



## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

### Saint Aidan's Church of England Academy

Hundens Lane  
Darlington  
DL1 1LL

#### Diocese: Durham

Local authority: Darlington

Dates of inspection: 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> November 2014

Date of last inspection: 17<sup>th</sup> March 2010

School's unique reference number: 135314

Headteacher: Ms Catherine McCoy

Inspector's name and number: Mrs Carole Snelling NS 519

#### School context

Saint Aidan's Academy is jointly sponsored by the Church of England and David and Anne Crossland. It educates 593 pupils between the ages of 11 and 16 years old, making it a smaller than average school. A purpose built campus provides a high quality learning environment. The principal was appointed in 2013. Declining numbers and a budget deficit have necessitated significant change in staffing over recent months. The majority of students are white British and the number entitled to free school meals is above the national average. The academy serves an area facing social challenges and economic deprivation.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Saint Aidan's Academy as a Church of England school are satisfactory.

- The realistic and accurate self evaluation by the principal, her team and governors has identified areas for improvement and action plans for progress including RE, worship and behaviour for learning.
- The passionate leadership of the principal and her team are able to articulate a vision for the academy based on Christian love of neighbour and the fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness and gentleness.
- The courage of the governors in making tough decisions has ensured that the learning experience for all students is more challenging and of a consistently higher quality.
- The work of the chaplaincy team is effectively supporting the academy in moving forward the work on building positive relationships, worship, and in offering pastoral support grounded in the teaching of Jesus.

#### Areas to improve

- Embed and make explicit the academy's ethos and Christian distinctiveness to develop,

drive and inform the relationships within the community in order that all can be respected, feel valued, learn and achieve.

- Improve the outcomes in Religious Education by ensuring that low level disruptive behaviours are eradicated and that learner entitlement to at least good teaching, formative assessment, challenge and engagement are consistently delivered as the norm.
- Increase learner involvement and participation in planning, delivering and effectively evaluating worship in order that they can have sense of ownership and to allow them to develop the themes of the fruit of the spirit.
- Ensure that high quality training is provided for the teams who deliver worship and RE in order that the work on values and opportunities for spiritual development can be further embedded.
- Identify social, moral cultural and spiritual development opportunities across the whole academy curriculum in order that learners can develop as reflective and caring young people.
- Review policies for R.E. worship and social, moral, cultural and spiritual development so that they reflect and inform current practice.

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

Saint Aidan's vision to provide opportunities for all young people to reach their potential underpinned by Christian gospel teachings has not yet been achieved. Christian values of care, respect and responsibility remain implicit and not all members of the community can articulate the gospel teaching on which the values are based. Student attainment based against national outcome measures has not yet been reached. Inconsistencies in teaching and learning have resulted in a lack of rapid progress and attainment for all groups of students. The principal, her team and governors are passionate and determined about improving the educational experience for all learners. Strategies to ensure that all students attend regularly and aspire to be the best they can be have not yet impacted on student attainment. The ethos is caring and inclusive based on Jesus' teaching of love of neighbour, although the majority of students are not yet confident enough to explain this. The atmosphere is one of welcome for and acceptance of visitors; the students are caring and helpful. Behaviour is mostly good though off task behaviours disrupt learning in some lessons. The introduction of Martin Buber's philosophy of I and Thou is beginning to impact on the way relationships between staff/students/staff are developing. Shared vision of the Ideal Adult and Ideal Student are informing and improving behaviours for learning. The provision of iReflect for those students disengaged from learning allows for reflection and strategies for re-engagement. The impact of this has been to radically reduce the number of fixed term exclusions. Restorative justice approaches based on Jesus' teaching of forgiveness are rapidly improving relationships by allowing staff and students to reflect and resolve conflict. Students are prepared to share their views of academy life and these are largely positive, however they are aware that some students need help to manage their behaviours and attitudes. Students say they feel safe and know that if they had a problem or were being bullied they will be listened to and helped. Opportunities to contribute to academy development exist through the student focus groups. The chaplaincy team provides a much needed support mechanism for those experiencing difficulties. The driver for the care offered is a working out of God's love for all and the recognition of the value of each person. The curriculum followed in Religious Education provides an opportunity to explore Christianity, its world wide nature and other major faiths. The impact of this is the development of tolerance, cultural awareness and a contribution to social cohesion. Opportunities for social, moral, cultural and spiritual development are afforded in RE, worship and Family tutor time but they have not yet been fully identified in other areas across the curriculum.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is satisfactory.**

