

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Waddesdon Church of England School

School Lane Waddesdon Aylesbury Buckinghamshire HP18 0LQ

Current SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Diocese

Oxford

Previous SIAMS inspection grade

Outstanding

Date of academy conversion

1 September 2011

Dates of inspection

5-6 March 2018

Dates of last inspection

14-15 February 2013

Type of school and unique reference number

Secondary Academy 137355

Headteacher

Matthew Abbott

Inspector's name and number

Allyson Taylor 768

School context

Waddesdon is an average size secondary academy with 965 students on roll, including 251 students in the sixth form. The school admits students from the local village and neighbouring town. The majority of students come from a White British background. The proportion of students with additional learning, social, medical or personal needs is above that seen nationally. The headteacher, formerly the deputy head, has been in post since September 2017. The deputy headteacher, previously an assistant head at Waddesdon, is therefore also relatively new in post. The school is non-selective within a selective area.

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

- Waddesdon is a vibrant Christian learning community which lives out its deeply held vision and values and so improves the life chances of students.
- Relationships are shaped by the focus on the twin values of dignity and respect. There is a palpable sense of Waddesdon being a safe and secure place to be, of a community built on good humour, mutual support and love of self and neighbour; this is seen in lessons and around the school.
- The school is held in high esteem by parents, especially those whose children have additional needs; they appreciate that 'there is a place for you here, whoever you are'.
- Truly outstanding leadership creates a powerful ethos of nurture where each student is known and treasured. There is a warm community feel which is very special in a school of this size. This extends to the terrific team spirit among staff, both those who are long-standing members of the community and those who are newer to the school.
- Teaching and learning in religious studies (RS) are excellent and the subject plays an important part in developing each student's abilities to think, debate, reflect and consider their place in our diverse world.
- Academic progress and exam results show the positive impact of the commitment to ensuring each student experiences 'life in all its fullness' (John 10:10).

Areas to improve

- Extend opportunities for students to plan and lead aspects of worship to support their understanding of service to others and to being agents of change.
- Weave the strands of the Christian vision and values together into documents and the website so that these more fully and coherently reflect the outstanding nature of the school as a church school.

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

The Christian character of Waddesdon has to be experienced to be fully understood. The school is a place of joy and Christian love. There is a genuine welcome and interest shown to a visitor. Students are wonderful ambassadors for the school and are confident and delightful companions. The Christian values of dignity and respect are the lifeblood of the school and seen at every turn. These are becoming aligned with the new vision statement of individual and collective flourishing and have a profound impact on personal development and academic outcomes. The culture of nurture and aspirational teaching means exam results and progress are consistently above those achieved nationally. The school is very successful yet this is non-selective in an area where grammar schools select students by ability. Waddesdon's results prove that its priority of the holistic development of each individual pays off; well-rounded students whose individual interests and talents are promoted and celebrated. In focusing on 'agency' and increasing their sense of self-worth, students are taking greater responsibility for their own progress and learning. The mission of 'living well together' and 'living a life of purpose' motivates adults and students to be the best that they can be. This is seen in the exemplary support for those who are more vulnerable. No student is allowed to slip through the net and staff regularly share pastoral information so that everyone is cared for. Support staff make a massive difference to many students. As a direct result of the Christian character, behaviour and relationships between the ages are positive. Students are confident that staff will listen to their worries and do everything in their power to help them. Attendance is good and strenuous efforts are made to engage students who are struggling to attend. Compassion is shown to young people experiencing difficulties and exclusion is a very last resort. No permanent exclusions in many years is evidence of the impact of the character.

RS is one of the school's most popular subjects, hence the number of students studying it at A Level. All students sit the GCSE course and exam and so the subject makes a significant contribution to the Christian character of the school.

There is a well-established view of spirituality, summarised most clearly in the policy for collective worship. This encourages students to look beyond the material and to show great consideration for others and for the natural world. The diverse curricular and extra-curricular activities allow for wider spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students have a good understanding of a range of faiths and cultures, demonstrating respect and interest, particularly through the RS curriculum. They are less secure in their knowledge that Christianity is itself a multi-cultural world faith. The active school council and Christian ethos group demonstrates that student voice is instrumental in decision making. For example, a recent review of the ethos by students highlighted the need to consider varying the weekly pattern of assemblies.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Time for worship, known as assembly, binds the school together and builds up its common life as a church school. The impact of worship is felt throughout the school day. Worship guides everyday actions and exemplifies the power of the values; the reverence of several hundred students listening with interest, reflecting, sharing the prayers offered is a true reflection of how this school lives out its vision in a practical way that embraces all.

Collective worship is highly inclusive and respectful of the diversity of views amongst the staff and student population. While underpinned by the chosen values, worship is made relevant to those present. Different leaders, senior staff, some students from the Sixth form and church visitors means that there is an element of surprise in each assembly. As one student put it: 'you never quite know what will happen!' Students' talents are harnessed and they regularly provide music and song to start worship. When year groups meet for assembly, students are growing in confidence to offer to lead aspects and help with prayers. Several students comment on the recent improvements to worship, stating that the focus on the Beatitudes and Fruit of the Spirit has been of interest to them. The involvement of local clergy is much appreciated and provides a valuable link between the parish church and school. This also allows students to become familiar with some Anglican traditions of worship, such as the Lord's Prayer and the giving and receiving the Peace. Services held in the parish church give students experience of more traditional aspects of worship. Church and school are working together to offer additional times for spiritual development, most notably the 'Prayer Space' set up in the library. This was very well-attended and students request more of the same. As a student stated: 'not everyone is religious, but we can all reflect.'

