

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

The Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat School

Hampton Dene Road, Tupsley, Hereford HR1 1UU

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Good

Diocese

Hereford

Previous SIAS inspection grade

Outstanding

Local authority

Herefordshire

Name of multi-academy trust / federation [delete as appropriate]

N/A

Date/s of inspection

9 & 10 July 2018

Date of last inspection

13 November 2012

Type of school and unique reference number

Secondary voluntary aided 116991

Acting headteacher

Martin Henton

Inspector's name and number

Lyn Field 151

School context

This is a larger than average sized secondary school and most students are White British. The proportion who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average but the proportion who have an education health care plan is above average. The Bridge, the local authority's provision for eight students with autism, is part of the school. The proportion of disadvantaged students supported by the pupil premium grant is below the national average. The school is affiliated to the Woodard Foundation and the Bluecoat Trust are trustees. An acting headteacher was appointed from the existing senior team in March 2018 prior to the retirement of the headteacher.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of The Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat School as a Church of England school are good

- The acting headteacher, fully supported by a determined and committed senior team, has kept the school focused as a 'vibrant Christian learning community'. This has restored a sense of calm and clear direction to the school following a period of change.
- The Christian ethos has been revitalised and is empowering staff and students to grow in their leadership roles through clear expectations and a culture of listening and attention to wellbeing.
- Pastoral care is exemplary in reflecting the school's vision and has benefited from the restructuring of roles and responsibilities.
- The new curriculum leader for ethics has rapidly raised standards of teaching and learning and broadened the impact of religious education (RE) on the character of the school.
- The vicar and chaplain have deepened the partnership with the church by adding a theological dimension to strategic planning.

Areas to improve

- Accelerate the rate of progress students make in religious education by improving consistency and rigour in written feedback to students and by improving students' skills in independently pursuing lines of enquiry in their learning.
- Embed the new ethos and worship committees in the leadership structure of the school so that there are cohesive and rigorous systems in place to develop and sustain the Christian character of the school.

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

The underlying Christian ethos of the school has remained a constant through a recent period of instability and change. Christian values are widely understood by new and established staff to be the basis of the supportive and caring relationships seen throughout the school community. Individually they relate these to the belief that every child is 'unique in the image of God' and biblical teaching to 'treat others as you would have them treat you'. It is abundantly clear that these connections influence exemplary pastoral care. Changes to the pastoral staffing structure have proved highly effective and attendance, for example, has improved including for vulnerable students. Learning mentors are now available to focus solely on the immediate needs of students as they arise. This allows heads of houses and teachers to focus on their core responsibilities. Student leaders add to the depth of this team through their training as Listening Link prefects.

There has been a fundamental transition from a discrete to an inclusive provision that integrates all students with special educational needs into mainstream classes. Students with autism in the Bridge are in mainstream classes for the majority of their learning. This fully reflects the school's welcoming and inclusive Christian approach to serving its community. It has proved a positive but challenging move and is fully embraced by students. The contribution of Bridge students to a fundraising 'bag-pack' in a local supermarket has left its mark on the whole community. Students believe everyone has benefited from this inclusive approach. They have gained a deeper understanding of difference and apply this to their lives outside school. As a result, bullying arising from any form of prejudice is rare. In lessons, matching activities and tasks to the individual needs and abilities of students has been a prime focus for staff development. Some inconsistency remains but tracking indicates that 2018 outcomes are likely to show further improvement on 2017 and that students with special needs are doing better than their peers.

Behaviour is good both in lessons and in social areas. In spite of the practice that is known and lived out on a daily basis, there is not a well-worked out explanation for exactly how biblical understanding shapes the school's policies for managing behaviour and attendance. It is, therefore, not sufficiently documented to ensure it is sustained in the future. Students speak confidently about how an explicitly Christian understanding of forgiveness is modelled by pastoral staff. They explain how forgiveness is 'a key step in recovery' and requires courage 'because it is then difficult to learn to trust again'.

RE and collective worship make a strong contribution to the school's Christian character. The new curriculum leader is revising the Key Stage 3 programme 'Skills for Life' so that coverage of philosophy, religion and ethics provides continuity in learning from Year 7 to GCSE. Students are fully aware of the breadth of Christianity as a worldwide faith and its birth in the middle east. Good attention is paid to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development across all subjects. This extends to an impressive enrichment programme where 'Spirited Arts' is just one example of where students who have special needs access the curriculum on an equal basis to their peers. This confirms the views of students who highlight 'equality' as a particular Christian value that captures the ethos of the school.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship is central to school life and defines the school as a church school. The creation of the Working Worship Group is already bringing more coherence to the strategic planning for worship through regular dialogue between clergy and school leaders. The personal commitment of those involved is stimulating a level of discussion that ensures changes are prompted by a theological understanding of the nature and purpose of worship rather than merely an exercise to meet criteria. Feedback from students is increasingly being used to inform changes because the chaplain poses precise questions and analyses the responses to raise pertinent issues for discussion.

