

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Ilfracombe Church of England Secondary Academy

Vision

Learning Together for Life in all its Fullness.

Our school is a sign of fullness of life for all, as we educate children for wisdom, knowledge and skills, for hope and aspiration, for community and living well together, and for dignity and respect. We embrace excellence and academic rigour within the wider framework of spiritual, physical, intellectual, emotional, moral and social development to enable children and adults to flourish.

Dream big, take responsibility, be kind.

Strengths

- The school's vision thoughtfully weaves together the educational aspirations of leaders, the academy trust and the wider Church of England. Commitment to the vision drives the moral purpose of leaders and impacts every area of school life.
- The belief in fullness of life transforms learning. Calm classrooms and ambitious teaching create a platform for future success for everyone in the school.
- Daily worship roots the whole school community in the shared vision. Detailed planning, thoughtful resourcing and highly committed chaplaincy make worship particularly high quality.
- Ilfracombe is a values-driven community in which people learn to live well together. Kindness, responsibility and courage are the watchwords of the school. Pupils want to be the best version of themselves, and staff wellbeing is high.
- The provision and quality of the religious education (RE) curriculum is exceptional. The well-embedded religion and worldviews approach means that pupils take an informed, reflective approach to issues of faith and morality.

Development Points

- Embed and secure the school's improvement journey as an expression of the Christian vision, working with the supportive academy trust. This is in order that the vision of fullness of life for all might be achieved.
- Broaden the appreciation of spirituality in the school to include the possibility of the transcendent or 'beyond'. This is to keep pace with the school's excellent work on reflective ethical living.
- Continue to promote the vision so that it is embedded in the hearts and minds of the whole school community. This is so that the ambition for 'fullness of life' will have long-lasting, wide impact.



Inspection Findings

Ilfracombe Academy is powerfully driven by its belief in transformation. Leaders are guided by the Bible verse about 'life in its fullness', expertly interwoven with the Church of England's 'Vision for Education'. Deep and detailed, the resulting Christian vision drives every aspect of school life. Leaders have particularly reflected on the context of the verse, talking about 'the thief who comes to steal'. They identify this with things, such as disadvantage, that prevent pupils flourishing in school. This fires their determination to overcome barriers to success and has driven a trajectory of rapid improvement. Joining the Athena Learning Trust has empowered the school. Leaders are given the autonomy, support and confidence which puts the Christian ethos at the heart of all they do. In return, the academy is contributing to the ethos of the wider multi-academy trust. Families are rightly reassured that recent changes have strengthened the Church school identity. Ilfracombe contributes strongly to its community, diocese and national networks. Staff have been delighted and encouraged by the support of church leaders at local and national level.

Leaders are passionate in their determination to improve people's life chances through education. This drives a whole-school focus on calm classrooms and ambitious lessons. Pupils rise to this challenge. Leaders rightly prioritise the building-blocks of learning. Therefore, resources are targeted to secure strong basic skills, such as literacy. Support for pupils with special educational needs and disability (SEND) is well-judged and expectations of all are high. As a result, all pupils can be fully included in the school's journey of success. This determined approach has transformed the school, so that school leavers can now access much improved choices and opportunities. Alongside this strong and successful focus on attainment, pupils enjoy a breadth of life-enhancing activities, including art, music and performance. Spirituality is an expected thread of every lesson. Training and planning ensure that teachers are skilled in creating space for reflection. In an English lesson, for example, pupils were exploring Scrooge's morality and questioning whether he had free will.

The quality of the provision for RE is exceptional. The skill of members of the team is recognised beyond the school. Staff are involved in the development of RE at local, diocesan and national level. Because of this, the curriculum is a model of what RE should be. The worldviews approach is fully embedded. This means that pupils learn that there is diversity between and within religions, as well as studying non-religious standpoints. The scheme of learning is well thought-out. As a result, pupils display a depth of knowledge and understanding about religion and philosophy. This informs their own developing worldviews. Learning is thoughtful and reflective. Pupils ask challenging questions and reject easy answers. A particular feature at Ilfracombe is that character education is incorporated into RE. This means that learning about life issues is deeper and more challenging. Opinions are well informed with insights from faith traditions and famous thinkers of the past. For example, a year 11 core RE group was applying Kant's moral philosophy to the topic of animal welfare. As a result, deep thinking is not confined to RE but is carried into the wider school and the wider world.

Worship is given the highest priority by leaders because it roots the school's vision on a daily basis. This is the heart of the transformation of school life. 'Greeting' time starts the day for everyone. Here, the values and vision are shared in ways relevant to each day's living. Planning for this is strong and meticulous. Biblically rooted, it is enhanced with stories and sayings from great people, past and present. As a result, the vision of God's purposes for a rich human life is thoroughly understood. Across the school community, there is a common language with which to talk about spirituality. Therefore, people speak frequently and fluently about the messages of worship throughout the day. However, aspects of spirituality which refer to the divine, or possibility of 'the beyond', are less well-developed. Staff expertise in leading worship is enhanced by the extensive commitment of local church leaders. Their work as chaplains strengthens connections with faith in the wider community. The chaplains'



weekly recordings help draw attention to the sacred, being filmed in the church or beautiful local landscape. A special prayer chaplain and community prayer group add depth and breadth to this strand of the school's spiritual life.

Working with the academy trust, Ilfracombe has been able to establish high standards of behaviour. Pupils feel safe in the calm environment and thrive in the culture of disruption-free learning. The emphasis on personal responsibility means pupils are increasingly mature in their conduct. The unwavering commitment to high expectations stems from a belief that people are children of God, worthy of fullness of life. The impact of this is that pupils aspire to be the best versions of themselves – fully rounded human beings. They grow to want the best for others as well as themselves. The school works hard to support this, building a strong culture of care, dignity, hope and resilience. The sense of community is powerful. Living well together is seen as an aspect of spirituality. Good relationships matter because people matter, even when issues are challenging. Belonging to the multi-academy trust has significantly improved staff well-being. Teachers feel supported and able to enjoy their work. Because of this, they make the school's vision a reality in their classrooms and wider school community.

Ilfracombe has a long history of working for greater good in the world. In 2020, pupils from the school initiated the charity Sparks UK. This has developed as a multi award-winning mental health charity 'by young people for young people'. Curriculum topics are chosen to develop pupils as change-makers and there are many opportunities for practical engagement. The school's focus on taking responsibility readily extends into an impetus to work for others. As a result, pupils are ambitious for their world, confident to speak out against injustice and keen to participate. They are active in a range of issues but have a particular vocation to the protection of their beautiful coast. Staff work hard to extend pupils' experience with the result that they are at ease with diversity. Visits abroad, including to Auschwitz, enable pupils to 'see things differently'. The partnership with a school in southern Africa challenges pupils to think about what 'life in all its fullness' really means. The impact of an exchange visit is life changing.

Information

Address	Worth Road, Ilfracombe, Devon EX34 9JB		
Date	10 October 2024	URN	139553
Type of school	Academy	No. of pupils	
Diocese/District	Exeter		
MAT/Federation	The Athena Learning Trust		
Headteacher	Stephen Rogers		
Chair of Governors	Richard Annear		
Inspector	Barbara Easton		