Worship themes are carefully chosen to celebrate the main festivals in the church's year and to refer to current local, national and international issues. Themes also regularly raise aspirations and social conscience with many students volunteering in community projects. Often, ethical questions are posed and those attending invited to respond at a personal level. This style of invitational and reflective worship, means that each assembly gives the opportunity for individual spiritual growth. That such growth is happening is evident from the increase in the number of students attending regular Holy Communion services either to receive communion, a blessing or to just be there. The school is sensitive to the age and stage of life of students. As a result, those who are of non-Christian or no faith feel included and engaged with worship. For those who are Christian, weekly Christian Union meetings at lunchtime give another opportunity for Bible study and reflection on their faith.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Religious studies at Waddesdon are a beacon of outstanding teaching and learning. As a result of expert teaching by talented subject specialists, students are inspired and motivated to learn. One confirmed this by stating 'I don't want RS lessons to end.' RS gives students vital life skills. The ability to discuss, debate, agree and to disagree well, feature in many lessons. Students from different year groups give a consistent message that they like the challenge of the subject, the skill with which the different teachers deliver learning and the fact that RS 'helps us find ourselves as we grow up'. The subject has high status and this strongly reflects the Christian character of the school. All students sit the exam at GCSE with results which reflect the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Standards of achievement are consistently high and compare favourably with other departments. Teaching seen during the inspection was impressive. Lessons harnessed students' higher level thinking skills; engagement with the theme was universal and teachers' questioning probed and deepened students' understanding. Assessment is an ongoing part of lessons, with more formal tests punctuating units of work. As a result, the assessments skilfully guide teaching and lead to excellent exam results at GCSE and A Level. Monitoring and evaluation of progress is also effective; it involves governors who work with the RS lead to inform subject development plans. The foundations in studying the main world faiths in Years 7&8 ensure that Year 9 are well-prepared for the academic rigour of the GCSE course. Students, therefore, have a secure grasp of the tenets and practices of several faiths with a detailed and considered knowledge of Christianity and Buddhism as they move through school. RS lessons develop skills which transfer to other subjects. Applying these skills is seen when comparing students' work in other subjects with RS. The RS lead and her teaching team are exceptional in their subject knowledge and skills in engaging students.

A striking feature of RS is the openness of students to share their views and be willing to share their own faith background in discussion. It is clear that the values of dignity and respect frame lessons and promote a learning environment where risks may be taken safely. RS is a safe space to learn. While resource materials and IT are used very effectively to support learning, at this time, students have limited opportunities to visit different places of worship. They do, however, have a good sense of the multi-cultural nature of modern Britain. The RS syllabus ensures that students have a respectful understanding of those from different faiths and cultures. In the Sixth form, the opportunities to travel overseas enriches students' sense of self as well as their appreciation of their place in the world.

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

Passionate, gifted and able leadership, embodied by the headteacher is building on the legacy of his predecessor, a much-respected leader. The new leadership team is united in its mission to ensure each student is able to 'flourish' in academic and personal terms. The headteacher, deputy and assistant heads are shepherding the school through the transition into a new phase. Their commitment to valuing all god's children shines in conversation. Key policies and documents are now referencing the revised vision statement but not consistently so. The strapline of dignity and respect, new vision statement and collection of other Christian values is not woven into one coherent message which accurately reflects the Christian character of the school. Statutory requirements are fully met. The development point from the previous inspection has also been addressed.

Governors have a very high level of expertise. They provide excellent strategic leadership as well as spending time in school. They are actively involved in the day to day life of the school and know staff and students well. This enables them to tailor their strategic decision making while being fully aware of individual needs. For example, their welcome and provision for students with a special need or disability is based on Christian principles of inclusion even when there are financial considerations. Senior leaders and staff, particularly the SENCo, to quote a parent 'move mountains' to accommodate students and support families in need. It is clear that leaders at all levels share a vision which unites them in service. As internal candidates have been promoted to leadership roles, governors are active in developing future leaders of church schools. Staff acknowledge that it is the students which make the school so great, while students say it is the staff. The inspection showed that all ages are proud of Waddesdon and play their part in sustaining a school which is itself 'flourishing'. As a result, the 2017 exam results were exceptionally strong. Governors ensure that the leads for RS and worship receive support in fulfilling their key roles.

Leaders self-evaluation is accurate and insightful. Plans for development and improvement place emphasis on the Christian foundation of the school. Sixth form provision is broad and rich. Students delight in the choice of subjects and first class facilities. They speak with great warmth of their teachers and appreciate how much is done for them to help them to move on. Leaving the 'Waddesdon bubble' is hard and this confirms how much students gain during their time at school.

Partnerships with parents, the local church and village community are mutually beneficial. Support from members of the church is given generously and students and staff engage in outreach work within the local area.

Above all, Waddesdon upholds each individual and gives its students both the secure roots and wings to fly.