

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St. Barnabas Church of England Primary Academy

Knowsley Road, Darwen, Lancashire, BB3 2JA

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Diocese

Blackburn

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Satisfactory

Date of academy conversion

01 October 2014

Name of multi-academy trust

CIDARI

Date of inspection

06 July 2017

Date of last inspection

06 March 2014

Type of school and unique reference number

Voluntary Aided 141483

Headteacher

Helen Thomas

Inspector's name and number

Mark Hamblett 864

School context

St. Barnabas is a smaller than average academy with 176 pupils on roll, serving the town of Darwen. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage and the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below average. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils, those supported through the pupil premium, is below the national average and the proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly in line with the national average. The headteacher and her deputy have been in post since September 2014. The new incumbent has been in post since October 2016.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St. Barnabas as a Church of England academy are outstanding

- The inspirational, visionary leadership of the headteacher and senior leaders ensures that the academy's Christian character makes an outstanding impact on the pupils' academic achievement and social, moral, cultural and spiritual development.
- Deeply embedded Christian values underpin the work of the academy and impact hugely on the behaviour of all pupils, which is exceptional.
- A confident, deep Christian vision is at the centre of all that the academy does. The conviction with which this vision is promoted by leaders and shared by all members of the academy community ensures the academy's continued success in meeting the academic and spiritual needs of all pupils.
- Religious education (RE) and collective worship act as the heartbeat of the academy and are highly effective in supporting the spiritual development of the whole academy family.

Areas to improve

- Cultivate further links in the immediate and wider community to increase pupils' awareness and respect for difference and diversity within the world-wide Christian church and other faith communities.

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

'Achieving great things through learning and growing together in a love-filled Christian family' is the academy's mission statement. This statement is intelligent, astutely accurate and evident on all documents and communication, along with the academy's revised logo. It is understood, articulated and embraced by all members of the school community and encapsulates the inspirational Christian vision of the headteacher. All members of the family attribute the ethos of the school to the core Gospel values which are nurtured and lived out by all. A Year 6 pupil commented with pride, 'Our Christian values are the glue that hold our school together and everyone knows it.' Parents say that during their frequent visits to the school, the headteacher makes the Christian foundation abundantly clear. They agreed with one parent representative who said, 'Spiritual development at this school is intrinsic. It really does function like a family.'

During a learning walk, Key Stage 2 pupils demonstrated maturity, passion and conviction when articulately explaining the school's focus on prayer and values. They do not take for granted the love lavished upon them by staff and know how fortunate they are to receive an outstanding Christian education. All pupils are extremely proud to be members of a family in which expectations of all pupils' behaviour and learning are very high. Christian values, displayed creatively throughout the school, including stained glass windows, were pointed out by the pupils and their significance explained eloquently. Creative, high quality displays and 'stations' throughout the school, together with extremely well-used areas for reflective prayer, portray exceedingly well the message that the school has a strong Christian foundation.

Almost all pupils who begin school in the Reception class have starting points below national averages. However, rates of progress throughout are good to outstanding. Regular monitoring, evaluation and analysis of assessment and data ensure that interventions are timely, precise and accurately meet the needs of all pupils.

Exceptional relationships demonstrate very positively the distinctively Christian character at St Barnabas. Love, compassion, care and respect is bestowed on each and every member of the school community including visitors who speak of feeling uplifted and empowered to make a difference. Behaviour is exceptional and an extremely calm and purposeful atmosphere permeates the school inside and out.

Pupils are encouraged to show concern for world issues as part of the school's Christian service. Examples of this include pupils' own prayers, displayed attractively on a world map. Often these are linked to highly emotive issues of conflict, terrorism or disaster, which the school demonstrates confidence in addressing. The whole school family is compellingly united in recognising the transformation that has occurred since the previous inspection.

The impact of collective worship on the academy community is outstanding

Collective worship is rightly given a very high priority by all members of the school community including parents and governors who regularly attend and take part in acts of worship. Collective worship is extremely well planned. It covers Christian themes with a strong emphasis on the liturgical calendar including Christian festivals and Christian values. This emphasis enables pupils to have a very good understanding of the nature of worship, the Christian faith and Anglican traditions and practice. The support provided by the local church is excellent. This includes the vicar being heavily involved in the regular delivery of worship. All staff and pupils understand the importance of distinctively Christian worship and enjoy the variety of content and opportunities to pray and praise. The highly effective worship team 'WOW' (Worship our way) demonstrate their enthusiasm and leadership skills in planning leading and evaluating worship. All members of the school community are able to evaluate worship informally and methods of formally recording evaluations are particularly effective. Honest and astute evaluations have led to positive change in collective worship and the school vows never to 'stand still'.

