

## Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

<b>Easton Church of England Academy</b>	
Beaufort Street, Easton, Bristol, BS5 0SQ	
<b>Current SIAMS inspection grade</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Diocese</b>	<b>Bristol</b>
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Date of academy conversion	1 September 2014
Name of multi-academy trust	Diocese of Bristol Multi Academy Trust (DBAT)
Date of inspection	14 November 2017
Date of last inspection	21 September 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	VA 141110
Headteacher	Peter Overton
Inspector's name and number	Mike Graham 286

### School context

Easton CE Academy is an above average sized primary school, situated in the heart of Easton, in central Bristol. A large majority of the children are from Somali families. There is a rich mix of cultural and religious backgrounds. 82% of pupils have English as an additional language and there are over 30 first languages spoken in the school. Over 60% of the children are entitled to pupil premium, which provides additional funding for disadvantaged children. The academy shares a site with Easton Family Centre, the local Anglican church, where family support and toddler groups are provided. In October 2014 a new KS2 building and an additional reception classroom were opened. A new headteacher and several key members of staff have been appointed since the previous inspection.

### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Easton Academy as a Church of England school are good

- Strong and sensitive leadership from the headteacher and senior leadership team, with unstinting support from staff and governors, has created a harmonious Christian ethos that gives the children security and benefits the whole community.
- Relevant, sincere and inspiring worship or 'community times', with great sensitivity towards members of all faiths, strongly develops children's spirituality and sense of unity with one another.
- High quality religious education (RE) leads to strong spiritual development and maturity in the children.
- Warm and loving relationships throughout the school family facilitate co-operation and excellent links with outside agencies and help maximise the benefits to children.

### Areas to improve

- Involve more children in planning, leading and evaluating worship so as to introduce greater variety and to give those involved a deeper understanding of their own spirituality.
- Develop greater breadth in the range of experiences available to children outside of the curriculum to enable them to deepen their understanding of world religions.

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

Christian values of love, respect and trust are not overstated but are lived out by all, regardless of faith position. All are welcomed and valued as children of God, and are made to feel secure and safe. This security enables them to give of their best, and the children are enthusiastic learners. Academic progress is good overall and outstanding in some cases. School and national data confirm a rapid improvement in academic performance, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The Christian character of the school supports the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all the children. Understanding of and respect for other cultures and faiths is diligently fostered by visits to different places of worship and excellent teaching in RE. Children speak over 30 different languages, and the headteacher and his staff see this diversity as an opportunity rather than a difficulty. The wealth of resources available, including children and adults of various faiths sharing their lives and experiences, are used sensitively and well to widen and deepen the children's understanding.

The Christian ethos extends to the attractive and often interactive displays which stimulate faith and prayer. A project called 'Unlocking Gifts' allowed children to help express their talent and unity with help from a visiting artist. The result was summarised in the project report: 'Tolerance has been nurtured and an understanding of difference achieved through creating a piece of artwork that embodies these ideas.'

The children's behaviour is impeccable, attendance is good and relationships amongst all members of the school community are outstanding. The respect shown by children to adults, visitors and to each other is commendable, particularly because of the difficulties experienced by many in the recent past. The trusting ethos created in school leads to good and growing parental involvement through the parent forum and 'tea and chat'. These are informal meetings through which parents can learn new skills, discuss school and life in general with each other, and be helped by family workers, education welfare officers and others. During one of these gatherings a mother attending commented significantly, 'It's good for our children to learn about other faiths'.

A project initiated by the headteacher, 'Children of Bristol, just like us', included exchange visits between Year 5 children from Easton and a very different school. This demonstrated the willingness of children and the community to support the school in embracing and celebrating difference. As a community governor said eloquently, this 'disproves the world's rhetoric, and shows that people of different faiths can thrive together and share life in a community.'

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

Children and adults engage fully with worship in the school's community times together. These occasions are varied, sincere and relevant, and make a significant difference to the lives of all concerned. The school's Christian values are introduced in community time and reinforced and explored further in class worship.

The sensitivity shown towards children from non-Christian faiths is striking. Great care is taken to include everyone. From the greeting and response, 'peace be with you', 'and also with you', through the reflection times and invitations to prayer to the calm dismissal all are gently encouraged and valued. A child commented 'It's good to learn about other faiths – I'm not scared any more.'

Community time often includes stories and short video extracts with invaluable and accessible teaching on values and trust, for example C S Lewis' Narnia stories. Open questioning and discussion lead to deepening understanding of some difficult topics such as betrayal and self-sacrifice. Faith stories are used sparingly at present, and all developments in worship planning are discussed carefully with church and community. The Christian love and care shown is exemplary. Indeed, the Christian values are demonstrated and celebrated in quiet and loving action, with a strong emphasis on inclusion and acceptance for all.

