Section 48 Statutory Inspection – Denominational Report

The King's Academy			
Address	Stainton Way, Middlesbrough, TS8 0GA		
Date of inspection	20th and 21st April 2023	URN	134223
Status of the school	Academy inspected as voluntary aided equivalent. Part of the Emmanuel Schools Foundation		

Overall Judgement	**How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?**	**Grade**	**Good with excellent features**
Additional Judgements	**The impact of collective worship**	**Grade**	**Good**
	The effectiveness of religious education (RE)	**Grade**	**Good**

School context

Part of the Emmanuel School's Foundation, The King's Academy has a non-denominational and inclusive Christian foundation. It is popular with more students wanting to gain a place than there are places available. There are 1,349 students including 85 in the special needs unit and 143 sixth formers. Most are of White British heritage. Very few speak English as an additional language. The proportion considered as disadvantaged is very high, being well above national averages as is the proportion who have special educational needs and / or disabilities (SEND). At the time of the inspection, the principal was on sick leave. This is its first section 48 inspection.

The school's Christian vision

Everyone is: Valued, Challenged, Inspired... being 'made in God's image' and therefore infinitely precious, morally responsible and gifted for a purposed. Founded on faith, hope and love, and inspired by Christ, we pursue excellence in character development, learning across the curriculum and service to our communities. This can be summarised as "to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic. 6:8).

Our Key Virtues are Love, Wisdom, Fairness, Self-Control, Courage, Humility and Integrity.

Principal	David Dawes
Acting Principal	Simon Reader
Inspector names	Lat Blaylock Pamela Draycott

Key findings

- The acting principal is providing very effective, stable, and compassionate leadership during the principal's long-term absence. Effective management systems ensure that the academy continues to function well. This is testament to the collegiate ways of working evidenced across the senior leadership team and indeed the wider workforce. The highly committed and dedicated staff team have a strong passion for ensuring the personal development of students which contributes to the good academic progress that many make.
- The vision and associated virtues shared across the Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) are actively related to the academy's context. They are biblically based and strongly reflect the Christian and inclusive nature. The academy rightly identifies the current need to refresh its focus on the vision and associated virtues as part of the ongoing cycle of development and improvement planning.
- Opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development are evident through the collective worship programme and through religious education (RE). However, a robust focus on SMSC opportunities across the curriculum is lacking. This leads to some missed opportunities for encouraging reflection and consideration of SMSC issues, particularly regarding the multi-cultural aspects of cultural development.
- Students take a pride in their school and behaviour is very good. This is because staff know students extremely well and "care for them wisely". Pastoral care, focused on encouraging students to be the "best they can be", is exemplary and draws strongly on the academy's Christian vision and associated virtues. Students within the special needs unit are appropriately supported to be impressively and fully integrated into the academy's life.
- The curriculum is well-matched to student needs. It is broad, well-sequenced and ambitious taking account of the varying abilities of students. Assessment practice overall is good and in the English department it is excellent. The academy has correctly prioritised the need to refine assessment practices to ensure further consistency in the use of assessment across the curriculum. Wide-ranging extracurricular opportunities strongly enrich students' experience.
- Drawing on the academy's vision and associated virtues, there is excellent pastoral support which addresses the varied needs of individuals and groups very well. Behaviour is very good with any low-level disruption dealt with swiftly, effectively and consistently. A small number of students demonstrate more serious behaviour breaches, sometimes repeatedly. Despite the best efforts of the academy, including work with outside agencies and its own Behaviour Support Unit (BSU), there remains a higher-than-average percentage of fixed term and permanent exclusions.
- Collective worship meets statutory requirements and makes a positive contribution to the academy's life and work. Detailed and well-focused plans and resources support staff very well when they conduct collective worship and / or reflection time in tutor groups. Student leadership of collective worship is underdeveloped as is the monitoring and evaluation of the programme by both senior leaders and students.
- The RE curriculum meets statutory requirements. It strongly supports developing knowledge and understanding of Christianity across all phases. Some studies of other religious and secular world views are included. Whilst discussion is encouraged, and some extended writing opportunities given, deeper analysis, interpretive and evaluative skills are not as well developed.

