Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

University of Chester Church of England Academy	
Woodchurch Lane, Ellesmere Port, CH66 3NG	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	**Inadequate**
Diocese	**Chester**
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Date of academy conversion	1 September 2009
Name of multi-academy trust	University of Chester Academies Trust
Date/s of inspection	22 and 23 June 2017
Date of last inspection	20 April 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Secondary academy 135941
Executive principal Interim principal	Cath Green Iain Robinson
Inspector's name and number	Rev Craig Watson 78
Quality assurance	Lyn Field 151

School context

The University of Chester Church of England Academy is an undersubscribed, co-educational, smaller than average, all ability, secondary school with 757 students on role, 87 of which are post 16. The number of students supported by pupil premium is well above average as it is for those who receive support for special educational needs and/or disabilities. The percentage of students from ethic minority groups is below average. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is average. Alternative provision at West Cheshire College is provided for some students. Ofsted placed the academy in special measures in April 2017. The interim principal has been in post since 20 April 2017 following the departure of the previous principal and an executive principal has been in post since 1 May 2017.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of University of Chester Church of England Academy as a Church of England school are inadequate

- The academy has only recently recognised that significant and urgent action is required to improve the effectiveness and distinctiveness of the academy as a church academy. The senior leadership team has a clear understanding of the issues facing the academy and the actions they have taken as a result are just beginning to have an impact for improvement.

- The recent action of the University of Chester Academies Trust in appointing an interim principal and an executive principal has stabilised the senior leadership team. This has created the leadership capacity to lead the academy forward as a church academy.

- The progress and achievement in religious education, which is significantly below national expectations, has begun to be addressed.

- The faith space has been redeveloped recently for use by students and staff. It has helped to develop the understanding of prayer, making it relevant to the daily life through activities such as the prayer tree and weekly staff prayers.

- The strong link between the academy and Saint Thomas' and All Saints Church has enabled the academy to provide basic collective worship but of limited impact on the lives of members of the academy community.

Areas to improve

- Develop a distinctively Christian vision with Christian values for the academy that is relevant to all stakeholders.

- Confidence in the Christian foundation of the academy should be outlined explicitly, within its partnership with the University of Chester Academies Trust (UCAT).

- Provide professional development and training for all staff, teaching and support, to equip them to better contribute to the Christian character of the academy. In particular, ensure that leaders access high quality training in the leadership of a Church of England academy. Create clarity for staff at all levels around their role in developing a church academy.

- Raise the standards of achievement to at least national standards in religious education by supporting the new head of religious education in improving the quality of teaching, marking and feedback to students.

- Develop effective systems for self-evaluation of all aspects of the academy as a church academy. Ensure this is rigorous, accurate and regularly reported to the governors' Statement of Action Committee (SOAC) so they have the information to hold the academy leaders to account. Draw on these self-evaluations to inform strategic planning to ensure it is well targeted.

- Develop stronger accountability in governance in SOAC to enable the academy to grow as a church academy through providing appropriate support from UCAT and outside agencies to guide this process.

- Act upon the intention expressed by both UCAT and the senior leadership team to co-ordinate the actions required to improve the academy against Ofsted and SIAMS criteria within one action plan to bring about a focused approach to improvement planning.

- Establish the recently implemented collective worship monitoring system and use it to identify good practice. Share this as staff development and regularly report the data to the SOAC as part of a full self-evaluation of the academy as a church academy.

- Improve the impact of collective worship across the academy by ensuring that it is not confused with the delivery of personal, social, health, citizenship and enterprise education (PHSCE). Provide an opportunity for all to come to the threshold of worship within a distinctively Christian environment through clearly defined collective worship.

- Use explicitly Christian approaches to address attendance and behaviour issues. Build on the concept of the Emmaus behaviour support unit, the close co-operation between the pastoral team and lay chaplain, and the range of support provided by the school pastors and other faith bodies to achieve this.

- Develop partnerships with the church and with other faith organisations that expand the horizons of the academy community locally, nationally and globally. Broaden the academy community's understanding of a range of faiths and the international nature of Christianity through these partnerships.

