate activities and experiences through which these areas can be explored. Pupils are effectively encouraged to respect themselves and others and to recognise and celebrate difference and diversity. As reflected on by one pupil, 'It's important to show respect to everyone. God loves us all. It doesn't matter what skin we have'. Pupils are increasingly taking responsibility by, for example, being ambassadors, representing the views of their class on improving the academy's life. They recognise their responsibility to others and to God's world through various opportunities for charitable giving.

Constructive relationships with the parish church enrich the academy's Christian and spiritual life. These enhance both the academy's and the church's involvement with service to its local community. The vicar is a regular and welcomed visitor. She supports in the planning of worship which she also leads weekly and she active on the local governing board.

Members on the local governing body take their responsibilities seriously and are working together well to provide good support for senior leaders. However, there are several vacancies. This means that it is less effective, for example, in systematically monitoring and evaluating the impact of the academy's Christian vision and associated

values, including through collective worship and RE. However, areas for improvement from the previous denominational inspection have been addressed.

The daily worship programme enriches the academy's life as it successfully encourages the community to live out its Christian vision and associated values. Planning is led by the headteacher and shared with the vicar. It draws on diocesan guidelines well. Christian belief in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the importance of Jesus for Christians and the significance of the Bible in relating faith to daily life are embedded. Through the celebration of key Christian festivals such as Christmas and Easter, pupils are gaining understanding of the Christian year. They also know the colours used at different points of the Church year. The ritual of lighting candles and opening and closing sentences with responses gives them insights into Anglican forms of worship. Monthly worship in the parish church enhances understanding further. Pupils and adults are well engaged in worship. Pupils respond positively to any questions posed, take a lead in Bible reading and in prayer, and join in singing with enthusiasm. Pupils regularly evaluate worship, using a well-structured form, which ensures that their views are taken into account to improve worship further.

In keeping with diocesan guidance and legal requirements, the RE curriculum addresses a range of faiths, including an appropriate focus on Christianity. Pupils' appreciation of key Christian beliefs and concepts are developing. The subject is regarded as a core subject and its positive impact on supporting growth educationally and personally is recognised. One pupil reflected that, 'RE helps you respect and understand other people,'. 'It's important to think about God, whatever you believe,' said another. Written work is broadly comparable with pupils' literacy work. Pupils enjoy and engage well with RE. They make good progress from their various starting points. Leadership of the subject is strong and supports teachers appropriately.



**The effectiveness of RE is Good**

Senior leaders monitor the implementation of the RE curriculum and the quality of teaching regularly, reflections from which feed into future planning. Teaching is good and teachers are gaining in confidence in addressing RE. This is shown, for example, by how teachers now explore big questions with pupils. These provide pupils with a good range of opportunities to think about the significance of religious belief and practice in the world today. Progress in RE across the school is good. Assessment, in keeping with school and Trust protocols, is developing well. Teaching is enriched through a range of appropriate activities to support learning and that is leading to signs of improvement in attainment. Thus, pupils' academic and personal growth is developing appropriately through RE.

Headteacher

Fay Cordingley

Inspector's name and number

Pamela Draycott (161)