Students engage well with the weekly themes for worship because they all take a turn in preparing, researching Christian values and leading the weekly form reflection time. These are meaningful occasions and well established as a direct result of monitoring by senior staff and house leaders even though these learning walks focus more on content than on the spiritual impact on students. Leaders rightly recognise that this is the time to introduce greater variety to the pattern of these activities.

Students are aware of Anglican tradition through the termly services of Eucharist and have a secure understanding of the place of Jesus in Christianity and the Christian belief in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These occasions are fully inclusive and enable students to engage with local clergy as well as experiencing formal worship in a church building. Students recognise the value of this as a reference point for choices they may make later in life. Changes to help students engage more actively in these services have been positively, if a little cautiously, received. but the growth of live music is universally popular for how it prompts a more reflective atmosphere. Students understand the regular part that prayer plays in school life. Opportunities for personal prayer are less developed and the Chaplain is bringing valuable insights into how personal prayer might be made relevant to this community.

The effectiveness of the religious education is satisfactory

As a result of her insights and passion for her subject, the new team leader has changed the way the subject is perceived in just a matter of months. She has created a team ethos that students recognise as the basis of the better teaching they now receive and, as a result, standards are rising. Teachers are taking responsibility for developing joint resources and sharing best practice so that there are higher and consistent expectations for how lessons are delivered. Creative activities that require students to work collaboratively capture their interest such as in the Year 10 unit on euthanasia. However, not enough distinction is made between sitting as a group and working interactively together. There is still too much variation in how students take responsibility for their own learning through raising questions and in the level of challenge to more able students. A good atmosphere of openness and respect exists in lessons. Students are confident to share their beliefs openly and genuinely listen to each other. Teachers manage sensitive topics carefully and so students learn to disagree well. Teachers have embraced whole school initiatives to raise standards, especially in giving students feedback on the next steps in their learning. Pockets of good practice exist where students are paying careful attention to amending their work but this is not consistently implemented. GCSE results in 2017 were affected by staff instability and were below schools nationally but predictions for 2018 suggest considerable improvement. This shows the benefit of actions taken to address underperformance such as whole days where the curriculum is collapsed to focus on RE. Assessment has been revised in the light of the new GCSE grading system and provides clear flight paths for what is expected of students as they move through the school.

All students take RE through to GCSE. Students fully support this decision because the outward looking nature of the curriculum opens their eyes to the relevance of religious belief in how moral dilemmas are tackled. In the past, the subject was renamed 'ethics' to increase its popularity but students are now clear that it has a broader identity and is more balanced in its coverage of religion, philosophy and ethics.

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

In a short space of time, the acting headteacher has made significant progress in bringing the Christian ethos back to the forefront of leadership. Prior to this, the pace of addressing the issues from the previous inspection was uneven and hindered by staff turbulence and the long-term absence of key postholders. The senior team is fully committed to the vision for a 'vibrant Christian learning community' and each word of this phrase is receiving due attention. The acting headteacher has taken decisive action to build systems and structures to sustain the renewed importance of the Christian character. An assistant headteacher now has specific responsibility for the Christian ethos as well as line management of RE. A chaplain and a new curriculum team leader for RE have been appointed and a new worship group of staff and governors is in place. Early indications are that these developments are making a difference in raising the profile of the school's Christian identity and in improving the quality of what students experience. The statutory requirements for RE and collective worship are met and leaders remain committed to the appointment of specialist staff for RE.

Greater clarity in the systems for holding staff at all levels to account is creating a more open, calm and transparent culture. The outcomes of monitoring are relentlessly followed up by leaders to instil good practice. Governors are now more skilled in questioning leaders and reflect more effectively on their own practice. This has prompted a decision to create a new committee to manage the strategic direction of the school as a church school. Most importantly, governors fully understand the distinctive roles and responsibilities of new committees so that the integrity of the chaplain and clergy is retained. There has been a longstanding connection with the church and the current clergy team bring theological thinking directly into the strategic discussions with leaders. Any changes to the provision for worship or spirituality are, therefore, informed by reasoning that is rooted in Christian teaching. A closer relationship has been forged with the Diocese and leaders are benefiting from the expertise of the Education team and conferences that raise aspirations for church school leadership. Partnerships with feeder primary schools are mutually beneficial. A rigorous programme of transition for Year 6 pupils allows no individual difficulty or anxiety to go unnoticed.

Many members of staff and governors relate the core purpose of their work to a personal understanding of the Christian faith. However, an agreed theological basis to the school's vision is only now emerging to make it absolutely clear how the Christian vision shapes the inclusive and hospitable nature of school life. The mental wellbeing of staff and students is of utmost importance and is properly resourced. The work of governors now dovetails with senior leaders. They have set about systematically reviewing school policies to ensure the approach to managing behaviour and attendance is consistently informed by Christian values at every stage.