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

The academy vision and values of Believe, Belong, and Become do not reflect the distinctively Christian character expected of a church academy. As a consequence they make little impact on creating a Christian character that is distinctive and is understood as such by the school community. The vision and values taught to the students have no explicitly Christian content when presented in the life of the academy, leading to students having little enthusiasm for engaging in and responding to experiences provided for spiritual development.

The absence of a distinctive Christian character has contributed to the significantly low attendance across the academy and the challenging behaviours in some classes. On the few occasions where attendance has been addressed with a distinctively Christian approach, improvement has been achieved. Students with consistently poor attendance who have received this support increased their attendance more significantly than similar students who had received intervention without this approach. This distinctively Christian approach evolved from the lay pastors and chaplain working closely with the pastoral team.

The academy has limited effect in promoting respect for diversity and difference. The limitation of the impact leads to poor relationships between some pupils with behaviour being a key barrier to worship and learning. However examples of respect for diversity and difference are evident, such as in the post 16 provision. As one pupil with a disability put it, 'I don't feel different here'. This reveals that the distinctive Christian character in the academy is currently only expressed in small pockets.

The attitude of students towards religious education (RE) is mixed, with many students failing to see its importance in their lives or the lives of others. This results in achievement and progress that is below expectations. This was reflected in other subjects with achievement and progress that is below national expectations across the academy. Every student, when asked for their favourite subject, responded with a subject other than religious education, confirming the low status in which the subject is held. This, coupled with a blurring of the distinction between religious education and PHSCE, devalues the place of religious education in the curriculum in the eyes of the students. An example of this blurring is seen in the numeracy across the curriculum posters in classrooms. These list each curriculum subject separately but combine religious education and PHSCE. This makes it difficult for students to recognise the distinction between religious education and PHSCE and to give religious education the same profile as other subjects. This leads to religious education making little contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students or the distinctive Christian character of the academy.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is satisfactory

The basic structure for collective worship is being developed around the UCAT theme for the week. This is used across their academies with the expectation that each academy personalises the theme to reflect their distinctiveness. The academy is only just beginning to recognise the significance in worship of the person and life of Christ and the nature of God as Trinity within the theme for the week and consequently it has limited impact on members of the academy community at present.

Students clearly respond to the opportunity to serve others through charitable activities. Students on post 16 courses are enthusiastic about their involvement in acts of collective worship, particularly at St Thomas and All Saints church. This encourages them to apply Christian values within the academy where they enjoy taking a lead in helping others to engage in charitable acts of service. This is having a positive impact on the wider academy community.

Staff and students have some knowledge of the life and person of Jesus Christ and God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit through the limited use of biblical material. This is leading to the growing impact of collective worship on the wider lives of the school community. There is minimal involvement of students in developing collective worship. Currently pupils are only involved in the planning and delivery of assemblies in Year 7. The pupils' faith council have been consulted about a few biblical quotes that have been painted onto the internal walls of the academy. Most students find it difficult to engage in, or understand, worship effectively. An example of this was that students had some understanding of the use of the cross in assembly but were puzzled by the practice of having a candle which was lit only at the end of the assembly as they were leaving.

The SOAC was unaware that there was no monitoring and evaluation of collective worship until very recently. The lack of information about collective worship prevented them from challenging school leaders and securing improvements. School leaders very recently started to carry out monitoring and evaluation of the delivery of collective worship during academic review time but there is no evidence of this for year group collective worship. Prayer and reflection takes place on a regular basis with variable quality. The data gathered from academic reviews has been used to secure some limited improvement in the delivery of collective worship.

A range of opportunities for prayer for both staff and students is provided. These opportunities include use of the academy prayer, the promotion of individual prayer with students and the use of the 'God pod' faith space, for prayer events and personal prayer. Recent prayer initiatives such as the prayer box in the staff room and the prayer tree in the faith space are helping to raise the profile of prayer in academy life. The manner of staff and student engagement in prayer reflects a range of understanding of its value and relevance in everyday life, with some seeing it as irrelevant and others valuing it to varying degrees.

