

Section 48 Statutory Inspection – Denominational Report

The Coopers' Company and Coborn School			
Address	St Mary's Lane, Upminster, Essex, RM14 3HS		
Date of inspection	26 th and 27 th April 2023	URN	136600
Status of the school	Academy inspected as voluntary aided equivalent.		

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
Additional Judgements	The impact of collective worship	Grade	Good
	The effectiveness of religious education (RE)	Grade	Excellent

School context

This popular and inclusive Christian, non-denominational academy has a very long history of service to its community. There are 1542 on roll, including a large sixth form of 505. Few pupils enter or leave the academy at times other than the usual starting points. Most are of White British heritage with a large range of other ethnic backgrounds making up the rest of the school community in smaller percentages. The proportion considered to be disadvantaged or with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) are below national averages but increasing. This is its first section 48 inspection since February 2003.

The school's Christian vision

- To ensure academic excellence by providing every student with the opportunity to make outstanding progress throughout their education journey.
- To foster true Love as Brethren spirit in a caring atmosphere which is based on the key Christian values of kindness, empathy, and justice, and by celebrating diversity.
- To develop character skills through varied and exciting opportunities beyond the classroom.

Headteacher	Sue Hay
Inspector name	Pamela Draycott

Key findings

- The motto of 'Love as Brethren' encapsulates the academy's vision well. It makes appropriate links with its long history and to the Coopers Company with whom it shares its motto. Staff and students are deeply aware of 'Love as Brethren' with its associated values which include kindness, empathy and justice. These are evident across the academy through, for example, positive, respectful relationships, very good behaviour in lessons and around the site, an emphasis on inclusion and diversity, and high expectations. Students are less confident in expressing how the motto and associated values are based on explicitly Christian/biblical teaching.
- The headteacher provides caring and well-focused leadership. The decision has rightly been actioned to increase leadership capacity in September 2023 by appointing two additional deputy headteachers. Staff are appreciative of the collegiate ways of working in evidence. They recognise that their professionalism is respected in keeping with the academy's motto, 'Love as Brethren'.
- Governors are committed to the academy and work co-operatively with the headteacher to ensure its continued development overall. The requirement for a regular Section 48 inspection to consider the academy's distinctiveness and effectiveness in relation to its Christian, non-denominational and inclusive foundation has not been met. This has been addressed. There are basic plans in place to improve the overall monitoring and evaluation of this aspect of governors' responsibilities. This includes ensuring future Section 48 inspections take place on a five yearly cycle.
- The curriculum is well tailored to student need which leads to a calm and purposeful learning environment. The vision and associated values are appropriately drawn on during some lessons which enhances students' academic and personal development well. Staff know their subjects well. This, along with positive classroom practices, leads to effective learning. Staff are ambitious for all students to make good progress, including those with SEND. Effective academic and very strong pastoral support are evident from Years 7 to 13.
- Students in the sixth form make excellent progress. Sixth formers benefit from a strong enrichment programme which includes a range of opportunities including mentoring and volunteering. However, the entitlement of all students to religious education (RE)¹ across their time in the sixth form is not met.
- There is an extensive range of extra-curricular provision. These include sporting, creative, subject based and other clubs. Most take part with enthusiasm in one, and often more, of these opportunities.
- Collective worship has a well thought through programme that draws on the vision and associated values, the faith and practices of a range of religions, academy priorities and local, national and international events. Some limited opportunities for reflection are offered in ways that include all students and staff, irrespective of their faith or non-faith position. However, the legal requirement for a daily act of collective worship for all students on the academy's roll is not met. The collective worship programme provides wide ranging opportunities to consider issues of moral and ethical concern and thus, supports the academy's values well. Monitoring of the impact of the programme by staff, governors and students is underdeveloped.
- High quality RE is evident across the academy. The specialist team work excellently together to develop effective, appropriately resourced, programmes of learning. The RE curriculum is academically rigorous with numerous opportunities for students to consider issues of religious, spiritual, moral and ethical concern. Its approach to curriculum development is exemplary. In Year 7 the RE curriculum is strengthened by a fortnightly lesson focusing explicitly on philosophical approaches to learning. All students in Key Stage 4 follow a GCSE course. Results are consistently high in relation to national and academy averages. A level Religious Studies in the sixth form is a popular subject and again standards of attainment are consistently high.

