

The John Wallis Church of England Academy

Millbank Road
Ashford
Kent
TN23 3HG

Diocese: Canterbury

Local authority: Kent

Dates of inspection: 25 & 26 March 2013

Date of last inspection: not applicable

School's unique reference number: 136197

Principal: John McParland

Inspectors' names and numbers: Tricia Martin (NS 103) & John Ross (NS 476)

Academy context

The Academy opened in September 2010, for students aged 11-16, upon the closure of a predecessor secondary Church school. (The predecessor school was judged inadequate as a Church school in March 2008.) A sixth form opened in September 2011. A nearby primary school, not previously a Church school, joined the Academy in September 2012. The Academy now provides for 1370 students, aged 3-19. The Academy has four sponsors, the Diocese of Canterbury being the lead sponsor. The Principal took up post in April 2010 and almost all senior leaders have been appointed since then. The Academy serves the local area of Stanhope. Numbers are rising. Very few students arrive with a previous Church connection. Most students are white British, although there is a growing Nepalese community within the Academy. A substantial building programme is due to start in June 2013.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of The John Wallis Church of England Academy as a Church of England Academy are outstanding

The John Wallis Church of England Academy is an inclusive and loving Christian community. Everyone is welcome here, irrespective of belief and background. All are valued and respected as children of God. Much has already been achieved since the Academy opened. There is strong capacity for further improvement across the Academy.

Established strengths

- The outstanding progress made in developing and embedding the Christian ethos across the whole Academy
- The visionary and inspiring Christian leadership of the Principal, strongly supported by senior leaders and the governing body
- The centrality of prayer in the daily life of the Academy
- The presence of the lay chaplain and his role in promoting the Christian witness of the Academy

Focus for development

- Strengthen Religious Education (RE) across the whole Academy 3-19, so that all students demonstrate outstanding progress and outstanding spiritual and moral development
- Raise standards in GCSE RE results
- Develop the Academy as a multi-cultural community where the faiths of all its members are celebrated

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

Christian values are lived out in the daily life of the Academy. There has been outstanding progress in establishing and embedding the Christian ethos across the Academy within a relatively short period. Values such as love, mercy, grace, forgiveness, reconciliation, compassion and care for the vulnerable are much in evidence. Students' descriptions of the Academy included 'inspiring,' 'friendly,' 'united' and 'loving'. There has been significant success in winning over older students who have embraced the changes and the opportunities these have offered. The number choosing to remain to study in the Academy's sixth form is increasing year on year. Aspirations are being raised, with more students considering university. There has been a relentless and successful drive to improve academic standards across the whole Academy, bringing students much closer to realising their full potential. Academic achievement is just one measure of the Academy's increasing success. A wide range of extra-curricular activities contributes immensely to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) and in raising their self-esteem. For example, during the inspection there was great excitement as around 50 students were to travel to Eastbourne to take part in 'Rock Challenge'. Pastoral care is outstanding. True to gospel values, care for the vulnerable and disadvantaged is exemplary. The parallel curriculum, which offers a range of vocational qualifications, provides support for disengaged students, some of whom are at risk of permanent exclusion. One commented, 'We get second, third and fourth chances here.' Another said, 'We wouldn't still be in school without the opportunities we get here.' Christian care reaches out into the local community and beyond. Students are increasingly involved in fundraising activities. The Academy contributes to the Ashford Food Bank. In June 2013 a group of staff and students will travel to Mexico to build a home for a homeless family, having raised significant funds towards this project. The Academy environment makes a strong contribution to students' spiritual development. There are Christian symbols and displays throughout the buildings. The primary section has particularly attractive displays, based on parables and the events of Holy Week. This illustrates its developing Church school character. The atmosphere within the Academy is calm and peaceful. The site is litter free and is well cared for.

