

Section 48 - Statutory Inspection Report

Trinity School

Seal Hollow Road, Sevenoaks, Kent, TN13 3SL

Current Section 48 inspection grade

Outstanding

Date of opening

1 September 2013

Name of single academy trust

Trinity School Academy Trust

Dates of inspection

27-28 November 2017

Type of school and unique reference number

Secondary – Free School – 139554

Headteacher

Matthew Pawson

Inspector's name and Church of England Inspector number

Pamela Draycott (161)

School context

This popular, co-educational free school was established in 2013 by a group now representing 30 local churches of different denominations. Its admission policy stipulates that half the intake can enter based on their Christian backgrounds. It has grown annually by one year group and has currently reached Year 11. In September 2018 a sixth form will open. The majority of students are White British, with a smaller than average percentage of ethnic minority students; these come from a wide range of backgrounds. The percentages with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) is below average. The current headteacher came into post in September 2016.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Trinity School as a Free School with a Christian foundation are outstanding

- The school's Christian foundation has proved to be a constant during the changes experienced through its annual expansion.
- The senior leadership team (SLT) and governors ensure that the school's Christian foundation is lived out and shapes decisions and developments across its life. These are well shared with staff and students so that there is a strong appreciation of the significance of faith within the school.
- Its Christian ethos and values impact positively on the mutually respectful relationships in evidence between staff and students and between students and their peers. It also supports the very good behaviour and focused attitudes to learning displayed by students of all ages.
- The school's relationship with the local Christian community, principally through the Sevenoaks Christian Education Trust (SCET), helps to affirm the school's Christian identity very well.
- The worship programme and religious education (RE) are strengths, being well led and managed and making constructive contributions to the outworking of the school's Christian underpinning.

Areas to improve

- In keeping with planned developments refine the process for tutor group worship so that staff and students are fully supported in its delivery.
- Embed how all curriculum areas thoughtfully and appropriately express their contribution to the school's Christian ethos and values.
- Deepen students' breadth of understanding by ensuring that fitting opportunities are planned across the RE curriculum to address Christianity as a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic world-faith.

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

The school's Christian ethos has been a strong inspiration since its inception. This means that it is well embedded and provides strong motivation to guide its service to students and their families. Consequently, there is a firm focus on both academic attainment and progress and on students' personal development and wellbeing. Its Christian ethos is well expressed through, the Trinity Way, which has five key elements: truth, excellence, love, leadership and service (TELLS). These were refined recently to ensure their continued relevance to the school as it grows. They are very well-known and lived out by staff and students. Love and service are very well expressed and linked to a Christian understanding in the minds of many students. For example, a Year 10 student reflected, 'Christianity is about love – God's love in sending Jesus and our love for him and for our neighbours'. Students do not as readily link the other TELLs to their Christian, biblical roots. The Trinity Way impacts strongly on the mutually supportive and respectful relationships in evidence and on the very good behaviour of students. Students relate their behaviour to the TELLs very well. This means that students are developing as considerate and confident young people. Based on its Christian foundation the school has supportive pastoral systems, and there is a calm and purposeful learning environment. These enable pupils to demonstrate at least good progress from their various starting points. The vast majority of students are happy in school which impacts positively on high attendance. On those very few occasions where behaviour or attendance gets in the way of learning, the school effectively supports students and their families, leading mainly to positive outcomes. This is clearly underpinned by the Christian concepts of justice and forgiveness. Consequently, fixed term exclusions are below the national average. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development opportunities are varied and students respond to them positively. RE successfully influences students' appreciation of difference and diversity. Denominational similarities and differences within Christianity are appropriately addressed, particularly when following the GCSE course. Developing an appreciation of the world-wide nature of Christianity is less explicitly planned for across the RE curriculum. The broader curriculum is beginning to use a Christian approach to curriculum planning called, 'What if?' This provides students with opportunities to discuss issues of religious, spiritual and moral concern within a Christian context in different areas of their learning. This is not, however, embedded practice. Students are appropriately supported in taking responsibility for themselves and others, including through the student prefect system, through service opportunities and through charitable giving, the latter organised principally through the four houses. There is a wide range of co-curricular opportunities to broaden students' outlook. These include catch up and extension opportunities for subjects and, for example, sporting, art, drama, and chess clubs as well as a Christian Union and an Explore group, which enables a range of questions about the Christian faith to be considered.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Daily worship is central in expressing and supporting the school's Christian underpinning. It provides a clear structure to the week and allows opportunity for gathering together for prayer and reflection. Staff and students engage closely with worship as individuals, and can express its importance to the school community. Links through worship with local churches, particularly those involved in SCET, are strong. This includes visitors from these churches leading worship. Prayer is central to the school's life and is important to many staff and students. It is rightly recognised as underpinning the school's actions. For example, there is a monthly staff and parent prayer meeting. Governor, senior leadership team (SLT) and staff meetings all begin with prayer. Time for reflection and prayer is given daily as part of the worship programme with other opportunities provided, including through the Christian Union and at the Explore group. A prayer is now said at the start of each lesson. This has been the case since September 2017 and is beginning to be embedded across school practice. Students know that Christians show their reliance on God through prayer and that there are different aspects to this, including praise, thanksgiving and intercession. Students have an age-appropriate appreciation of the Lord's Prayer and its significance for Christians, although this is more through their RE work than through school worship. An annual prayer space week, during which all students take part in various activities connected with prayer, enhances provision further. Students find this, 'interesting, memorable and reflective', and, 'helpful in giving you opportunities to pray around a theme and ask God to help you or refugees or someone who is ill' as a Year 9 student said. In the worship programme the Bible figures strongly and students develop a good understanding of its importance to Christians as, 'God's word'. They also explore in worship various key Christian concepts such as incarnation, forgiveness, resurrection and the Trinity alongside the TELLs of the Trinity Way. This contributes effectively to developing a thoughtful approach to these beliefs, irrespective of the students' personal beliefs.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

