

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Malcolm Arnold Academy

Trinity Avenue, Northampton NN2 6JW

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Good

Diocese

Peterborough

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Good

Date of academy conversion

September 2010

Name of multi-academy trust

David Ross Education Trust (DRET)

Dates of inspection

27 & 28 February 2018

Date of last inspection

March 2013

Type of school and unique reference number

Sponsor-led Academy 136201

Executive Principal

Chris Steed

Inspector's name and number

Lyn Field 151

School context

This is a larger than average sized secondary school that shares a site with the Malcolm Arnold Prep School. The executive principal leads both schools as well as supporting other schools in the DRET. The proportion of disadvantaged students and of those with special educational needs are broadly in line with the national average. The proportion speaking English as an additional language is twice the national average. Around 10% of students take up music scholarships and a further 10% take places on faith grounds. The high level of migration locally means many more pupils than usual join and leave in the course of the year.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Malcolm Arnold Academy as a Church of England school are good

- The executive headteacher and senior leadership team have embraced the religious status of the academy and taken decisions that have revitalised its Christian character.
- Highly capable staff with the ability to lead and inspire others have been appointed to take responsibility for aspects of the school as a church academy and this is rapidly leading to sustainable improvement.
- Investment in the wellbeing of both adults and pupils is delivering the inclusive Christian vision and successfully overcoming barriers to the quality of both teaching and learning.
- Improvements to the RE curriculum in Key Stages 3 & 4 have raised the profile of the subject and accelerated pupils' progress.
- Changes to collective worship have taken longer to implement and their impact remains inconsistent.

Areas to improve

- Ensure the delivery of the tutor programme for worship is consistent so that all students have opportunities to explore and reflect on spiritual as well as moral and ethical issues.
- Increase the involvement of staff and students in the planning and delivery of worship so that they have a greater ownership and understanding of this aspect of academy life.
- Organise governor monitoring and evaluation procedures into a regular structured cycle in order to hold leaders to account for the development of the academy as a church school more effectively.
- Ensure that all Sixth Form students have access to a general curriculum outside of their examination courses that explores issues of faith in the context of contemporary society.

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

Three core values of friendship, peace and truth are proving a most effective vehicle for implementing the inclusive Christian vision through all aspects of academy life. Biblical texts are used to help shed light on their meaning. The ease and confidence with which staff and pupils refer to values in conversation demonstrate their depth of understanding. This is lived out in the exemplary attention given to the wellbeing of staff and pupils and the work ethos in classrooms. Pupils draw a direct link, for example, between the very low level of bullying and the constant emphasis on 'peace' and 'friendship'. Relationships are totally accepting of difference and diversity and this is especially pertinent given the high level of migration in the area. New pupils settle quickly and those who do not speak English as their first language are performing well because of the way they are helped to integrate into the community.

Staff constantly go the extra mile to work closely with families and ensure the best possible outcomes for pupils. Attendance is rising to above the national average and exclusion rates have dropped dramatically, enabling the most vulnerable pupils to remain in education with few requiring alternative placements.

Staff and pupils have risen to the challenge of taking more responsibility for the quality of their work. The truth and honesty required for reflecting on their strengths and weaknesses are reinforced by the Christian values and supported by good monitoring systems within the academy. Pupils regularly make an initial self-assessment of their work and are motivated by the link with career pathways that are highlighted in every lesson and on classroom walls. Teachers make maximum use of the protected hour in their timetable each week to observe colleagues and improve their practice. As a result, although pupils' attainment is still just below national figures, the level of progress pupils make is slightly better than the national average and continuing to rise.

Developments in RE are making a significant contribution to ensuring that the breadth and balance of the whole curriculum reflects the academy's Christian status. The curriculum for ethics and philosophy now includes 'religion' in its name (REP) and this element is discernable in lessons and valued by pupils. Similar changes to the life skills curriculum in Key Stage 4 are making a positive impact on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Although the academy has no written guidance on the approach to spirituality in a church school, a thorough audit of provision shows that Christian values are promoted and integrated into all aspects of academy life.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is satisfactory

Collective worship is the aspect of the academy's Christian character that has been slowest to develop. However, a useful policy is in place to guide improvement and sufficient pockets of good practice exist as a starting point for sustained improvement. The delivery of the religious content of year group and tutor group worship varies considerably but the academy's core values are regularly promoted in a biblical context. As a result, the spiritual dimension receives less systematic attention than moral, social and ethical issues.

Chaplaincy has traditionally supported the spiritual life of the school but is now reaching a far greater number of students. In only her second term in post, the chaplain is held in the highest regard by all staff and students whatever their personal positions on faith and has established exceptionally positive relationships across the whole community. Her dynamic style of delivery captures everyone's interest and is increasingly drawing students in to be active participants. Students explain this as her ability to live out Christian values and to relate them to the experiences that are common to young people in their daily lives.