Worship plays an important part in the life of the academy; it takes place in the morning and sets the tone for the day. Each week there is House worship and whole academy worship. During the time spent in family vertical tutor groups, social and moral issues are explored linked to the academy values of respect, care and responsibility. The chaplaincy team carried out an evaluation of staff and students' views about worship. This resulted in a re-worked schedule. Themes for this academic year are based around fruit of the spirit. The Anglican tradition and the Biblical teachings behind the major Christian festivals and Lent form part of the worship cycle. An invitation is extended to the academy community to take part in an occasional lunch time Communion service lead by visiting clergy. The evaluation exercise also impacted positively by increasing the size of the team opting to lead worship including contributions from visiting clergy, governors, students and staff. Worship takes a clear pattern with quiet reflection time, an invitation to prayer and stimulus material. Students behave well in worship and during the Armistice service behaviour was exemplary; following the service students reflected in RE about what they really valued and selfless commitment to others. There is some evidence of the impact of worship from the theme of Goodness, where Year 7 students followed this up with service for others by fundraising for Leprosy. An invitation to listen to a prayer is offered and students use the Lord's Prayer. A prayer diary is available for the community compiled by the chaplaincy team; however prayer does not yet play a large part in the life of the academy. The areas for development raised at the last inspection have been partially addressed. A more rapid development of the opportunities for students to take an active role in worship is needed. Currently each family group plans and leads worship once each year. During Family time students reflect on *iLearn, iLove, iLive* which encapsulates the academy's values and some opportunities for social, moral, cultural and spiritual development. The students do not yet articulate that teachings of Jesus are the basis for work on values and the fruit of the spirit. Guidance in helping them to understand the gospel teaching would allow them to articulate that which is at the heart of the academy's ethos.

The academy is compliant in holding a daily act of collective worship.

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is inadequate**

The attainment in RE is in line with other subjects across the academy and is below the national average both in terms of expected progress, closing the gap between pupil premium learners and their peers and in attainment outcomes. Standards have declined since the last inspection. At Key Stage 4 all students follow full course GCSE RE consisting of two units on Christianity. From the students entered in summer 2014, 27% gained a grade C or better. The long term absence of the subject leader, frequency of staff changes and recruitment difficulties have resulted in inconsistent standards of teaching and learning, assessment practices which are not routine, and in limiting student progress, enjoyment and engagement in lessons. A subject specialist took up her post at Easter 2013 and she is currently leading the department in an acting capacity. The Diocesan syllabus "Illuminating Pathways" has been introduced at Key Stage 3 which is mainly Christianity but also studies other major world faiths. This is proving to be a useful vehicle to explore and marry the academy's Christian values with worship but this work is in its early stages. Where there is best practice, students know their target levels and comment marking allows for improvement. However this is not consistent and some students had not had their work marked this term. Students are not fully engaged and challenged in their learning resulting in some low level disruptive behaviour. There is a need to increase pace and rigour and to ensure that work is sufficiently differentiated to extend the most able and support those with special learning needs.

At KS4 where students have experienced some good teaching, they describe their lessons as being fun. They enjoy debate knowing that there is no right or wrong answer and that their views are valued. They feel that contentious topics are handled sensitively with regard to peoples' feelings. A comparison between the teachings of Christianity and Islam on moral and religious topics allows for the development of tolerance and community cohesion. In

discussion with students it is clear that some know their target grades, and where they are currently performing. Where staffing is stable over time there is some good teaching. However this is inconsistent across the subject.

### **The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is satisfactory**

An effective relationship exists between governors and the leadership team. Together they articulate high aspirations for all at Saint Aidan's and a determination to create a culture in which high quality teaching, good student behaviour and attitudes to learning can flourish underpinned by Christian care and love. Saint Aidan's is on a journey of improvement, but this has not been sufficiently rapid. Student attainment is inadequate and is below the national average for expected progress. Recent changes to budgets and the subsequent restructuring of staffing have resulted in turbulence and a loss of confidence amongst a minority of parents and community members. It is a priority for the academy to restore and rebuild these relationships. Conversations with parents show they value the care, nurturing and support given to their children by the academy. They praised the patience of staff and value that. As parents they are listened to, especially when difficulties need to be resolved. The academy works hard to broker input from external agencies to ensure that all students receive the support they need. Governors have taken difficult decisions to ensure that the teaching and learning experience will improve for all learners. Improvement strategies are in place; however it is too soon to see their impact on attainment, attendance and attitudes to learning. At a recent academy training event governors and other leaders made significant progress in enabling staff and some students to understand and contribute to the development of the academy ethos. The impact is the development of a Christian based philosophy that is now informing and underpinning the developing work on relationships, behaviour for learning and SMCS opportunities in Family time and worship. The principal has developed supportive networks with local institutions which allows for smooth transition into Year 7 and for students from Year 11 moving into the next phase of their education or training. Additionally the principal and her team are working closely with other Church of England academies in both Durham and Newcastle Dioceses to provide mutual support, training for colleagues, opportunities for leadership development and the dissemination of shared good practice. Areas for development identified at the last inspection have been partially addressed but have not yet brought about the required improvement of standards in RE or in the wider opportunities for spiritual development. Support from the Diocese for RE and a strengthening of foundation governors is starting to make an impact on developing the Christian character. The governors' appointment of the chaplaincy team from Darlington Area Christian Youth Ministry is bringing new challenge to the working and living out of Christian love in the academy community. Religious Education and collective worship are based on Christian values which help to form the basis for the academy ethos. However they are implicit rather than explicit. As a result, although community members know that this is a church school, they are unclear how these inform and impact on their daily experience. It is important that existing policies for RE, worship and SMCS are reviewed to reflect and inform current practice. Arrangements for RE and collective worship meet statutory requirements.

St Aidan's Church of England Academy Darlington. DLI 1LL