The impact of Collective Worship on the Academy community is good

Collective Worship occupies a central place in the life of the Academy. Increasingly, it is the students who are planning, preparing and delivering Worship. During the inspection, a Year 7 tutor group presented a dignified reflection on Holy Week, through readings and drama. This was received warmly, not only by their peers but also by older students. Staff attend Collective Worship across the Academy. An act of Collective Worship observed in the primary section, on the theme of Palm Sunday, was led by one of the local clergy, with eager assistance and participation from the pupils. Pupils sing enthusiastically in the primary section. Singing is being developed in the secondary section. Prayer has become central to the life of the Academy. Outside formal acts of worship, prayer is often used spontaneously. Students frequently write and lead prayers themselves and prayers are always said at staff, parents' and governors' meetings. There is an Academy Prayer which is regularly used. The head of the primary section meets pupils at lunchtime to pray. In the secondary section, 'Thought for the week' takes place in tutor bases on days when students are not meeting as a larger group. A range of interesting and helpful resources are provided and all tutors are expected to lead these acts of worship. In one such act of worship observed, students were well behaved, calm and reflective, while readily joining in at appropriate moments. Collective Worship is planned meticulously, and quality is assured through regular monitoring by senior staff, who in turn report to governors. There is a voluntary communion service held around six times a year, led by various local clergy. This is attended by more adults than students at present. On rare occasions, the entire Academy has assembled in the sports hall for a celebration service. The chapel is small but attractive and is open for prayer and reflection throughout the day. It is due to be replaced by a larger chapel as part of the proposed building programme in 2013. As the Academy becomes increasingly multi-cultural, there are plans to celebrate more widely the various faiths of all within its community, while retaining its strong Christian identity.

The effectiveness of the Religious Education is good

Students' attitudes to RE are positive across the Academy. In lessons observed in the secondary section behaviour was exemplary. Classes in Year 9 and above are taught exclusively by enthusiastic and highly qualified specialists who convey high expectations. Learning and teaching are good. In the best lessons observed, students were challenged by a wide range of learning activities and encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning by thinking about and discussing religious issues. In a Year 1 lesson, in which pupils were acting out the Easter story, pupils were engaged and some displayed a good understanding of the events of Holy Week. Assessment is used effectively in the secondary section to track students' progress. When asked, secondary students have an accurate idea of their strengths in the subject and what they need to do to improve. Assessment in the primary sector is beginning to be used. GCSE RE results have been below national averages in recent years but are now showing signs of rapid and sustained improvement. They are currently in line with other core subjects. So far the proportion of students examined in the full course GCSE RE has been less than half the population within a year group. This is increasing and is expected to be the full cohort by 2014. The introduction of a GCSE course on Mark's Gospel has challenged students to think imaginatively about religious and specifically Christian belief and apply it to their own lives. Other major world religions are also studied, in line with the Kent agreed syllabus. Students in the primary and secondary sections enjoy their visits to local churches as part of their RE studies. The department provides a philosophy and ethics course at A level and its first students will be examined in 2013. All students in the sixth form follow a general RE course and enjoy presentations and discussions on topical ethical issues. This makes a good contribution to students' SMSC. There is good RE subject leadership in both primary and secondary sections. However there is as yet no senior leader with an overview of the subject across the whole Academy 3-19.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the Academy as a Church Academy is outstanding

The Christian leadership of the Principal is visionary and inspiring. He is very well supported by senior staff and governors. The senior leadership team contains Christians from various denominations, who regularly pray together. Several have qualifications in theology and one is an ordained Methodist minister. The governing body contains a wealth of expertise. Governors are highly committed, meeting monthly. They provide strong challenge and support for the Academy's leaders. Parents are delighted with the Academy and recognise the many recent changes for the better. One parent described pastoral care as 'second to none.' Describing the support their child had received, another said, 'They can't do enough for him.' Parents recognise that the Academy never gives up on a student and will always 'go the extra mile.' Communication is seen as a strength. Staff, including senior leaders, are readily accessible and concerns are dealt with swiftly. Significantly, all parents interviewed expressed no hesitation in recommending the Academy to others and would choose it again for their children. Staff feel supported and valued. Professional development has a high profile. The lay chaplain works tirelessly across the whole Academy and he is an important presence and symbol of its Christian witness. With the support of staff and clergy he helps to run the Christian Union in the secondary section, leads an Enrichment Group (Bible Study) in the primary section and has prepared students and staff for confirmation. The four Academy sponsors are highly supportive. The Diocese of Canterbury, as lead sponsor, has provided practical support through training and advice on appointments. The Bishop of Dover is a regular visitor. There are very strong links with local churches and their clergy. Self-evaluation as a Church Academy is robust, accurate and thorough. All stakeholders contribute to self-evaluation. Regular questionnaires gather the views of parents and students. A listening culture ensures the views of everyone are heard and concerns are acted upon. The Academy is under no illusions about the work still to be done, for example in raising standards in GCSE RE. All issues arising from the last inspection of the predecessor school have been successfully addressed, and much more besides. Capacity remains for significant further improvement.