The RE curriculum has an appropriate balance between content focusing on Christianity and that addressing other world faiths, alongside moral and ethical issues from religious perspectives. This supports students in developing understanding of Christian beliefs and practices as well as being able to compare and contrast these across religions. Students rightly recognise the contribution it makes to both their academic and personal development. 'It's good that we learn about a range of faiths, it helps you be respectful and more knowledgeable', a Year 8 student reflected. The department follows the school's developing assessment practice which focuses on 'steps' in learning well. Whilst recognising the need to refine this practice in RE it is aptly supporting pupils in knowing the strengths and areas for development for their work in each unit. Students begin studying for GCSE Religious Studies in Year 9. Careful and accurate monitoring and evaluation of learning is in place, based on examination criteria, which supports progress well. The majority of students find RE stimulating and enjoyable. 'RE gives you opportunity to think and reflect on important issues like abortion and war. We get lots of times when we can talk about religion and what it means in the world today,' as commented on by a Year 11 student. Links between RE and other subject areas are identified so that there are instances of mutual support between RE and, for example, history, science and art. Such opportunities help students to have a holistic view of their learning. There are firm plans in place to increase the time allocation across Key Stage 4 from three to four periods per fortnight from September 2018. Similarly clear planning is in place to include religious studies (RS) A level and core RE as part of the enrichment programme for sixth form students. This reflects the high status of the subject in supporting the academic and personal development of students.

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

The school's founding principle that God gives each individual potential leads to a clear recognition that everyone is loved and valued by God. It fruitfully steers SLT and governors in the strategic and practical aspects of their work. Consequently, its Christian vision is intertwined throughout, and acts as a driving force for priority setting and further developments. It is well shared and understood by staff, irrespective of their personal faith position. The school's self-evaluation is detailed and accurate, with clear action points. This demonstrates that SLT knows its school well. Governors have secured the services of a chaplain to provide spiritual and practical Christian guidance and direct the development of the school's worship life. This she does effectively. Likewise there is a strong head of RE who leads the subject area very well ensuring that it is recognised as a robust academic subject and contributes well to the school's Christian ethos. Both worship and RE meet statutory requirements. Links with the local Christian community through SCET, are strong. Parents are involved appropriately in school life: examples include the Friends of Trinity group and a parents' prayer group. They recognise and support its Christian ethos saying that it provides a good moral and spiritual framework for growth. Many value the positive impact that these Christian values have on their child's behaviour and attitudes. The school is outward looking and is establishing positive working practices with other schools and the local university. These links provide appropriate opportunities to monitor and moderate standards of work across different institutions. This contributes effectively to the accuracy and confidence with which predictions about the academic attainment of the current Year 11 are made.

Section 48 report [November 2017] Trinity School, Sevenoaks, Kent, TN13 3SL