



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

Dagenham Park Church of England School

School Road
Dagenham
RM10 9QH

Previous SIAMS grade: Good

Current inspection grade: Good

Diocese: Chelmsford

Local authority: Barking and Dagenham

Date of inspection: 19 April 2016

Date of last inspection: June 2011

School's unique reference number: 136028

Headteacher: Simon Weaver

Inspector's name and number: Lyn Field 151

School context

This is a larger than average, non-selective school that adopted Church of England status in 2010 and moved into a new building in 2012. The onsite base for students with moderate learning difficulties has capacity for 30 and the overall proportion with special educational needs and disabilities is above average. The proportions from minority ethnic groups, those who speak English as an additional language and those for whom additional funding is provided to tackle disadvantage are all above average. More students than usual join at times other than the start of the school year. A chaplain was appointed in 2013.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Dagenham Park as a Church of England school are good

- The headteacher provides ambitious and uncompromising leadership in developing the Christian character of the school so that its impact is widely recognised in the community.
- The harmony that exists between the many different religious and cultural groups in the school is expressed by the involvement of all students in the regular celebration of the Eucharist.
- Prominence has been given to religious education, collective worship and the curriculum for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. As a result, these areas now make a major contribution to pupils' academic achievement and wellbeing.
- Responsibility for developing the school's curriculum in line with its Christian character is now shared by leaders at all levels. This has increased the pace of development as the spiritual dimension becomes embedded across all subjects.

Areas to improve

- Develop a sixth form programme of spiritual study and forms of worship that are tailored to the level of students' maturity as they approach adulthood
- Establish a coherent system for reviewing progress as a church school so that clear and

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

The school's Christian character is now firmly established across the whole curriculum and has a significant impact on students' achievement, spiritual development and wellbeing. Religious education has played a key role in this. Teachers challenge students to apply Christian beliefs to current political and ethical issues both globally and in the UK. A more collaborative style of learning has taught students to be open-minded and accepting of others. They have discovered a commonality that has created a sense of belonging to one community. The suite of RE classrooms conveys some very positive messages about attitudes to religious belief and students of all faiths make use of these rooms for prayer and reflection outside of lessons.

Students of all abilities are confident to explain the basis of the school's five core values in biblical teaching. Equally important is that students of other faiths talk of how the values can also be interpreted in the context of their own sacred texts. This creates a powerful commitment across the school to living out Christian values in relationships, charity work and attitudes towards others. The values provide a common language and rationale for challenging any form of prejudice. Consequently, racist incidents and bullying, including of a homophobic nature, have dropped to a very low level. A typical comment from a younger student relatively new to the school was 'this Christian values idea is about putting things into practice; it changes us'. Older students note the impact on their aspirations for the future and how they look for opportunities to make a difference in society. The school is increasingly approaching the use of its values from the perspective of character development in line with a new Church of England initiative. There are firm plans to incorporate this into the Year 7 curriculum for September 2016. Leaders are right in recognising that ongoing changes to the curriculum have led to a lack of consistency in how spirituality and Christian values are defined across all areas of the school's work. This is partly because practice has now moved beyond the initial policies written when the school first became a church school.

The pastoral care of students is directly linked to the belief that each individual is made in the image of God. Close attention to the detail of individual needs helps students to overcome barriers to learning and attendance, for example, is regularly in line with national figures. At GCSE, achievement continues to improve and the gaps for disadvantaged students are narrowing. This represents good progress from low starting points. RE is compulsory and results have steadily improved to be in line with schools nationally and above those in the borough. The new Key Stage 3 curriculum is at an advanced stage of development and the new systems for monitoring progress suggest the needs of specific groups have been addressed, especially the more able. Similarly, the performance of sixth form students continues to improve. The school leads on RE in the consortium of four schools and all students achieve grade C and above. However, at sixth form level there are limited opportunities whereby all students continue to engage with religious, spiritual and ethical topics.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Students and staff of all faiths and backgrounds engage with a wide range of Christian worship on a daily basis. This is firmly established in the school and is a clear indicator of its distinctively Christian character. Students recognise the Eucharist as 'a unifying experience'. The chaplain invites participation and students respond with no sense of compromise to their own personal beliefs. A high proportion take communion and still more come forward for prayer. Students describe this occasion as 'a safe place for students of different faiths to share the Peace and express their shared values'. Sixth form students regret that, although they attend a weekly act of worship, a service of Eucharist is not part of their timetable. Whilst the school pays close attention to spiritual aspects of the curriculum, tailoring worship to the greater maturity of the oldest students has been missed.

All students are familiar with the festivals of the Christian year and the Anglican responses used

in weekly worship. They have a sound understanding of how these express key Christian beliefs about the place of Jesus Christ and of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit although students' confidence to explain them varies. Worship promotes the values of the school from a distinctively biblical perspective whilst acknowledging the viewpoints of other faiths. As a result, students know they are all equally valued in the sight of God and refer to this in justifying the importance of accepting diversity and difference in society.

The appointment of the chaplain accelerated the development of worship in the school. It confirms the wisdom of including this post in the early vision for the school as a church school because worship now has an impact on everyone involved with the school. Senior leaders monitor the daily inclusion of prayer and reflection in tutor time. This highlights the importance placed on spirituality. The chaplain has moved this forward from being a thought for the day to a time when students actively participate in discussion as well as taking time to reflect and pray. This is because the themes capture their attention and place faith at the centre of topical issues. Students appreciate that staff do not shy away from handling sensitive issues. Each week 77 tutors lead these sessions, making use of resources and personalised support from the chaplain. The impact of this on the spiritual wellbeing of the whole community is impressive and deserves to be celebrated. Student leadership of worship is emerging more quickly in the younger year groups. This is due to their confidence in the Christian ethos which has been in place for them since the beginning of their time in school.

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

The headteacher and chair of governors have been unswerving in their determination to deliver their vision for the school as a church school. It has worked because, from the start, the headteacher identified four non-negotiable areas to establish the school's Christian character. These were compulsory RE for all students, the place of prayer, the appointment of a chaplain and a curriculum shaped by the Christian character. As at the time of the previous denominational inspection, this successful approach continues to be one of evolution not revolution, recognising when the school is ready to move forward in each area. With the first generation of 'church school' students only now in the sixth form, a significant change has been achieved in the culture of the school. The transformation is viewed positively by students, staff, parents and members of the wider community. Standards are rising and a significant number of new students are now attracted by the school's Christian status.

Development as a Church of England school has gained momentum. The appointment of the chaplain, beneficial partnerships with the Diocese and local churches as well as visits from the Bishop of Chelmsford have a constant input into the school's Christian character. Staff are drawing on national initiatives to support improvement such as the Church of England report on character education (*Fruits of the Spirit*). However, it is the growth of Christian leadership, particularly among middle leaders, that has increased the pace of development. Professional training and support for staff from the chaplain has given a legitimacy to explicitly highlighting spiritual and moral issues across all subjects and is seen in the quality of students' reflection in tutor worship. Similarly, the prominence given to RE has been fully embraced by the team of specialist teachers now in place. The department's ambitious vision and pride in the subject is now an example of exemplary practice in how it contributes to the school's overall vision. RE leaders believe that the subject informs students' fundamental decisions about life and must inspire them to question themselves and why other believe differently.

Regular dialogue between senior leaders and governors ensures they know exactly what is working well and where further action is needed. However, the formal systems in place for gathering information and drawing this together to plan strategically lack a clear structure. At no stage has this hampered the school's development because of the clear direction and vision of leaders. However, the current system depends on their insight to establish clear priorities for improvement and so better procedures are necessary to support new leaders in the future.