

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Bennett Memorial Diocesan School (Academy)

Culverden Down, Tunbridge Wells TN4 9SH.

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Rochester
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Date of academy conversion	1 April 2011
Dates of inspection	20-21 September 2017
Name of multi-academy trust	Tenax Schools Trust
Date of last inspection	July 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Secondary - Academy (voluntary aided equivalent) – 136603
Headteacher	Jon Sparke
Trust Chief Executive	Ian Bauckham
Inspector's name and number	Pamela Draycott 161

School context

This popular and successful co-educational academy serves students from Years 7 to 13. The majority come from a variety of Christian backgrounds with a small percentage of other religious backgrounds also represented. The percentage for whom extra funding is received due to social or economic disadvantage is below the national average. Bennett Memorial is proud of its history as a church school serving its community. Since the previous denominational inspection, it has continued to celebrate its Christian distinctiveness as part of the development and expansion of the Tenax Schools Trust.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Bennett Memorial Diocesan School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- The school's Christian vision fruitfully underpins its Christian service. This impacts positively on students' high academic attainment and progress and on their strong personal development.
- Students of different prior attainment levels and backgrounds thrive within this caring and inclusive Christian community. This is expressed in their exemplary attitudes to learning, accompanied by high standards of behaviour and the strong relationships and sense of belonging evident in school.
- The worship programme and religious education (RE) are strengths of the school, contributing successfully to the outworking of its Christian foundation and inclusive values.
- Membership of the Tenax Schools Trust provides effective support for the ongoing development of the school with its embedded Church of England foundation.

Areas to improve

- Expand the role of governors on the local governing body so that they more formally monitor and evaluate the impact of the school's Christian distinctiveness and effectiveness in order to actively influence future developments.
- To broaden the RE curriculum by developing more focused and explicit opportunities to explore Christianity, including Anglicanism, as a world-wide, multi-cultural faith.

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

The school's Christian vision drives it into successfully seeking to unlock the potential of every individual, created by God with uncapped possibilities. Its deeply embedded motto, in place since the original school was founded in 1951, is 'Semper Tenax' (Ever Holding Fast). This principle continues to have a high profile and to inspire staff and students into 'not giving up because God never gives up on us'. This is expressed in school life through the many opportunities which students have to offer 'compassionate service' especially through volunteering and through charitable fundraising. As a Year 10 student reflected, this is, 'an expression of Jesus' teaching and example of caring for others'. Students flourish academically and personally. Their wellbeing, and that of the staff, is effectively addressed as an outworking of its Christian ethos and values. The majority of students enter with around average attainment when compared with their peers locally and nationally. In their journey through school, they progress rapidly so that, by the time they reach Year 11, attainment is high and well above average. These excellent outcomes are continued in the sixth form reflecting the accelerated progress made by students of differing attainment levels and backgrounds. In keeping with its Christian vision of encouraging all to flourish, there is a broad curriculum offer, high aspirations and focused teaching in evidence across the school. This is closely monitored by senior and middle leaders which means that there is a consistency of expectation across different subjects and teaching staff. Students apply themselves positively to their studies. As an expression of its embedded Christian ethos and values, which set high standards for all, behaviour, attendance and punctuality are excellent. Students are confident and caring individuals. They are proud to be part of their school. On those rare occasions where behaviour or attendance gets in the way of learning, strong pastoral systems provide realistic and compassionate support to resolve any problems in their learning. This overwhelmingly results in positive outcomes. Relationships across the school are strong and contribute productively to the sense of belonging and strong community feel that is in evidence. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development opportunities are clearly and very well catered for across the curriculum and through the wide range of co-curricular opportunities provided. Students' response is very positive. A range of visits in the United Kingdom and beyond, as well as making use of visitors into school, enhances SMSC opportunities further. RE and the worship programme contribute deeply and effectively to helping students to develop a sense of social and moral responsibility. RE supports students' understanding and appreciation of difference and diversity very well. This includes identifying denominational differences within Christianity. The world-wide, multi-cultural nature of Christianity, and indeed of Anglicanism, is addressed but in a more limited way.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship takes place daily for all students. It follows a well thought through, structured programme, planned by the chaplain and assistant headteacher. The programme is expressly Christian in nature, broadly following the Christian year, key events in school life and current affairs. It provides a wide range of opportunities to reflect on key Christian beliefs such as God as Holy Trinity as well as on moral and ethical issues. This means, for example, that students develop an age-appropriate appreciation of the Christian belief in the Trinity. Worship is led by a range of staff, including year group and senior leaders and the chaplain. Whilst being deeply Christian, it is presented in such a way as to be inclusive of those whose background or faith is different. This results in a programme that is highly valued by both students and staff and which makes an excellent contribution to the school's cohesive and inclusive Christian ethos. As a Year 9 student reflected, 'Worship time in year groups and in tutor groups helps with the feeling of community and belonging'. Through worship, students develop a meaningful understanding of the importance of the Bible and of the significance of Jesus for Christians. They are also developing a sense of different approaches to worship and to prayer through the experiences they encounter across their time in school. Worship is appropriately extended through regular opportunities to take part in the Eucharist and through, for example, a Year 8 retreat. There are also specific lunchtime Christian clubs which provide support and worship opportunities for those who attend. Students and staff engage very well and respectfully with the programme. Responses, both anecdotal and collated as part of the monitoring process, reflect its significance to and its impact on many members of the community. Students take part regularly and appropriately in leading worship, both in tutor and year groups as well involvement during the Eucharist. Prayer and reflection are integral parts of the worship programme. The Lord's Prayer is said regularly and students have a sound understanding of its significance for Christians. The school prayer remembers the founders of the original school and offers the community to God. This is expressly linked with the school's Christian vision. Prayer begins a range of staff meetings, as well as governors' meetings, indicating a commitment to and reliance on God for the work being undertaken. As a Year 10 student said, 'Whether you are a Christian or not, the prayer times in worship give you a bit of space to think and be