Areas for development

- Based on its Christian and inclusive vision and in keeping with the academy's ongoing improvement plan:
  - ensure that the vision and associated virtues are revisited and refreshed as part of the ongoing improvement cycle
  - improve the rigour with which SMSC development opportunities are identified and provided for across the curriculum, including ensuring that multi-cultural aspects within cultural development are highlighted more appropriately. This is to refine the ambitious curriculum offered and to support students' personal and academic development and so contribute more effectively to preparing students for life in modern diverse Britain today
  - improve the breadth, depth and usefulness of assessment practices in RE, and across the wider curriculum, so that it consistently reflects the excellent practice evident in English of using accurate data to inform and adapt teaching and learning to raise standards.
- Increase student leadership of and active participation in, the collective worship programme and ensure effective monitoring of its impact by both senior staff and students. This is in order to refine practice and ensure the programme's continued strong relevance and impact on individuals and on the academy's life.
- Increase the challenge and range of oral and written activities across the RE curriculum that deepens evaluative, interpretive, and analytical skills. This is so that students are consistently deeply engaged with their RE learning and better able to express their viewpoints and understanding.

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How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?
Inspection findings

Expressing its deep Christian foundation King's is a highly inclusive community. It serves students of different abilities and socio-economic backgrounds, including those with a wide range of special educational needs and disabilities as well as many from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. There is specialist provision for hearing and visually impaired students and for some with higher level and complex needs. These students are excellently integrated, and make valuable contributions to, the academy's life. For example, they share lessons and take part in a full range of extracurricular activities. The academy's mission is based on an inclusive Christian vision of the value of the individual who is unique and precious to God. This leads to an extremely caring and supportive community. From the vision spring the seven virtues which include courage, integrity and fairness. Consequently, there is an appropriate emphasis on moral responsibility and purpose which strongly encourages personal responsibility. Whilst expressing Christian teaching those with secular worldviews and the small proportion of students from different practising religious backgrounds (which includes, for example, Christians, Muslims and Hindus) recognise how the virtues help them to "try to do the right thing" and as such are "not only for Christians". In this way the explicitly Christian and inclusive basis of the academy is well celebrated. The vision and virtues are drawn from the MAT and well applied to King's context and needs. As part of its ongoing development cycle, a current priority is to revisit the vision and values to ensure its continued strength in underpinning the academy's work and widen understanding for all staff and students.

Reflecting the preciousness of each individual the academy is a welcoming and happy place where students' self-respect and self-confidence is developed, along with a growing appreciation of the needs of others who may be different from themselves. Good, mutually respectful relationships between staff and students are in evidence. Staff provide excellent role models and students are well known and cared for. This leads to excellent pastoral care being given to all. Similarly, staff wellbeing is also given a high priority. The academy is ambitious for its students, setting high standards both academically and behaviourally. There is a strong anti-bullying culture which means that instances of bullying are low and when they do occur are dealt with swiftly and appropriately. Behaviour is very good. A few students offer very challenging behaviour, and the academy provides a wide range of support for these students. This includes an effective behaviour management policy which is consistently applied as well as working with outside agencies. It also runs its own Behaviour Support Unit which effectively helps many students integrate fully into the academy's life. Permanent exclusions are a "last resort" with clear evidence in place to demonstrate how senior leaders and others have striven to provide support which has not been taken by the student involved. The above average percentage of fixed term and permanent exclusions are something which senior and pastoral staff are working tirelessly to bring down for the sake of the young people concerned.

The principal is currently on long-term sick leave. The acting principal, who was previously the Senior Vice Principal, is providing very effective, compassionate, and focused leadership at this time. He is ably supported by a Vice Principal and the wider senior leadership team. There are effective systems in place to ensure the continued smooth working of the academy, so that it functions well. Self-evaluation clearly identifies accurate 'next steps' for continued improvement. There is an exceptionally strong sense of purpose across the staff team who are extremely supportive of one another. Irrespective of their personal beliefs they identify strongly with how the virtues shape their work and contribute to the moral and social development of students. They are dedicated and passionate about ensuring that students, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds, get the most out of their education at The King's Academy.

