

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Archbishop Blanch Church of England High School

Earle Road, Liverpool L7 6HQ

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Liverpool
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Liverpool
Name of multi-academy trust / federation	n/a
Date of inspection	29-30 June 2017
Date of last inspection	June 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided 104705
Headteacher	Heather Duggan
Inspector's name and number	Robert Haigh 660

School context

Archbishop Blanch is a slightly smaller than average-sized girls' secondary school. Boys are admitted to the sixth form which operates in partnership with three other faith schools. The school serves an extensive urban community of diverse cultural and socio-economic character. The majority of students are White British. An above average and rising proportion come from a minority ethnic background. The proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. The proportion for whom pupil premium funding is received is below average. The school is oversubscribed. In 2015 it moved to a new site and building in a city regeneration scheme.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of the school as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The headteacher's dynamic and inspirational leadership, strongly supported by the dedicated staff, chaplain and governors, means that the school's Christian mission and ethos are paramount.
- The school is an exceptional multi-faith community, confident in its Christian identity yet demonstrating unity in diversity. Everyone is known well and cared for deeply. The culture of inclusivity and Christian nurturing means that a strong sense of belonging is experienced by all members of the school family.
- A belief in the value and uniqueness of each student before God inspires excellent pastoral care. This promotes students' self-confidence, impeccable behaviour and love of learning.
- The six core Christian values are deeply embedded. Students have an excellent understanding of their importance and determinedly practise them. Thus, the values support the growth of character, facilitate learning and enrich the excellent relationships throughout the school.
- The school is a beacon of Christian hospitality and service. The emphasis on servanthood means students aspire to contribute to the good of the community while at school and the wider world in the future.

Area to improve

- Ensure Archbishop Blanch's Christian ethos evolves with the school, both in responding to the challenges of increasing diversity and in embracing the opportunities for partnership in its new setting. This will enrich the Christian distinctiveness of its contribution to the service of education within the city of Liverpool.

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

Archbishop Blanch is a happy and harmonious faith community and community of faiths. Everyone is engaged in its vision to be 'one community showing the love of Christ through friendship, compassion and thanksgiving'. These core Christian values, together with those of forgiveness and trust are deeply embedded. They are a golden thread woven through every part of school life. Students understand that the values mirror the teaching of Jesus. They can also explain their impact on their attitudes and behaviour. One Year 9 student summed up the views of the many by saying, 'The six values are installed in our brains and behaviour and grow within us to help us change who and how we are.' Parents also recognise that the values permeate the school to ensure that each child knows the love of Jesus through faith in action. Students feel safe and cherished. A Year 10 student said, 'What holds our school family together is not just mere tolerance, nor simply respect, but genuine friendship.' A Year 12 student, new to the school, remarked, 'I have never experienced this quality of community. The emphasis on social cohesion makes this school a bridge bringing us all together.' Students' enjoyment of school is reflected in their above-average attendance. All are known very well. The emphasis on friendship and belonging results in outstanding behaviour. When problems do occur the values guide responses and interventions. This vibrant and nurturing culture is highly conducive to learning - the ethos enhances outcomes. The atmosphere is calm yet students fizz with enthusiasm and aspiration. Staff combine high expectations with unstinting support and individual care, which for the most vulnerable students is transformational. Thus, all students are increasingly effective learners making good or better progress from their starting points. Standards of attainment are high at all levels and often exceed local and national averages. Disadvantaged students make similar progress to others. Being enabled to shine not only means academic success, but also a challenge to fullness of life and to be a blessing to others. As a result, this community lives well together. Students work and learn collaboratively showing kindness and mutual support. They show compassion in the way they speak about other students' needs and their willingness to befriend them. Sixth form students, led by the visionary head girl and deputy head boy, are seen as role models. They care for younger ones around school and serve as classroom learning assistants. This buddying builds the self-esteem of both groups. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is outstanding. They respond well to learning about values in religious education (RE), worship and across the rich and relevant curriculum. They speak about faith and morality in their own lives with maturity and confidence. Students say the bright soaring interior of their school building and its inviting spacious areas for gathering and conversation lift their spirits and encourage 'togetherness'. A cross and reflection point in each classroom and eye-catching Bible verses and values displays in public areas foster students' spirituality. They have a strong sense of right and wrong and a bias to victims, the poor and the marginalised in society. Thus, they raise support and funds for foodbanks and many charities, linking their action to the values of compassion, friendship and justice. The school choirs regard their many performances as part of their Christian service. Highly effective RE ensures students develop a sound knowledge and understanding of Christianity. They also learn to explore and understand the beliefs of other denominations and faiths. Therefore, they respect diversity, difference and shared values which in turn enhances the school's cohesive inclusivity.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship is central to the school's life. It is inclusive, engaging and binds the community together. Gathering for worship is seen as special. A Year 7 student said that worship 'brings us all into the presence of God.' It is both affirming and challenging. Evaluation from adults and students shows how worship provokes their deeper thinking, prompts exploration of what it means to be a person of faith and inspires service through social and charitable action. Well-planned themes enable students to understand Bible teaching, Christian values, the church's year and the faith experience of other religions. Celebrations of Christian festivals, communion services and visits to Liverpool Cathedral enhance their understanding of Anglican worship tradition. As a result, students gain a secure knowledge of the life and teaching of Jesus. They also understand the challenges for Christianity in the modern world and develop a Christian perspective on the big questions that matter to them. Prayer is a core element of worship and enhances the spiritual life of students. The prayer room is available for Muslim students to pray as their faith requires. They say that reflecting on their faith at school helps it to grow. All students have a mature grasp of the purposes of collective and private prayer in their journeys of faith. They regularly compose and contribute prayers for a variety of types of worship. Thus, they understand the range of prayer from silent reflection to communication with God. This deepens their knowledge of its value and significance. They have a sense of the awe and wonder of God the Creator and Father, Jesus the Saviour and Son and the Holy Spirit. The chaplain's quiet, prayerful strength and leadership are greatly valued by all. His ministry stimulates a thoughtful interest in faith throughout the school community. Different contexts, leaders and styles ensure students understand how varied worship can be. Students of all faiths plan and lead times of prayer, reflection and worship. This builds their leadership skills and understanding of how to make these occasions meaningful for others. There is a need to create even more opportunities for students to design and lead worship as well as to ensure that the outstanding approaches in larger worship gatherings consistently inform the creative programmes of form worship.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