Children have many opportunities for prayer and reflection. These aspects of worship are a natural part of school life, with many reflection activities and a 'quiet place' set aside for prayer. This room is well used by children and adults, individually and in small groups. No one is criticised for demonstrating their faith in such ways. One child said, 'We show respect, because we learn from each other.'

The school community contributes to the planning, leading and evaluation of worship. Staff, children and church members play their part, although the children's involvement is limited. The newly appointed priest-in-charge is keen to support in any way he can, whilst being fully aware of the sensitive approach that is needed.

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

Almost every major world faith is represented in the rich mix of cultures that is Easton academy. This gives an especially diverse series of options for teaching about the significance of faith. These opportunities are seized with joy, yet with commendable care. Several staff members, parents and visitors have shared their beliefs and cultural

richness with classes, as have many of the children. One child commented, 'Learning about other faiths is good because we can discuss about them and understand them.'

The planning for RE is well established and the RE leaders are constantly seeking ways to improve the syllabus further. They are well supported by the leadership, who see the subject as crucial in the life of the school. Units from the project 'Understanding Christianity' have recently been introduced, alongside excellent resources exploring other major world faiths. Visits to the Easton Family Centre and non-Christian places of worship, a mosque and a synagogue for instance, give first hand experiences to the children at appropriate times in their studies.

The achievement of the children in RE is good, with some children reaching outstanding levels of understanding and spiritual maturity. This results from consistently good and often excellent teaching, as well as from support at home. In an outstanding Reception class lesson, the children were asked what was special about Diwali, the Hindu festival also celebrated by Sikhs. One child said immediately, 'It's about light'. They were then introduced to two puppets, Tom and Tessa, who are Christians looking forward to their festival of Christmas. Even at this young age they are learning of similarities between faiths and celebrations.

An outstanding lesson in Year 2 examined special stories. Having used two Muslim stories, they were exploring one from the Bible, 'The lost sheep'. The children's understanding was developed with great skill, with one child explaining that the shepherd searched for his missing sheep 'because he loves all his sheep.' The success being achieved in overcoming the challenges involved in building harmony in school was illustrated movingly by a child's reaction to a comment from the teacher. The teacher said that she would be like the shepherd when she takes them on a trip, because 'we care about you all'. The children were clearly impressed by the teacher's demonstration of the school's values of love and care.

Another excellent session in Year 6 was stimulated by the story of the 'Prodigal son', from the Christian tradition. The teaching led the children into a deep series of discussions about forgiveness. They were asked, 'Is anything unforgiveable?' Most agreed that forgiving someone who has hurt you or a loved one is 'a strong thing to do' as one of them put it. The teacher's question, 'What does your faith say about forgiveness?' illustrates perfectly the openness and inclusive nature of the teaching of RE here. A statement regularly made in presentations to the classes sums up the aim; 'We are working together to understand the different beliefs in our country so we can all live peacefully in Britain today.'

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

The headteacher, leadership team and governors excel by example in living the Christian vision of the school. This is summarised well in a self-evaluation document. 'We understand and value the importance of faith and spirituality in the lives of communities, families and children. We focus on what unites us, not on what divides us. We foster a love and fascination with diversity, difference and beauty in our world.' The way in which the whole team have worked tirelessly to build harmony in and beyond the school community is outstanding. They have listened to parental and community concerns following the launch of the academy, and have 'built a bridge of trust' as one parent said. This is allowing children to flourish in an ethos of love, respect and care for one another.

The school's Christian distinctiveness lies in the subtle ways in which Christian values are brought into the lives of the children with absolutely no overt pressure, but a simple adoption of values that are appreciated as precious and life-changing by all children, regardless of their faith position. Success has been achieved through exemplary teamwork, with every member of staff using these values to guide, support and inspire the children.

The governors regularly review the school's Christian distinctiveness and bring challenge and encouragement to the staff, thus promoting development. Governors and church members are frequently involved in the school's work and activities, sharing, helping and building close relationships with the parents and children. One governor said, 'Relationships are central to everything we do.' Systematic and thorough reviews of the school's work and Christian distinctiveness create a passionate drive for constant improvement. The areas to improve from the last report have been thoroughly and carefully addressed.

Leaders prepare for future leadership in this and other church schools through excellent in-service training, teamwork, delegation and coaching. Partnerships and deep friendships with the local parish, diocese and the wider community, including the educational welfare team, are strong and mutually beneficial. Parents are proud of their school, and comments include 'They handle problems straight away, they listen!', 'There are no problems with different religions' and 'This is the best school in Bristol!' Such remarks reflect how parents' involvement and trust in the school have been established. The school is continuing to develop that trust to help build for the future with confidence.