Attainment on entry is generally below national expectations. The academy has effective systems in place to support students of differing ability levels which leads to many making good progress through their time in the academy. GCSE results, whilst currently just below national averages, indicate good progress when the various starting points and backgrounds of students are considered. The curriculum is broad and balanced. It is well matched to the varying abilities of students and supplemented by an impressive range of extracurricular activities. Participation is high in these activities which include, for example, various sports, cultural and creative activities, Combined Cadet Force (Royal Marines) and Duke of Edinburgh awards. House activities and competitions further support and extend students involvement in the academy's life. Assessment is good overall. As part of the ongoing process of refining the curriculum, the way in which assessment data is used in English to adapt teaching and learning to target students' progress is rightly recognised as being something to emulate across all subjects. Steps to enable staff to do this are in place.

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Opportunities for SMSC development are evident, especially in RE, through the collective worship programme and in the Relationships, Health and Sex Education (RHSE) programme. However, as identified by the academy's self-evaluation, such opportunities are less evident or celebrated across the wider curriculum. Plans are in place to prioritise ensuring a more robust approach to SMSC development across the academy. Students are aware of the virtues and how these relate to moral and social issues particularly well. Prayer and reflection opportunities are offered regularly as part of the daily collective worship programme. There are numerous opportunities given through the RE curriculum to explore different viewpoints on moral and ethical issues. The multi-cultural dimensions of cultural development are not well highlighted and so there are some missed opportunities for contributing to students' appreciation of life in wider diverse British society.

The programme of collective worship meets statutory requirements and makes a strong contribution to students' awareness of the academy's vision and virtues. It supports their sense of identity as members of the King's community well. Students and staff are invited to reflect and / or pray daily. As one student says, "They never force you to pray or to believe anything but give you space to think about what has been said, which can be very helpful". Relevant themes are clearly chosen to support students' spiritual and moral development. These draw appropriately on the academy's inclusive Christian vision. Biblical material is appropriately explored through collective worship, often in thought provoking ways. Staff who volunteer to lead collective worship in assemblies bring their own insights to the various topics considered. These staff and all tutors who lead tutor group reflections are provided with clear guidance and support materials to aid them in this important aspect of the academy's life. The collective worship programme is particularly sensitive to most of its community having secular world views. Consequently, it offers Christian teaching and practice in sensitive, open and invitational ways so that all are included, irrespective of their faith or non-faith background. Students listen attentively. However, their active participation in and involvement in leading worship is underdeveloped. Similarly, although there is much anecdotal evidence about the value of the programme for staff and students, the robust monitoring and evaluation by senior leaders and by students is lacking.

RE makes an effective contribution to the academy's vision and associated values. The Trust, members of the Local Governing Board and senior leaders ensure that RE is given enough curriculum time and a fair share of resources. The programme meets statutory requirements across all phases. A large department of specialist staff are strongly supportive of one another. Staff have a secure subject knowledge which means that they present accurate information and are able to respond to students' questions well. Ongoing assessment methods, including activities to help students remember previous learning, are provided at the start of each lesson. These are effective in helping students extend their knowledge and understanding of key religious vocabulary and practices. Further development of skills such as interpretation, analysis and evaluation is a suitable current priority. Likewise, in keeping with academy priorities, the department is currently addressing how to improve the use of data to adapt and target learning opportunities more consistently.

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The effectiveness of Religious Education

The RE curriculum in Key Stage 3 has a well-structured programme of lessons about Christianity. It also enables students to begin to learn about other religions and worldviews, such as Judaism, Islam and Hindu Dharma. Appropriate comparisons across religions are sometimes made. Standards of learning are good overall. Consequently, students make satisfactory progress across Key Stage 3, especially in relation to their understanding of biblical texts and key concepts such as covenant, sacrifice, and salvation. However, progress is slowed because activities do not consistently provide enough support and challenge to encourage students to engage with analytical, interpretive, and evaluative tasks and so deepen their knowledge, understanding and skills. All students in Key Stage 4 following a GCSE course focused on Christianity and Judaism. Teaching across this phase is well linked to examination specifications. Attainment at GCSE has in recent years been negatively affected by the ongoing effects of the pandemic. There are firm and appropriate plans in place to raise standards to at least pre-pandemic levels. Indications, through careful monitoring, are that this recovery will begin with the 2023 cohort of students. Small numbers, but a good proportion of the A level cohort, take Religious Studies in the sixth form. This is supplemented by a very effective enrichment programme of religion, philosophy and ethics for all sixth formers. Here, for example, they address issues such as capital punishment. These sessions energise students' interest and motivation and develop valuable skills for future higher education or training.

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