Next Steps

- Improve the linking of the academy's vision, motto and associated values with biblical teaching so that students and staff can further celebrate its non-denominational, Christian and inclusive basis.
- Governors to ensure the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the distinctive foundation of the academy continues, including providing for a section 48 inspection to be conducted on a five yearly cycle. This is to ensure that the academy's foundation continues to drive forward developments.
- Ensure that all students on the school roll have appropriate daily opportunities to take part in reflection and/or prayer as part of the refinement of the collective worship programme.
- Find relevant opportunities to include an effective RE entitlement for all students in the sixth form and so extend further the excellent provision offered through the enrichment programme.

¹ RE is referred to across the academy as religious studies (RS)

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

The longstanding motto of "Love as Brethren" reflects the academy's vision of being an inclusive, Christian and non-denominational educational institution. It is deeply embedded into academy's life. "It's part of the academy's DNA" as one member of staff said. This is exemplified, for example, with it being one of three pillars for planning and development along with the curriculum and extra-curricular provision. From it springs inclusive Christian values such as kindness, empathy and justice. Students are well aware of the motto, and many speak confidently about its impact on the academy and indeed on them as individuals. They recognise that the motto and associated values are shared across different religions and worldviews. As one student said, "Our motto sets high standards and is shared by everyone, it doesn't matter what they believe or think, all are respected and valued". Students are less able to confidently express how the vision, motto and associated values reflect and explicitly link to Christian beliefs and teaching. Staff are strongly committed to the way in which the academy's vision shapes their work and sets high expectations for all: recognising its profound impact on the quality of respectful relationships in evidence. Staff and students also recognise how the motto is a good standard to live by outside of the academy. Anecdotal evidence is that many former students and members of staff still talk about and reflect on 'Love as Brethren' in their daily life, especially when making decisions.

The academy is a happy and welcoming place. There is little movement of students in and out of the academy except at the usual times. There is a good balance of new and long-standing members of staff. Consequently, there is a stable and productive environment. Behaviour in lessons and around the site is very good. Expressing 'Love as Brethren' well the academy's culture is rich in aspiration and inclusivity. It celebrates diversity and consequently helps to prepare students for life in Britain today. It builds resilience and perseverance so that difficult situations are faced positively. For example, there are currently some building issues which means there is real pressure on teaching and social spaces. This is being handled well by staff, and students are understanding of the difficulties and remain calm amongst the disruptions. This positively reflects students' self-discipline and concern for their peers. Relationships between staff and students are based on mutual respect which leads to strong engagement in lessons. On those very few occasions where behaviour falls below the very high standards expected staff deal with these effectively. There is a clear behaviour policy which students say is consistently applied also reflecting that it, "is a balance between rewards and sanctions which is only fair". Staff have a real commitment to working effectively together to support students to, "be the best they can be both academically and personally".

Good mental health and wellbeing for all members of the school community is prioritised. Pastoral support overall is effective with targeted help provided for those in greatest need. Effective working with parents/carers and with outside agencies including early intervention work with the Havering Emotional Support Team (HEST) is productive. It demonstrates how the academy lives out 'Love as Brethren' by providing appropriately targeted support for those who are more vulnerable. A regular internally produced newsletter for staff focusing on a particular aspect of SEND is indicative of the high priority given to these aspects.

Across Key Stages 3 and 4 the curriculum is well planned and sequenced providing a broad and balanced programme for learning. It is enhanced through an extremely wide range of extra-curricular activities, clubs and trips which extend students' academic and personal development strongly. The curriculum in the sixth form provides a wide range of academic subjects which attract students from within the academy and beyond. Students are skilfully supported throughout their time in sixth form which provides an effective 'launch pad' to higher education and training. This is shown by how consistently the figures for those not in education, employment, or training (NEETs) on leaving the academy in Year 11 and in Year 13 are well below national and local averages. This is evidence of commendable practice and support for students. The sixth form enrichment programme is strong. It reflects the academy's vision and associated values well through for example providing opportunities for mentoring and volunteering. However, all students in the sixth form do not have their entitlement to RE provided for through the enrichment programme.