Pupils benefit from rich and varied experiences of worship. Worship is led by a wide range of people including the vicar, other Christian visitors and often by the pupils. All pupils are enabled to understand the biblical teaching and they enjoy the variety of worship. One pupil commented, 'No two worships are ever the same!' Collective worship at St. Barnabas is a time of unity. Enthusiastic singing of Christian songs and an unaccompanied call to worship by pupils and staff demonstrates confidence in their abilities and offers rich opportunities to develop personal spirituality. Pupils show a great level of respect during worship, which they recognise as a hugely significant part of the school day, expressing their joy through animated responses and enthusiastic involvement. All pupils know the Grace and respond to frequent opportunities to spontaneously express their own personal prayers. Even the youngest pupils enjoy being asked to pray spontaneously and do so with courage, conviction and respect. Pupils demonstrate an appropriate understanding of the threefold nature of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. One pupil explained articulately 'Jesus is the visible God, but God is omnipresent and the Spirit surrounds us all in our lives.'

Parents appreciate the ability to regularly share collective worship with their children. One parent commented 'Our children are confident to discuss Christian values at home and they demonstrate them out of school too. We see them taught in worship and can carry on the discussion out of school.' The school's documentation for planning and evaluating collective worship is exemplary.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Pupils make particularly good progress in RE as is evidenced in pupils' written work, their practical work and discussions and beautifully-presented portfolios of evidence. The excellent subject leader, supported by well-trained governors, monitors RE thoroughly using observations, book scrutiny and cross-checking of standards. As a result of this highly effective monitoring and feedback to teachers, outstanding teaching and learning take place throughout the academy. Standards for all groups of pupils are in line with those achieved in other core subjects and are high in relation to national expectations. Teachers have a shared commitment to improving standards and are right to recognise RE as a core subject. The school's monitoring and evaluation show that RE has an extremely positive impact on pupil's social, moral, spiritual and cultural development.

Pupils of all ages have an impressive and thorough knowledge of the Bible. Lessons are planned systematically based on diocesan guidelines. Previous weaknesses and inconsistencies in the subject have been addressed with much success. Pupils' understanding of Christian values is hugely enhanced through the very high-quality RE teaching and effective questioning which probes and challenges children's concepts. Inspirational teaching and astute questioning encourage pupils to think deeply about the subject matter and enable them all to achieve, regardless of their ability. Challenging questions are pondered during high quality RE lessons which extend thinking and reflection effectively. Written and oral work is of a very high standard and participation in activities particularly effective.

Consistent marking in RE is of a quality equal to that found in other subjects. Responsive feedback challenges pupils to think more deeply and reflect further on the subject matter. Year 5 pupils were able to reflect on answers to questions about values, purpose and commitments. They effectively used their knowledge of the Old Testament book of Ruth to form opinions strong enough to act as the 'defence' in a mock trial, questioning Ruth's motives for leaving Moab. The exceptional subject knowledge of the class teacher ensured all pupils made outstanding progress in the lesson and some excellent examples of work were created. In a Reception lesson, the teacher and pupils shared their personal feelings and thoughts when exploring the story of Noah. The children articulately discussed different character traits and related them to their own lives, resulting in outstanding conversation, reflection and creative writing. One pupil eloquently explained, 'God wanted people to have goodness inside them, that's why he made the flood happen.' Outstanding RE at St Barnabas cleverly encapsulates a wealth of rich experiences enabling the very best learning to take place, which contributes significantly to pupils' spiritual development. The study of other faiths and visits to places of worship, such as a recent visit to a mosque, support the pupils' growing cultural awareness. They also strengthen their knowledge of other faiths. The school is committed to ensuring that understanding of other faiths and diversity within Christianity is further embedded.

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

The highly effective, devoted leadership of the headteacher and her deputy provides an extremely clear vision for sustaining the powerful Christian ethos that permeates all aspects of school life. This vision is understood and extremely well supported by everyone involved in the life of the academy including governors and parents. It is lived out across the school family. The headteacher's strong Christian faith is evident in all aspects of her leadership. Staff, pupils and parents see her as approachable and caring and she, along with the governors, ensures that the staff are nurtured as future leaders. The school community works harmoniously together to ensure the very best provision and outcomes for pupils. Issues from the previous report have been fully addressed. Staff are extremely well-prepared for working in a church school through excellent training, work as part of a cluster of academies in the MAT, teamwork, delegation and support. The headteacher has made it her priority to know all the school's families, putting her in the very best position to be able to help and support them, particularly through times of difficulty or crisis. Excellent opportunities are provided to enable the pupils to lead on whole school developments. As a worship group, the WOW team are highly effective young leaders who embody and sustain the academy's commitment to its vision and values. This group contributes extremely effectively to the excellent attitudes and behaviour of all pupils. Pupils speak with empathy about the charities and good causes they support and feel it is only right to do this as Christians. The school supports and benefits greatly from strong and effective partnerships with parents, the local community and the diocese. There is mutual support and common purpose between the local church and the school, enhanced by the new vicar who makes a valuable contribution to the spiritual life of the whole school family. He plays an important part in supporting RE and leading worship and seeks ways to further strengthen the relationship between church and school. The academy has forged a strong partnership with the diocese, receiving advice and training to ensure the professional development of staff and governors. This has led to the high standard of provision seen in RE and worship which enjoy their place at the heart of school life. Governors are rightly proud of their school and the bold Christian faith associated with it. Through their good level of involvement and commitment to improvement, the dedicated governors have contributed well to securing a high quality education based on a deep-rooted Bible teaching. Governors have first-hand experience of the work being done to build the spiritual and academic progress of the pupils, and staff value their support.