

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Buckden Church of England Primary Academy

School Lane, Buckden, St Neots PE19 5TT

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Ely
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Date of academy conversion	1 November 2011
Date of inspection	27 June 2017
Date of last inspection	16 July 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary 137639
Headteacher	Alison Anderson
Inspector's name and number	Stephen Green 809

School context

This voluntary controlled academy situated close to the town of St Neots, currently has 268 pupils and a rising roll. Most pupils come from semi-professional backgrounds, are well motivated and have strong support from home. The number who have free school meals is significantly below the national average. A small minority of pupils are from ethnic minorities, and an increasing proportion are in the early stages of acquiring English. The headteacher is a National Leader of Education and has been in post since 2010. The academy has teaching school status and offers support for other church schools.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Buckden as a Church of England academy are outstanding

- The academy has a strong and distinctively Christian ethos which underpins all aspects of the curriculum and wider academy life.
- The academy's Christian character has a high profile and has a significant impact on the spiritual, social, moral and cultural (SMSC) development of the pupils in its care.
- Pupils have a good understanding of the traditions and multi-cultural nature of the Anglican church.
- Pupils are happy to take major roles in collective worship (CW), supporting those who lead it, planning and leading it themselves, and occasionally offering feedback to those who co-ordinate worship.
- Parents and governors are keen to recognise and value the commitment and Christian vision of the academy's leaders.

Areas to improve

- To review the way the academy's core values and mission statement are presented, in order to ensure the academy's Christian distinctiveness is made more explicit.
- To monitor the extent to which Understanding Christianity supports the academy's Christian character by enabling pupils to explore core Christian beliefs and concepts in relation to themselves and others.

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

The academy's Christian character is given a very high profile and underpins all aspects of academy life. Its distinctive Christian character is very obvious on the website, in its communications with parents, and through artefacts, paintings, and references from scripture which are painted on the walls. It is also very obvious when talking to parents and children. The academy has adopted both the distinctively Christian values in the Values for Life scheme, one of which is given particular focus every year as part of a diocesan initiative (e.g. 'hope' at the time of the inspection), and which are displayed around the academy, and also a set of core values which were arrived at in consultation between staff, parents and governors. These include friendship, excellence and equality and are supported with references from scripture (e.g. respect: 1 Peter 2.17: 'show proper respect to everyone...') They are widely displayed in classrooms and corridors around the academy and are consistently reinforced by staff in the wider curriculum. Pupils make links between the two sets of values, interpreting the core values in a Christian way using the academy's Christian values.

Pupils have an impressive understanding of the multi-cultural nature of Christianity, Anglican traditions and Jesus' life and teachings. As a result of the school's values, pupils behave very well and have excellent attitudes to their learning. All groups of pupils make at least good progress and usually reach better than expected standards of attainment in all subjects. The Christian ethos of the academy has been adopted wholeheartedly by the staff, and parents were keen to state that their positive relationships ensure they act as good role models for the children. Pupils find RE interesting and challenging, and it plays a major role in determining the academy's Christian character by regularly making links with its Christian values and providing opportunities for pupils to reflect on their learning. Staff gave the example of the impact on behaviour that a module on peace and forgiveness that was recently taught in RE had across the school. Two Muslim parents have chosen to move their children to the school because it practices tolerance and they feel their children are more respected in a church school.

When asked what difference they thought it made that this was a church academy, pupils talked about the opportunities they had for reflection and prayer, their greater knowledge of God, and the choices they are given. 'We encourage people to reflect,' one said. 'No-one forces anyone.' They also spoke about having a greater understanding of God, and a closer relationship with Him as a result of the academy being Christian. Pupils recently worked with the Faraday Institute to investigate apparent conflicts between Christianity and science relating to the creation. Older children composed a hymn which the choir performed in Ely cathedral. This has been recorded for use in other church schools. An after-school club called Jamworkx is run by the local church to provide a greater knowledge of the Bible for pupils. They visit the church several times during the school year, and all pupils visit the cathedral before they leave. They put their beliefs into practice in many ways, including supporting charities (e.g. Macmillan and Foodbank) and helping local people. They have a good understanding of other world faiths and respect for those who practice them. Pupils demonstrate the impact of their values in many ways. Respect and equality are demonstrated by the quality of their relationships and the way they treat visitors. They have a strong commitment to compassion which is shown by their fundraising and support for each other, and excellence in the quality of their work.

The impact of collective worship on the academy community is outstanding

CW is inspirational and inclusive, and firmly rooted in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. All members of the community place great value upon it and it has a significant impact upon behaviour and the Christian character of the academy. Worship is planned by the co-ordinator and led by a variety of leaders representing staff, pupils, the incumbent and a Methodist pastor. This variety ensures worship continues to be inspirational, and demonstrates some of the similarities and differences within the Christian church. However, the academy has plans to extend this further. CW usually takes place in the hall, which has excellent displays and wall paintings which make it a very suitable and inspirational venue. As well as Bibles, crosses, candles and prayers, there are displays relating to the academy's core and Christian values. Pupils and parents spoke of the value many of them give to reflection and prayer as part of their spiritual development.

