

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Margaret's Church of England Academy

Aigburth Road, Liverpool L17 6AB

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Diocese

Liverpool

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Date of academy conversion

1 October 2012

Name of multi-academy trust

St Margaret's Church of England Academy

Date/s of inspection

5/6 July 2017

Date of last inspection

25/26 May 2012

Type of school and unique reference number

Secondary academy 138850

Headteacher

Stephen Brierley

Inspector's name and number

Barbara Easton 862

School context

St Margaret's is an average size boys' stand-alone academy which admits a small number of girls in the 6th Form. The intake is predominantly white British, with lower than average percentages of disadvantaged and EAL students and a very low percentage of students with a statement of special needs or health and care plan. 15% of places are reserved for more able students. The school enjoys close relationships with local Anglican and Roman Catholic secondary partners with whom some 6th Form provision is currently shared.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Margaret's as a Church of England school are outstanding

- Distinctively Christian values, which are clearly articulated and Biblically rooted, are fully embedded across the school and inform its life at every level. These are strongly re-enforced by the vocational leadership of the Headteacher and the commitment of faithful staff.
- St Margaret's translates its commitment to the love of God for everyone into a strong sense of responsibility for each individual in the school's care. This is marked by the strength of the pastoral care and the urgency with which the school is responding to any issues of underachievement.
- Trust, care and respect define relationships in the school. The sense of belonging within this deeply Christian community means that people of all faiths and none share a sense of St Margaret's as family which extends beyond the school gates and the school day.
- Because of the school's focus on Christianity as an active faith, students consistently commit to high levels of participation and volunteering. Within this, the response to the challenge of greater diversity within and around the school has been embraced in ways described as 'life-changing'.

Areas to improve

- Ensure that measures to secure students' progress are embedded so that standards, particularly for disadvantaged children and in religious education, continue to rise in line with the school's already high standard of attainment.
- Resource training about worship at all levels, so that there is greater confidence, range and imagination in creating richer opportunities for exploring and developing spirituality.
- Develop a more forensic approach to monitoring and evaluation so that examination outcomes in religious education more closely reflect the positive experience students have in lessons.

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

St Margaret's is distinguished by the ways in which distinctively Christian values drive the care of each young person in its family. The school treasures each student as a child of God: students are well known and well-loved, and those with particular needs are cared for particularly well. Families speak movingly of staff 'going the extra mile' for students who are weathering troubled times. The support given to Looked After Children was particularly praised. In order that some more vulnerable students can continue within this nurturing ethos post-16, the school has adapted the 6th form curriculum to create new vocational pathways alongside the more traditional A' level route. The Christian vision of the school promotes a strong sense of community in which students show the ability to live alongside one another, tolerant of each other's individualities and idiosyncrasies. Despite the pressures on adolescence, St Margaret's brings out the best in its young people so that, as they grow through the school, they aspire to be caring and protective, giving generously of themselves to others. Because of the ethos of the school, youngsters like to come here. Attendance and behaviour are very good. Good relationships are often sustained well beyond the school, with families and leavers returning to their sense of belonging to the St Margaret's family at times of need or celebration.

The school sets great store by its holistic approach to student achievement such that it works hard to offer rounded opportunities for youngsters to flourish. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education are strong, particularly through the consistent focus on the school's values in Learning for Life and religious education. Programmes throughout the school, reinforced by displays around the building, secure the expectation of high levels of participation and volunteering. Through their experiences in the school, students are gaining a powerful appreciation of what it means to live in a diverse community. The impact of their experiences of life together and friendships across cultures enables them to know each other's humanity and challenge the stereotypes to which they are exposed. The work the school has done to enlarge its admission categories and then embrace the new cohort of children of other world faiths, as well as the way the religious education staff manage students' engagement in trips and visits, has been very significant in this – some youngsters spoke about it as 'life-changing'. Attainment in the school is high and significantly above national averages. In the last couple of years, other indicators have dipped. The school is rightly concerned about this and the possibility that it may not be giving sufficient support to its most disadvantaged learners. The school's own data indicates that considerable progress has been made through work to rectify this over the last year.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good.

Worship is a valued aspect of school life. People from all aspects of the school community speak with deep appreciation of special services such as the 'emotional' leavers' service or the popular visit to the Cathedral for Christmas. Within school, students engage with worship willingly, and community hymn singing and participation are encouraged throughout. Students readily help with delivery, particularly as accompanists and technicians and, more occasionally, by contributing from their personal faith and experience. When this happens, it is popular and memorable. For example, students and staff both spoke about the powerful impact of the assemblies led by youngsters on their return from the Auschwitz visit, or the occasion a 6th form boy got up and preached: 'he owned the mic!'. A small group of year 7 students is the focus for rekindling more consistent student ownership of worship, taking a leading role in evaluation and delivery. This is still at an early stage but, during the inspection, these young students led assembly for the whole cohort with impressive confidence.

