



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Birchills Church of England Community Academy

Farrington Road
Walsall
WS2 8NF

Previous SIAMS grade: N/A

Current inspection grade: Outstanding

Diocese: Lichfield

Local authority: Walsall

Date of inspection: 23 June 2016

Date of last inspection: N/A

School's unique reference number: 139435

Principal: Bavita Williams

Inspector's name and number: Lizzie McWhirter 244

School context

Birchills became an Academy in July 2013 as part of St Chad's Academies Trust. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is well above average in this richly diverse school. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is above average. The academy serves an area of great deprivation. There have been significant changes in governance and senior leadership. The headteacher has been in post for two years.

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

- The level of pastoral care in the welcoming, nurturing and inclusive, yet richly diverse community stems from the dedication and commitment of all staff, clergy and governors to serve the children and their families.
- Christian values are embedded in the daily life of this academy. This enables pupils to grow as confident individuals and achieve well, given their starting points. As a result, pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and behaviour and relationships are exemplary.
- Prayer and reflection features significantly in daily life and nurtures pupils' spiritual development.
- Strong leadership and good governance are rooted in mutual partnerships between academy, church and community.

Areas to improve

- Enable pupils to deepen their knowledge of key Christian concepts and beliefs to enhance their understanding of the academy's Anglican heritage.
- Provide training and support for the religious education [RE] subject leader as an important aspect of Christian distinctiveness and as part of the governors' monitoring of this key subject.

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

Birchills Academy is a richly diverse community respecting everyone's belief, faith and culture. Consequently, it is a welcoming, inclusive and nurturing Christian family where the wellbeing of the whole community is of utmost importance. Children, staff and families of all faiths and none are warmly accepted. This is because the school's core Christian values, such as trust and love, foster a very strong

sense of belonging as well as driving positive progress. In addition, such values permeate all school life, making an excellent contribution to the Christian character of the school and to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural [SMSC] development. As a result, relationships between all members of the school community are very good. This school has a very clear policy for behaviour and discipline, which stems from the Christian value of forgiveness and new starts. Consequently, pupils are given positions of responsibility in school and children of all abilities are praised for their individual achievements. There is not just a focus on academic achievement, but the whole child is valued. Music, sport, gardening and art are all strengths of this school. Pupils know they are special and loved. 'Be cool, calm and beautiful' are constant affirmations. They also know that love in practice demands respect and that it is important to attend school to obtain lifelong skills for the workplace. As such, attendance is positively encouraged and actively enabled by staff who go the extra mile to support needy families. Dedicated staff have very high aspirations for the pupils enabling them to be successful, raising self-esteem and helping to eradicate poverty. As a result, data shows an improving picture, with all groups of pupils making accelerated progress, given their starting points. Strong pastoral support ensures that vulnerable children make significant progress. More importantly, all children have a very strong sense of self-worth as they are given positive paths to follow. Collective worship and RE make good contributions to pupils' personal development and to the school's Christian character. However, the school acknowledges that deepening pupils' knowledge of key concepts and beliefs in RE is a focus for development. Parents highly praise the richness of this diverse, yet well integrated, community which enjoys common shared values. Excellent links between academy, church and the mosque ensure 'a special respect is preserved and we appreciate each other'. Good examples include charity fundraising, collecting for the local foodbank, Harvest services and bazaars at the mosque. In addition, everyone is aware that HM The Queen is Head of The Church of England and 'our country's leader. Our school represents a common wealth of different multi-faiths which is very important and special to us'.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

The excellent partnership between St Andrew's Church and the academy is embodied through its parish priest, who is instrumental in the daily life of the community. He makes a very good contribution to the spiritual development of the gathered community. He sees his role as a governor and as the local incumbent as an important aspect helping 'the church to take its part in the local community'. This is because acts of worship, in church and school, involve and engage everyone and are linked to Bible stories and the school's Christian values. Worship embraces the Christian faith and reflects on values, such as being priceless in the eyes of God, which everyone can relate to in their lives. All pupils, staff and governors are involved in regular and robust evaluation of worship, which informs future planning. Pupils have a good understanding of the Christian teaching about God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They say, 'just like the leaves on each shamrock I see there are three parts of The Holy Trinity'. They speak confidently about 'God choosing to come to earth as a human'. However, they are less secure in their knowledge of Ascension-tide and Pentecost. Pupils speak of 'collectively talking to God' in prayer, whilst the school is affirming of individual faith and belief. Pupils also say they pray at home before they go to sleep. Key festivals are marked in church and school, with pupils and adults, including parents, celebrating the different seasons of the church year. The majority of parents too believe collective worship is an important part of school life.

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

Leadership at Birchills is very strong with shared collaborative and yet clearly defined roles and responsibilities. This is because the headteacher, senior staff and governors are all committed to its Christian ethos and values. Such virtues are at the root of all decision making. Pastoral care is a high priority, with foundation governors ensuring the response to the challenge of community life is met with Christian compassion and direction. This is through the significant work of the parish priest, headteacher and governors working together with one mind. Consequently, the Christian vision of the school's leaders drives the school development, including the academic and personal development of pupils. The two key areas of RE and worship are closely monitored by governors, with the incumbent meeting regularly with the RE subject leader. Hence they meet statutory requirements. The school's vision is

modelled and embraced by the whole staff. This makes clear to all the importance of the school's chosen Christian values. Additionally, members of the school community explain such values in their own words as well as parents testifying to pupils modelling the school values at home. All governors are committed to ensuring that every person, whether adult or child, flourishes in this caring Christian environment. They acknowledge 'tomorrow's citizens are in our hands'. Consequently, children feel safe, grow in self-esteem and achieve well. They grow spiritually and socially as well as academically. All areas from the previous inspection have been addressed and there are clear priorities for future action and development. This includes supporting training needs for staff, who are growing in leadership skills at all levels of responsibility, not least the RE subject leader. Birchills has benefitted greatly from diocesan support and training. Partnerships with the local community, especially with the mosque, are strong and growing. Parents, who include the local imam, say that 'teachers always welcome me with a smile' and 'this school is a blessing'. As one of its trustees puts it, 'right at the heart of its community, Birchills is a beacon of Christian mission and Anglican identity'.

SIAMS report June 2016 Birchills Academy, Farringdon Street, Walsall WS2 8NF