



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St Edmund's Girls' School

Church Road
Laverstock
Salisbury
SPI IRD

Previous inspection grade: Outstanding

Current inspection grade: Outstanding

Diocese: Salisbury

Local authority: N/A

Date of inspection: 18 March 2016

Date of last inspection: 10 February 2011

School's unique reference number: 137827

Headteacher: Sarah Busby

Inspector's name and number: Jo Fageant 104

School context

St Edmund's School is an 11-16 academy for girls located on the eastern edge of the city of Salisbury, serving both the city and beyond. It became an academy in February 2012. It shares a site with two other secondary schools, a Church of England boys' school and a mixed Roman Catholic school. There are currently 840 girls on roll, with fewer than the average number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds, and with a lower than average cohort of students with special educational needs or eligibility for free school meals.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Edmund's Girls' School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The Christian understanding that every person is valued and loved by God results in the school's high expectations of its students and its high aspirations for them.
- This same understanding means students are both trusted and supported to take responsibility for their learning and given rich and imaginative opportunities to do so.
- Students value the quality of the religious studies (RS) course they experience. They recognise the skills of their teachers and how the subject challenges their thinking, develops their understanding of Christianity and other religions and their respect for the beliefs of others.
- Students appreciate the opportunities available to engage with active Christianity and also the freedom they have not to do so.
- Links with the local Christian organisation *the Bridge* enables the school to enrich its excellent pastoral care system.

Areas to improve

- Ensure the school's Christian foundation and values inform, and are clearly reflected in, relevant policies as they come up for renewal so that policies match the school's existing practice and Christian focus.

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

Christian beliefs and values are woven through all aspects of St Edmund's School. A recent review of its values and vision has identified three key values (respect, responsibility and resilience) to sit alongside a verse from the biblical book of Micah. Although a recent initiative, everyone reports that this has simply articulated more clearly the long established Christian character of the school. Students report that seeing the Micah verse (What does the Lord require of me? To act justly, to love kindly, to walk humbly (with your God)) displayed around the school makes them reflect on who they are and who they want to be. Students appreciate how the values and Micah verse are explored from a Christian perspective but value the fact that they are relevant for everyone. As a consequence, students develop a spirit of generosity and an awareness of need in others locally and globally raising considerable sums for charities they choose to support. Believing that every student is valued by God results in the school setting high expectations and aspirations for all of them. Some say, 'teachers push us to our limits. They set very high expectations because the school is committed to us achieving our best.' The result is that all students make at least expected progress and in recent years they have achieved results which are higher than the national average. Encouraging personal responsibility and resilience has a positive impact on attendance, which is higher than the national average. Acting justly and loving kindly inform the excellent pastoral care system which is relentlessly focused on individual needs. The lay chaplain works with members of the pastoral team to provide support and mentoring for the most vulnerable students. In some cases this is transformational, for example, leading to a 20% improvement in attendance for one girl in the course of a year. Teachers new to the school say they are impressed by the 'unending support available to the girls'. Students themselves say they feel fortunate to be in such a caring environment. They are well aware of how the school's values encourage positive relationships, excellent behaviour and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. A reflection on the significance and importance of Lent gave rise to the idea of trying to undertake 40 acts of kindness during the period. Staff and students alike were enjoying this challenge of selfless giving at the time of the inspection. Some students understood this to be a way of helping them to refresh their ideas about Christian teachings. They develop a good understanding of Christianity as a world-wide faith through their RS course and international initiatives. Students are very enthusiastic about RS, value the challenge of the topics they study and appreciate the freedom to question and express their own views. They recognise how the subject develops their understanding of other faiths and their respect for people who have different beliefs. They are highly appreciative of their teachers, describing them as 'inspirational and so well informed'. The school provides many opportunities for students to demonstrate their sense of responsibility. One is through the active and well respected system which enables them to express their views about the school and its development and improvement. They have, for example helped improve lunchtime arrangements. The importance of personal responsibility is made clear through students' involvement in the Pixl Edge award; an award designed to develop a range of personal qualities. To achieve it students have to seek out opportunities to develop and demonstrate these qualities. An active Christian union group enables Christian students, as well as those who are less certain, to explore their feelings about and responses to faith. The annual *sacred space* experience organised by members of the Bridge is another example of a context in which students can practise their Christian faith or explore through a range of profound experiences what prayer and reflection mean to them.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship, which takes place in a variety of forms and contexts, is highly valued within the school community. It is planned and led by a variety of people, including clergy and other Christians from local churches offering a variety of approaches. It takes place in large groupings in formal settings and also with less formality in tutor groups. Students enjoy the opportunities they have to take responsibility for aspects of leadership in all these contexts. They also appreciate the fact that they can contribute ideas for the 'thought for the week' planning and they speak with enthusiasm about the themes addressed. These themes inspire personal reflection and have a very positive impact on relationships and behaviour as well as motivating a great deal of social and charitable action. A regular focus of the tutor group worship sessions is 'world view'. Students value this highly. They