Monitoring and evaluation is thoughtful and involves a range of voices but the links with strategic future planning are less clearly drawn. Each week's worship is resourced with a range of Christian materials, allowing staff to personalise and differentiate according to different contexts within the school. However, although the materials are varied, staff do not always have the experience or the confidence to branch out to craft moments of deeper spirituality and reflection, so that the diet of worship opportunities is limited. The reworking of the communion liturgy and the creativity of annual Retreat Days and Prayer Space week is opening up more varied, imaginative and accessible approaches to spirituality but the influence of this does not yet spread across the school. Worship is distinctively Christian: Trinitarian in framework, with a clear focus on the person of Jesus and the insights of the Bible. It closely celebrates the rise and fall of the liturgical calendar and exposes youngsters to the rich diversity of Christianity through the involvement of worship leaders from different traditions within and beyond the school. Students enjoy regular visits to the parish church which adjoins the site and their reverence there in worship is commented upon. The small school chapel is a pleasant and accessible resource, but currently underused. Worship is a significant vehicle by which the Christian ideals and ethos of the school are expressed and embedded in the understanding of children and the wider community. It very frequently challenges hearers to make a response through action, strongly underpinning the ethos of service which runs through the school. Because of this, volunteering and charitable initiatives are strong and the ethos of the school is roundly embedded in daily life.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

The quality of teaching in religious education is generally good and sometimes outstanding. Because of this, most youngsters, of all faiths and none, enjoy RE. In the best lessons, teachers compellingly manage the pace of learning, with the result that children handle difficult material and concepts with interest, evaluate with depth and make links across complex ideas. In one lesson, for example, children considered the perspectives of classical and modern philosophers in relation to miracle stories across cultures and history. The well-judged probing of the teacher stimulated sophisticated discussion amongst groups of learners with the result that they thought more deeply and attained highly for their age. In another, a more measured pace coaxed learners into well-handled, thoughtful reflection around death and dying, sharing deeply from the experiences in the room. The good quality of relationships between students and with staff supports an atmosphere in which challenging issues of life, ethics and faith are sensitively handled. Students value the opportunity to explore some of humanity's greatest challenges in a safe environment, articulate their developing opinions and wrestle with the perspectives of others. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are strong in RE as staff balance pursuit of the academic curriculum with reflection on the Christian concepts which underlie the values of the school and the gospel. As a result, boys are growing into reflective and empathetic young men. The best classrooms have a stimulating learning environment which reflects the diversity of religious experience and promotes interest in matters of faith. A lively programme of visits and visitors is creatively used to consolidate learning and expand understanding. Students report the transformational impact of these opportunities on their worldview and self-confidence. The progress of learners in Key Stage three is strong but external examination results at GCSE do not reflect this strength or the quality of classroom experience seen. The target from the previous inspection, to improve outcomes at A' level, has not been consistently met. At GCSE, results have dipped below the national average particularly for the higher grades. The RE team is tackling this issue with energetic determination. Practice is being continually refined through focused, specific interventions and a commitment to learning from professional development. Monitoring and evaluation support this improvement although they are not sufficiently refined to give the department the forensic analysis and strategic focus that would make improvement more secure. Nevertheless, considerable progress has been made this year in identifying and tackling underperformance at department and whole school level so that school data now shows the majority of children achieving in line with national expectations and some making very significant improvement.

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

The Christian vision of St Margaret's, to be a nurturing community built on the love of God, is strongly articulated and deeply understood, making it the foundation on which the whole work of the school is built. The values which flow from it form the touchstone for community life: they are theologically expressed, practically promoted and consistently referenced. The vision is nourished by the vocational Christian leadership of the Headteacher, the enthusiastic commitment of faithful staff in all parts of the school and, significantly, by the wider St Margaret's family. As a result, it permeates every aspect of the school's mission in the lives of young people, enfolding youngsters in the rounded care of a distinctively Christian community as they grow into adulthood. Christians, people of other faiths and sometimes those of no faith catch, carry and share the distinctive ethos in their work, with the result that the impact of the school runs deep within and beyond its doors. Links with local church communities are strong. The school does not benefit from the services of a dedicated chaplain but good relationships with a range of local clergy and Diocesan staff strengthen the school's religious and educational life and are much valued. As a result of school leaders' strategic decisions around admissions and the curriculum, St Margaret's has embraced greater diversity. Links with other faith leaders have enriched the school and resourced it to build strong relationships across communities. The value of this was felt as the school came together during recent terrorist events, including the relatively local Manchester bombing, for example.

Inspired by the ethos of the school, members are nurtured to value self-giving. Students readily talk about 'giving back' and take up extensive opportunities for volunteering. Some participate in the Future Teachers programme and a number go on to undertake leadership in various Church traditions. Staff are well supported with considerable time given to professional development, which encourages church school leadership. RE has especially benefitted from staff participation in advanced study through becoming Fellows of the Farmington Institute. The school's frank self-evaluation of its key areas of underperformance has prioritised a committed drive for school improvement. This is particularly true of the timely focus on outcomes at GCSE and A' level. In both of these areas, the school shows evidence of the impact of robust intervention strategies in significantly accelerating pupil progress. Internal data shows that measures of student progress is now more in line with their targets and with the strong figures for achievement in Key Stage 3. Governors serve the school loyally and are undertaking an increasingly specific role in monitoring the work towards improvement. This means that the school's ability to ensure every student's achievement, in line with the deeply held vision, is increasingly secure.