Pupils are given many opportunities to reflect and pray, and parents spoke of the spiritual development that they have been able to see in their children. There is a reflective area in the academy's grounds, called the Tranquil Garden by the pupils and constructed by the church and local community. This provides opportunities for pupils to sit either under cover or outside, surrounded by plants, the academy's distinctive Christian values (e.g. 'peace' carved onto a wooden cross) and its mission statement. Pupils have been given the opportunity to influence the way this area has developed since the last inspection, and it now provides a high-quality venue which is regularly used for reflection and prayer and greatly valued by pupils and staff.

Pupils have a very thorough understanding of Christian beliefs and traditions, and can give sound explanations of such terms as 'The Holy Trinity' and 'Eucharist'. They visit the local church for worship and to learn about Christian customs and belief, and they have a close and valued relationship with the incumbent.

Parents are supportive of the academy's practice in CW. Several who are not themselves practising Christians, spoke in support of the inclusive attitude it has, emphasising values that they support as being valuable rules for living. A parent who is not herself a practising Christian, talked about her son asking to be Christened as a result of his experiences 'enjoying going to church with the school.

Monitoring and evaluation are thorough, being carried out formally by senior staff and governors supported regularly by contributions from parents and pupils. Parents regularly join the academy to share worship and are confident that senior leaders listen to their views.

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

Buckden Academy benefits from very strong and experienced leadership. The headteacher is a National Leader of Education and the academy has recently gained teaching school status. Both the headteacher and her deputy consistently articulate and live out a vision for the academy that is rooted in their distinctively Christian values. However, this Christian distinctiveness is not consistently and clearly explicit in all communications, specifically in the presentation of the academy's core values and mission statement. School leaders have a thorough and accurate understanding of the school's performance and distinctiveness based upon effective self-evaluation that has involved all members of the school community. Parents speak highly of senior leaders, and one said that they 'embody the Christian values of the school.' Parents are well aware of the academy's Christian ethos and values, and could explain how the two link together. In a recent survey, all 101 parents who responded stated that they were aware that 'the school is a church of England school with a Christian ethos'. They recognise strong and supportive relationships within the academy and praise the culture of knowing every child as an individual. As one parent stated, 'every child is an individual. The children integrate well, and each child will understand the other children.' Speaking of the academy's core values, a parent said that 'the values are good ones to live by... They are values and attributes that every parent would want.'

As a result of regular monitoring and briefing by senior staff, governors have an accurate view of the academy's strengths and areas for development, and they have a major role in strategic planning for the school. Their insights provide a valuable resource for those leading RE and CW. They are well aware of the academy's distinctive Christian values and the positive impact these are having upon its ethos and daily life. They are also very aware of the strengths of their headteacher and deputy. Before the present headteacher was appointed in 2010 the school had been declining, and was rated as requiring improvement by OFSTED. The chair of Governors said that it is 'her passion that has turned it around.' He said that she has a commitment to put the children first, seeing spiritual and moral development as equally important to academic success, the former being a view several parents also voiced. The academy is now rated as outstanding by OFSTED. The academy has retained the same structure for governance as it had before conversion, with a committee of foundation governors who meet separately, as well as on the full governing body, to monitor ethos and related issues. When asked about the relationship the school has between its core values and its underlying distinctively Christian values, the Chair of Governors explained that 'it's the colour of your glasses; how you see them. Our understanding of the values is interpreted through our Christian ethos.' The incumbent echoed this, saying that although some of the values are not explicitly Christian, they are interpreted in a Christian way. 'This appeals to all parents and makes them more real for the school'.

There is a very strong relationship between the academy, the local church and with the incumbent, supported by the diocese. The incumbent is seen as approachable by pupils and staff and spends much time in the academy contributing to CW and RE and offering support to staff. Church leaders play a major and much appreciated role in both strategic planning on the governing body and by leading weekly CW. The church was able to offer considerable support when the school recently had a double tragedy, and it was noted by senior leaders that the academy turned instinctively to the church at this time. A parent said that 'the values that the church brings to the school are paramount.' She said that its influence is important, providing opportunities rather than pressure to conform. Religious education is well resourced and investment in the Understanding Christianity training and materials is supporting its further development. The church and parent communities support the academy in tangible ways, with parents donating £700 for the purchase of additional RE resources and the church providing a set of Usbourne children's bibles. The church has a notice board in the school playground and a section on the academy's weekly 'Roundup' newsletters to publicise its events, while the academy has a space for displays in the church.