Planning and leading of worship depends too much on a small number of adults. However, this has ensured that good material is available for tutors to draw on and students really value times when staff share their personal reflections. The weekly DRET debating topics are given the added dimension of a question for discussion or reflection from a faith perspective. Students see the potential of this time and enjoy the thought-provoking questions posed. However, the depth with which these questions are handled is where the inconsistency lies. Even though senior staff monitor this, students do not all benefit on a regular basis. Feedback gathered from adults and students about worship is encouraging overall. It shows the positive impact of raising the profile of the academy's religious status over the last two years. This is especially the case for younger students who have only ever known the current culture. Feedback also shows that, although Christian festivals have a regular place in the calendar, students are not confident to explain how these express Christian beliefs about Jesus Christ and about God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The detailed analysis of feedback and monitoring highlights pertinent points for development planning. Leaders make good use of these but, in the determination to improve, do not always arrive at clear priorities for action.

Time and space for prayer are available to pupils of all faiths but are not embedded in the pattern of worship. However, a growing number of pupils are accessing the chapel and making use of the prayer board to seek a quiet space for themselves. Although Year 7 pupils value the techniques they learn for prayer and reflection, this is not followed up well enough to equip students with spiritual skills for life. In collective worship, prayer is invitational and students completely understand that they have a choice about how they respond. No-one feels compromised and many speak positively of these opportunities.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

The new leader has an ambitious vision for the subject that is fully shared by her colleagues. She has rapidly demonstrated her ability to ensure pupils derive maximum benefit from the major changes made since her arrival. Her extensive subject knowledge and strategic understanding of the subject has prompted adjustments to the curriculum that take a long-term view of RE. The starting point for these changes has wisely been the skills that Sixth Form students need for academic study and to equip them for life beyond school in a multi-cultural society. This has been followed by schemes of work for each key stage that give due attention to Christianity alongside other world faiths and constantly challenge pupils' thinking with enquiry-based topics. The Key Stage 3 units for REP (religion, ethics and philosophy) have starting points such as 'Would it be possible to start a new religion?' and 'Design a zoo based on ethical and religious views.' The proportion of pupils who choose to take RE at GCSE has doubled in the last three years. The RE leader's skills have again been employed to enhance the RE dimension of the life skills curriculum so that non-GCSE pupils receive their entitlement. Effective teaching means that new parts of the curriculum have been quickly implemented and whole school strategies to raise standards are already in place. Initiatives such as 'green sheets' build individual pupil profiles that teachers use to track progress on a daily basis. More able pupils, for example, do well in RE because teachers expect them to express their ideas freely and fluently without continually depending on writing frames. Teaching has been securely good over time and, with a team of specialist teachers now in place, is often better. GCSE results overall are below average nationally but are rapidly improving because many pupils make good progress from low starting points. The number of higher grades achieved in 2017 was in line with schools nationally and double the number in previous years with disadvantaged pupils outperforming their peers. This places RE among the best performing departments. Students studying for A level are inspired by the subject because lessons are tailored to their individual needs and taught by staff passionate about their subject. Students read widely about topics and one student drew on her knowledge to create a drama presentation at her university interview.

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

Christian values have traditionally been important in the school. However, despite its legal status as a Church of England academy, there was a period when this aspect was not given its proper profile in the governance and management of the academy. This omission was acknowledged in 2015. Since then, decisive actions by current leaders, particularly in staff appointments, have refocused the academy on its religious status and accelerated the impact of this on the whole community. Leaders are embracing the distinctive nature of church school leadership particularly through the partnership with the adjoining prep school and the growing presence of the Diocese. The executive principal has overseen the implementation of an inclusive vision rooted in biblical teaching. The selection of 'You will know them by their fruits' (Matt 7:16) to express this vision reflects the drive and ambition of leaders to raise standards and is clearly evident in improving performance. It is equally shown in the academy's close attention to the mental wellbeing of adults and pupils and so removing barriers to good teaching and learning. Responsibility for the Christian ethos now sits with an inspiring and highly competent assistant principal. It is widely recognised that this direct link with the senior team has increased both accountability and commitment to the Christian status throughout the school. Chaplaincy is now a full-time post and RE is now a stand-alone subject, after having been subsumed into humanities for several years, with its own leader. The holders of these posts are of a high calibre and the effectiveness of their work means the academy is making good progress towards meeting the challenging requirements of the Church of England's Statement of Entitlement for RE. However, the attention to raising the profile of RE in Key Stages 3 & 4 has not extended to the Sixth Form where no cohesive plan exists for making sure they have access to discussion of religious issues outside of examination courses. The Trust's scheme of delegation allows the academy to define its own vision in relation to its church status. This has not been supported by a co-ordinated approach from the DRET and the Diocese, although the academy has benefited from their separate avenues of support. A member of the DRET staff has made a helpful check on progress against SIAMS criteria. The assistant principal takes maximum advantage of regular termly meetings with a consultant provided by the Diocese. This support has clarified strategic thinking and added momentum to the development as a church academy. The local governing board has not monitored the impact of the leaders' work to rejuvenate the academy's church status or linked this to the improvement agenda. However, the new chair of governors is already applying his long experience of church schools to the role and has promptly set about establishing a regular pattern of governor monitoring that is clearly focused on the impact of the academy's Christian status. Along with senior leaders, he is aware that collective worship remains the weakest link even though it meets the minimum statutory obligations. Detailed action planning for the last two years has accurately highlighted the issue but not tackled it in small enough steps. In spite of this, significant progress as a church academy has been made because self-evaluation is thorough and analytical. The systems in place for monitoring and review indicate that the rate of improvement is sustainable.