RE is a high profile core subject. There is a clear understanding of its importance in fulfilling the Church of England Statement of Entitlement for RE in church schools. Seen by the diocese as a centre of RE best practice, the school is piloting the new Understanding Christianity national project. The leadership of the highly effective head of department is outstanding. His ambition for RE is shared by the team of dedicated and very talented teachers. Their vision is not only of academic excellence, but also of RE as a journey of spiritual discovery in which matters of faith and belief are encountered, explored and responded to. Students rise to this admirably. They achieve high academic results at GCSE and A Level and make very good progress across all key stages. Teaching is always good and frequently outstanding, so students are challenged and nurtured to achieve above expectations. Assessment in RE is accurate. Teachers monitor and evaluate standards rigorously. Students receive helpful feedback so they know the next steps in their learning and discuss with teachers how to improve their work. Students engage, reflect and are becoming wise questioners. They make links between the religious material under investigation and their own lives which develops high levels of theological insight, moral understanding and mindfulness. For example, Year 9 investigate the practice of baptism and discover what a life dedicated to Jesus means. Year 10 explore beliefs about death and beyond and ponder the implications for life here and now. There are many opportunities for analytical and evaluative tasks. Students are not merely acquiring information, but applying the skills of enquiry and interpretation and being stretched intellectually. For example, Year 12 wrestle with Bultmann's theories about the resurrection and whether or not they undermine its importance for Christians. Students of all backgrounds say that teaching in RE helps them to learn about and from religion, provides new experiences and knowledge and nourishes them in their faith journey. Links with the school values and students' SMSC development are explicitly planned for and taught. Students make these connections. Their teachers are adept at asking challenging questions and facilitating discussion which deepens students' thinking. This enriches students' collaborative learning, which in turn promotes their skills of listening and empathy. They have a strong knowledge of Christianity and other faiths. They are able to compare beliefs, practices and value systems across a range of religions. However, the absence of visits to other than Christian places of worship makes this understanding less meaningful. The contributions of students, staff and parents of different faith backgrounds goes some way towards addressing this.

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

The school's mission statement impels leadership and management. The deep and reflective faith of the highly regarded headteacher underpins her exceptional Christian leadership. She and her dedicated, highly competent senior colleagues, strongly supported by all staff, the chaplain and governing board, live out and promote a Christian vision. It illuminates all aspects of school life. Servant leadership and teamwork are strong. Governors, leaders and staff have a deep understanding of Christian values and the school's purpose in nurturing students' lives through learning, worship, care, guidance and service. Thus, the drive to improve the quality of the education offered and the effectiveness of the school's Christian distinctiveness are paramount. Rigorous monitoring and honest self-evaluation is effective in informing the school's priorities as a church school. These are prominent in the school development plan and provide strategic direction. Key policies refer to Christian values in practice. Governors are dedicated, vigilant and are a strong presence in school. They know the school well and offer robust challenge and generous support. This enhances the effectiveness of leadership at all levels.

The governing board and the headteacher skilfully led and managed the change process that brought the school to its new location. They are not only mindful of the need to retain the school's unique signature but also to enable it to respond to the opportunities and challenges it faces in its new setting and in light of its growing popularity. The governors ensure that collective worship and RE meet statutory requirements, are well resourced and retain a high profile. Both aspects benefit from robust monitoring and support by senior leaders and effective links with the governing board. The areas identified as needing improvement at the last SIAMS inspection have been addressed. The culture of distributed leadership and teamwork means that students are entrusted with much responsibility. They relish their roles as worship monitors, buddies, councillors or representatives. This delegation fosters their confidence, leadership skills and commitment to the school's aims. The same support and care shown to students is extended to staff who enjoy their work and feel valued. They also see themselves as learners. This has brought about personalised professional development. The growth of Christian leadership and the induction of new staff and governors into a church school are well supported. Governors, leaders and staff say this provision enhances their expertise and effectiveness. The school has mutually beneficial links with churches, the diocese and cathedral, the local authority, universities and its partner schools. The students' families are known well and supported by the school in times of need. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of and thankful for what the school is achieving. They see their children's happiness, progress and success as rooted in its Christ-centred ethos and character.