The effectiveness of the religious education is inadequate

Leaders' view that the quality of teaching in religious education requires significant development is accurate. Religious education is a core subject with all pupils taking it at Key Stage 4. However it is not valued by most students. This is currently resulting in progress and achievement that is significantly below national expectations for all pupils. Action to address this is already underway and there is a glimmer of this having an impact on raising standards. This is seen through the introduction of more varied interactive approaches to the teaching in some classes. There is little use of prior learning data and effective differentiation and this restricts the progress of students. The quality of assessment, marking and feedback is variable both in the techniques used and in the way staff apply these techniques. Teachers leave too many elements incomplete with a significant amount of inconsistency. The over use of questions and ticks is leading to a lack of clarity for students on what they have done well and what is required for improvement.

Religious education makes little contribution to the academy's Christian values or the promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, creating the impression that the subject is not relevant to life or valuable in the curriculum. The quality of RE display does little to enhance learning or inspire students to value the subject.

The curriculum covers Christianity and Judaism as world religions at Key Stage 4 with different faiths included at Key Stage 3. There are a few opportunities for students to develop their understanding of Christianity and different faiths through first hand encounters. These are limited to a visit to Chester Cathedral, the involvement of West Cheshire school pastors and visiting clergy in the academy, and Christmas and Easter services at St Thomas' and All Saints church. Other faiths are only represented by visits from a Jewish holocaust survivor and a Muslim imam. These limited experiences contribute to the restricted understanding students have of different faiths and of the diversity that exists within the Christian church.

The absence of the head of religious education throughout this academic year has prevented the development of a scheme of work that reflects the distinctive Christian character of the academy. This has resulted in a lack of depth of learning in religious education and a slow pace when covering the curriculum. This highlights that procedures for the monitoring and evaluation of religious education are only partially effective. This has been recognised by the senior leadership team and initial steps have been taken to access appropriate church school support. This is just beginning to produce a more effective scheme of work for the next academic year. The recent support from other church schools and academies brokered by the vice principal has begun to stabilise the situation.

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

The current senior leaders have a clear understanding of the steps that need to be taken to develop a coherent vision and strategic plan for the distinctiveness and effectiveness of the academy as a church academy.

The profile of religious education and collective worship in the academy is insufficient and, since the last inspection, the leadership of the academy has made very little progress in implementing the focus for development points resulting in the academy becoming compromised as a church academy. Students are half-hearted about both collective worship and religious education with poor student conduct and mixed attitudes leading to a disregard for the distinctive Christian character of the academy.

The current leadership's very recent self-evaluation arrived at secure judgements These have been acted upon by UCAT. They are addressing these by providing support through engaging Chester Diocese and other members from within the trust and beyond. The SOAC does not use self-evaluation as an ongoing review procedure to enable continuous improvement which impairs the ability to govern the academy and so to effectively hold academy leaders to account for its improvement as a church academy.

The current senior leadership team have not yet been able to access training in church school leadership from the Chester Diocese or the Church of England nationally. The middle leaders have yet to fully recognise the need to implement a more coherent Christian vision for the academy as a church academy. The lack of support for the wider staff in equipping them for the delivery of the distinctively Christian elements in academy life leads to the communication of misleading and inaccurate messages that confuse students and undermine the distinctive Christian character. There has been some informal staff development through a Diocesan consultant and by the priest at St Thomas' and All Saints Church of England Church. This has made some difference in raising the awareness with some staff of what it means to be a church academy.

The partnership with Cheshire Vale Teaching School Alliance has provided a specialist leader in education this year to set up and lead a UCAT religious education network. Along with the day release of the head of religious education designate and support from Woodchurch and Bishop's Blue Coat Church of England High Schools, this has increased the capacity of the academy to improve. It has enabled more accurate self-evaluation of the academy to be undertaken. The most recent self-evaluation demonstrates that the judgement of the recently stabilised senior leadership team is secure and the actions taken as a result show that the capacity exists for improvement. The senior leadership team has demonstrated energy and determination to bring about rapid improvement and this is beginning to bring about some progress.

There is some engagement with the wider community at the local, national and global level. There has been a Christian aid charity promotion, some community arts projects, one of which gained national recognition in 2016 and work has been carried out by the pastoral and chaplaincy teams with parents. This has enriched the limited number of students and staff involved, leading to a greater understanding by, and the raising of the aspirations of, those taking part.