Across different subject areas the vision and associated values are appropriately used to ensure a calm and purposeful learning environment. Explicit examples of curriculum links are made. For example, in Year 7 English when students' study Animal Farm specific reference is made to how 'Love of Brethren', if applied, would have affected relationships and outcomes of the story. Similarly, elements of the science and geography curriculums address moral and ethical issues in line with the academy's vision and associated values.

The headteacher provides insightful, caring, and effective leadership well supported by her leadership team. The decision has rightly been actioned to increase leadership capacity in September 2023 by appointing two additional deputy headteachers. One of these is an internal appointment and the other external. This is to support further the academy's strategic development in the coming years. Staff are appreciative of the collegiate ways of working in evidence across the academy, recognising that their professionalism is respected in keeping with the academy's motto, 'Love as Brethren'. An example of this is the way in which overarching policies, such as for the curriculum and for assessment, are set and then departmental staff are trusted and enabled to adapt specifics in line with their subjects' needs. Staff report that the senior leadership team are approachable and helpful. Staff across the academy have a strong subject knowledge which leads to clear well-sequenced learning. Teachers check regularly for any misconceptions and target lesson activities accordingly. This enables students of varied abilities to make at least good progress.

Governors take their role seriously and work with the headteacher to ensure the academy's effectiveness overall. An external review of governance is being planned to improve effectiveness further. Governors' oversight of the academy's Christian, non-denominational and inclusive foundation has not been rigorous. This means that, for example, the legal requirement to hold a Section 48 inspection has not been actioned by governors for some considerable time. This aspect of monitoring and evaluation of the academy's foundation has been rectified. Embryonic plans are in place to improve the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of this dimension of the governors' responsibilities.

There is a planned programme for collective worship which draws appropriately on various Christian festivals such as Christmas and Easter and also considers other celebrations such as Eid for Muslims. Events such as Holocaust Memorial Day, items in the news and internal issues are also focused on. Formal Year Group acts of collective worship and tutor time reflections are the main ways in which the programme is delivered. This is supplemented by periodic services at partner churches. Opportunities for reflection and prayer are offered in an open and inclusive way as are times to consider biblical teachings. "We are not forced to pray but you can choose to pray or just think about something and what it might mean." Whilst the programme overall is good and makes a positive contribution to students' spiritual and moral development, it does not meet the legal requirement of a daily act of collective worship for all on the school roll. Tutors and those who lead more formal assemblies are positive about the impact of collective worship. Students engage well but their involvement in leading and evaluating the programme is underdeveloped.

The commitment of academy leaders and governors to high quality RE enables the specialist team to develop effective and appropriately resourced programmes of learning. Its curriculum is well thought through and academically rigorous with numerous opportunities for students to consider issues of religious, spiritual, moral and ethical concern. Its approach to curriculum development is exemplary. It is rightly recognised within the academy as a 'flagship' department which leads to them being drawn on to share expertise and trial policies from time to time. The team are confidently led by a well experienced subject leader. The team set high expectations and aspirations for RE and work closely together to develop and share approaches and resources. In Year 7 the RE curriculum is strengthened by a fortnightly lesson focusing explicitly on philosophical approaches to learning. All students in Key Stage 4 follow a GCSE course and results are consistently high in relation to national and academy averages. A level Religious Studies is a very popular subject and again standards of attainment are consistently high. This means that students demonstrate excellent progress in RE across their time in the academy. The curriculum provides a wide range of theological and philosophical approaches to learning with some evidence of approaches from the social sciences also being addressed.

Teachers within the department know their subject well. This means that challenging tasks are set, and discussions are skilfully handled. Appropriate cross-referencing between religions and/or topics being covered are well evidenced. Relationships between staff and students are extremely positive. Some sensitive and controversial issues are excellently addressed within a safe and mutually respectful learning environment. Skills such as analysis, evaluation and interpretation are well developed through the varied curriculum on offer. GCSE and A level examination specifications are used effectively to promote the development of deeper knowledge, understanding and application.

The departments' expertise is called upon by outside agencies locally and nationally. This includes some involvement in teacher training. A small group of students are taking part in a national meeting of the Religious Education Council for England and Wales (REC). One member of staff is a former chair of the National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE). These, and other external links, extend well the influence of the academy's RE department.