



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

The Blue School

Kennion Road,
Wells
Somerset BA5 2NR

Current SIAMS grade: Good

Previous SIAS grade (prior to academy convertor status): Good

Diocese: Bath and Wells

Local authority: Somerset

Date of inspection: 7th July 2015

Date of last inspection: 1st July 2010

School's unique reference number: 137285

Headteacher: Steve Jackson

Inspector's name and number: Linda Rudge, 791

School context

The Blue School is a larger than average school with 1591 students aged 11-18 years. It is situated in the centre of this small cathedral city and it was founded in the seventeenth century. The majority of students are identified as white British with a wide range of social and economic backgrounds. The number of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average, and pupil premium funding is below the national average. The school, formerly voluntary-controlled, converted to academy status in 2011, continuing its Church of England foundation. It has addressed some key areas for development from the last inspection in 2010.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of The Blue School as a Church of England school are good

- The school's Christian character has a positive impact on students' personal development and high standards of achievement
- Worship is an increasingly central part of school life, enhanced and well-supported by chaplaincy provision through the school's foundation
- Religious education (RE) makes a significant impact on the Christian character of the school by developing students' understanding of the importance of faith and diversity

Areas to improve

- Planned and agreed opportunities for developmental review of the Christian distinctiveness of the school's ethos, in order to involve and inform more students, staff and parents
- Provision for RE to enable more older students to develop their spiritual and cultural identities informed by teaching and learning about Christianity and other worldviews
- Provision for appropriate daily collective worship, including prayer where appropriate, to enable all students to develop their personal spirituality

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

The school has much to celebrate and to be proud of; it is an inclusive and purposeful place to live and learn. Its distinctiveness can be characterised in its approach to positive community learning. Parents and students think highly of The Blue School and the majority implicitly support the Christian foundation and ethos. The school has shared values of compassion, respect, forgiveness and co-operation based on the historical motto and current aims. These values were agreed since the last inspection through consultation, for example in student focus groups. As yet, the values are not known or explained effectively in terms of their Christian roots by many students. Public examination results and standards data show that most students make good, and often very good, progress. Overall achievement exceeds the national average. The school makes good use of additional resources to support students with special educational needs, and is narrowing the gap in their achievement over time. Admissions are based on the foundation of the school, and welcome packs for students explain the foundation and ethos. Attendance is improving since the introduction of new interventions based on the school's values, the pastoral system and the chaplaincy. The school provides a broad curriculum and inspirational extra-curricular activities to promote spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. These include art displays, engineering education challenges, residential and volunteering experiences, musical productions, and lunchtime prayer meetings and chaplaincy events. Older students are excellent role models for younger students as demonstrated in the school's lunchtime Buddies Club and in the well-established and nationally renowned Blue School Council. The council enables students to make values-led contributions to their school community. A recent fund-raising event for Nepal resulted in reflective displays around the school as well as generous social action through charities. Staff policies are implemented effectively in line with the Christian ethos, showing compassion and care for welfare. Some staff members are also beginning to use the chaplaincy services for their additional pastoral support and faith development. Students enjoy religious education (RE) and recognise its importance. RE is known as RP (Religion and Philosophy) in the school. The curriculum is drawn from the Somerset agreed syllabus and public examination courses and it is particularly effective in terms of promoting students' respect for, and understanding of diversity. However, more than fifty percent of students are not provided with a religious education after the age of fourteen. This precludes the further development of their religious literacy through their statutory entitlement.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Staff and students engage positively in the inclusive collective worship, but it is not provided for all on a daily basis. Themes linked to the Christian values make a difference to the school's engagement in social and charitable actions, and they have an impact on students' pastoral care and welfare. Students are increasingly taking lead roles in worship and assemblies, for example in sessions linked to themes of e-safety and cyber-bullying. Older students refer to worship as a stimulus for informed and inclusive discussions about faith and belief. Worship takes place in large groups or sometimes in class settings in which materials provided by the chaplain are shared in tutor groups. Christian symbols and texts provide a focus for the community's reflection on Bible teachings. The school's emphasis on the value of worship is seen through careful planning discussed with church representatives, and led by the chaplain. The chaplaincy has also provided space and resources for optional worship groups during the school day and outside it. Many students and some members of staff are happy to speak openly about how prayer can help them to deal with challenges in life. The whole school worship observed during the inspection visit showed students demonstrating an active interest in the theme of humanity as the 'hands and feet of Christ' in relation to the work of a young volunteer who had just returned from support work in Nepal. Through their learning in worship and in RE some students of all ages can explain their understanding of some Christian concepts, and some Anglican practices. Students are not yet involved closely in reviewing, planning and

leading worship on a regular basis, although they do provide occasional feedback. Confirmation classes, Founder's Day and Christmas services in the parish church contribute to the Christian distinctiveness of the school especially through chaplaincy action. Ten students have been confirmed over the last two years. Although most families are not church attenders, many family members join in school worship events at the local church, for example at the annual Founder's Day celebrations. Worship is seen by some older students as a symbol of 'what the school stands for', and younger students spoken to during the visit indicated that 'you can worship anywhere' at The Blue School.

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

The Blue School's leaders and governors show how the school is a Christian foundation through their actions to support every student. Leadership is also effective through the lived out values which are in line with the Christian vision for the school. The development of the role of the chaplain as a guardian of the school's ethos has been positive in terms of its impact on student and staff welfare, and increasingly on the profile of the school's Christian foundation. Leaders are able to talk with some confidence about the relationship between the school's Church foundation and its specific positive interpretation in this local community and large school. The head teacher, staff members and governors know the impact of Christian values and ways of living on the developing attitudes, achievement and self-worth of the students. However, the self-evaluation processes for ascertaining, sustaining and promoting the school's ethos are only partly shared across the whole community. Arrangements for RE and collective worship do not meet statutory requirements, or the foundation scheme. Governors express satisfaction with the way the school is meeting the foundation's aims through its provision of high quality education and its self-sacrificing pastoral care for students and for the wider community. The school participates in a lead role in relevant professional development through the Diocese and other providers. It is also contributing to the future leadership of church schools through its work in supporting student teachers, especially in RE, and in discussions about new ways of partnership across primary and secondary sectors. The links with the local parish church and the cathedral are mutually beneficial and lead to effective local partnerships, widely appreciated civic events and student presentations of RE and other work in places of worship. RE is given a good level of support and resources in line with other Humanities subjects, but this provision needs to be secured through ways of providing RE for all beyond the age of fourteen. The school's commendable decision to retain and promote Religion and Philosophy courses for public examination has sustained good examination results and a rising high number of candidates at GCSE and A level. This is a good church school led by highly committed and successful senior staff and governors who are supportive of the school's Christian character but especially of its specific foundation.

SIAMS report July 2015 The Blue School (academy convertor) Wells, BA5 2NR