say it helps them develop understanding of and respect for people who are different from themselves; it helps prepare them for life beyond school 'because it's important for us to understand other people'. Recently introduced reflection sessions are particularly appreciated by Year 11 students who say they value this time away from examination stress and the chance it provides to look at things from a wider perspective. The annual *sacred space* experience enables students to explore different forms of prayer and helps even those who do not naturally pray to see its possible relevance to their lives. Girls appreciate that, although the nature of worship is Christian, there is scope for a variety of responses. In the different worship contexts they say Christian teachings are applied to real life situations and linked with the school's values. As a consequence, they understand the continuing relevance of the teachings of Jesus and other material from the Bible. Through careful planning, supported by learning in RS, students engage with key Christian concepts, festivals and seasons of the church year. This enables them to speak with a good level of understanding about the Eucharist and the Christian belief in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Addressing, in part, issues raised in the last inspection, staff have received training in leading worship and resources have been developed to support the tutor group sessions. Heads of house and other leaders monitor the provision of worship in its varied contexts. Information gathered in this way, together with the views of students, has influenced ongoing developments with which students are pleased.

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

The recent review of the school's vision and values has resulted in a new statement about its long established Christian ethos. The values and vision are now more clearly articulated, promoted and shared through the website, staff training and the collective worship programme. The school has benefited from the attendance at diocesan training about the distinctive character of church schools by representatives of the senior leadership team and the governing body. There was a wide consultation, including with students, about what the values should be and how the Christian character could best be expressed. As a consequence, the values and Bible verse are known by everyone and their impact on all aspects of school life is understood and discussed with ease and insight. Governors and school leaders have mutual respect for and confidence in one another. They all have a thorough understanding of the school's performance and distinctiveness. Strong Christian presence on the governing body influences decisions and governors say their work is guided by prayer. Despite this, relevant policy documents in the main focus only on legal requirements and do not draw on Christian teachings which set out the same challenges. Although the collective worship policy was revised in response to the last inspection report, it still did not reflect the requirements for worship in church schools. However, improved understanding as a result of conversations with leaders, including governors, early in this inspection resulted in an exceptionally well redrafted document by the end of the day. Rigorous analysis of success indicators enables appropriate celebration of achievement and successful targeted support reflecting the Christian commitment to the value and importance of each student. This leads to a consistent focus on the needs of the girls over any other considerations. Leaders understand the school's strengths and have high aspirations for its future development including the enrichment of its Christian distinctiveness. Collective worship and RS both have a very high profile in the school and make a particularly profound impact on students' SMSC development. Staff have received training to support their leading of worship and resources have been produced to help a consistent approach across the school. RS has enjoyed inspirational leadership and excellent teaching throughout the department with the result that students make outstanding progress and GCSE results are above national expectations. The school enjoys close links the local community, the Bridge and local churches all of which are beneficial to all concerned. The Christian commitment of leaders to the value and wellbeing of all individuals extends to care for staff. They cite sessions which explore ways of improving work/life balance and access to a mindfulness course, designed to reduce stress, as helpful.

SIAMS report March 2016 St Edmund's Girls' School, Church Road, Laverstock, SPI IRD