reflective which is helpful'. The programme is regularly and closely monitored by the chaplain and an assistant headteacher with other members of staff and students appropriately engaged. This means that the worship programme is consistently refined and improved.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

RE plays a central role in supporting the school's Christian ethos and values. The curriculum is well balanced between Christianity and a range of other world faiths. The GCSE Religious Studies (RS) examination is begun in Year 9 with the examination being taken in Year 10. Despite sitting this examination early, attainment is high when compared with local and national averages and the progress made is overwhelmingly positive. During Year 11, the school has developed specific RE elements outside of the GCSE criteria which extends and supports students' continuing growth in their understanding of religious, moral and ethical issues. A level Religious Studies (RS) and Philosophy are offered in the sixth form and taken up by at least a dozen students each year. Attainment and progress over this course is very positive. All students in Year 12 follow a personal and citizenship education (PACE) course which includes addressing a significant element of religious, ethical and moral issues. In Year 13, students engage in four RE focused days which address issues such as religion and science. Students are appreciative of these experiences across the sixth form. They recognise that they 'support the ethos and values Bennett espouses,' and 'are useful in helping us develop as more rounded people'. The majority of students find RE enjoyable, stimulating and challenging. They see its relevance to the school and to their own lives. Students are generally enthusiastic about their work in RE. This is evidenced, for example, in lessons where they are engaged and on task. Likewise, there is very little evidence of unfinished written work, with the majority of students of all ages taking pride in the way in which they present their work. Effective teaching from the able staff team, who work in a collegiate way to support each other and their students leads to excellent outcomes for students. Planning is detailed and rigorous and opportunities are taken to ensure that marking and assessments are consistent. Staff are aspirational for their students and work effectively to support their learning and enjoyment of the subject area.

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

The strong leadership of the headteacher is effectively supported by his leadership team and by the Tenax Schools Trust. This ensures that the school's Christian distinctiveness and effectiveness continue to be lived out and drive forward developments. The school's self-evaluation and development plan is detailed and accurate. This demonstrates that leaders know their school well. Appropriate next steps to focus developments are firmly in place. Since the previous denominational inspection, a new system of governance has developed. This involves trustees with overall responsibility for all Trust schools and a local governing body for each school to oversee its individual development. Members of the local governing body, as well as trustees, know the school well and are regularly involved in its life and work. They receive information about the outworking of the school's Christian foundation in reports and visits. However, their more formal and active role in monitoring and evaluating RE, worship and the school's Christian ethos is underdeveloped. Governors have ensured good specialist staffing ratios for teaching RE and appropriate curriculum time is secured for the subject in each year group. Likewise, the longstanding service of the full-time chaplain is effective in developing its worship life, alongside her supportive pastoral role for students and staff. RE and worship meet statutory requirements. The key issue from the previous denominational report was to bring to fruition the idea of developing a spiritual garden when a new teaching block was built. This has not been actioned because the block was not built. However, careful consideration has been given to ensuring clear signs and symbols in each school area to reflect its Christian underpinning and life. The professional development and wellbeing of staff are taken seriously, with appropriate training opportunities provided for working within the church school sector given. Links with parents and carers are strong. They are kept well informed of their children's academic progress. Any concerns are dealt with swiftly and sensitively. As one parent said, 'Many staff here go 'the extra mile' for the students. This is linked to them seeing the importance of and valuing each individual as created by God'. Links with local Anglican parishes and with representatives of other Christian denominations are in place. They enable students to develop an understanding of the impact of faith in the world today. The Tenax Trust works appropriately with its Dioceses of Rochester and Chichester. The school attends appropriate training offered by the Diocese of Rochester, including the subject leaders' meeting held twice a year.