

# Accrington St Christopher's Church of England High School

Queen's Road West, Accrington, Lancashire BB5 4AY

**Inspection dates**

6–7 December 2016

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The headteacher, other senior leaders and governors are determined in their ambition to ensure that pupils blossom into thoughtful, caring and responsible citizens.
- The headteacher leads with openness, drive and humanity. The restructured governing body effectively holds leaders to account. Governors have played an important part in bringing about recent improvements.
- Leaders at all levels have clear and accurate knowledge of their areas of responsibility. In most cases, this has enabled them to take strong actions that have led to rapid improvements.
- In a few subjects, however, leaders have not taken decisive action to ensure that all groups of pupils make rapid progress. Senior leaders have not used their evaluation of the school's performance to drive up standards across all subjects.
- The personal development of pupils at the school is of an extremely high standard. Pupils are happy, polite and very respectful of others. Attendance is much higher than the national average and no group is disadvantaged by poor attendance.
- Pupils' conduct in lessons and around the school is exemplary. Pupils are resilient and mature.
- Good teaching has led to consistent improvements in pupils' attainment in key stage 4. Despite this, the speed with which pupils have made progress in different subjects has varied in the past.
- Pupils currently in key stage 3 are making faster progress than in recent years. Disadvantaged pupils are now making broadly similar progress from their starting points as other pupils nationally.
- The most able pupils have not made rapid progress in recent years. Although there are signs that this is changing, not all teachers have high enough expectations of what the most able are capable of achieving. They do not routinely provide work that challenges this large group within the school.
- Students make excellent progress in the sixth form. Leaders have created and developed this relatively new provision with drive and commitment. It serves its students exceptionally well.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that leaders at all levels use sharp and accurate evaluation of the school's recent performance to help them speed up the progress made by pupils in all subjects, to at least national averages by the end of key stage 4.
- Improve teachers' planning and provision for the most able pupils, so that they make faster progress, by ensuring that all teachers in all subjects:
  - consistently challenge and extend the most able so that they achieve the highest levels possible from their starting points
  - raise the aspirations of the most able pupils, sustain them over time and develop them further
  - have the highest possible expectations of what the most able are capable of achieving.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management Good

- The headteacher has been successful in creating a happy, supportive and highly inclusive community at St Christopher's. Members of staff at the school are keen to follow the example set by the headteacher and the safety and well-being of pupils is paramount to all.
- Leaders have created an ambitious culture. Pupils are expected to become the best they can be, both academically and socially. Pupils are supported to have a strong sense of right and wrong. Tolerance and respect are strongly evident throughout the harmonious school community and the warm and inclusive ethos permeates every aspect of the school's work.
- Leaders monitor the effectiveness of the school thoroughly and methodically. This has provided them with a deep and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This, in turn, has enabled leaders to drive many improvements across the school and in the sixth form.
- Leaders have responded positively to a dip in examination results in 2014. Since that time, attainment by the end of key stage 4 has improved significantly each year and is now at record levels. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is significantly above average and progress in most subjects is now similar or better than national averages. In recent years, however, pupils have not made fast enough progress in mathematics and modern foreign languages. Although there are signs that the pace of progress is quickening in these subjects, leaders have not yet done enough to ensure that performance in future external examinations demonstrates secure and significant improvement.
- Leaders have been determined to reduce the differences between the progress of disadvantaged pupils at the school and that of other pupils nationally. A new position was created on the leadership team to do this and the post holder has led an effective whole-school focus on this area. The school's own data paints a clear picture of disadvantaged pupils making far quicker progress than in recent years. Consequently, differences in both attainment and progress are diminishing markedly. School leaders have begun to evaluate carefully the impact of different strategies to improve the progress made by disadvantaged pupils. As a result, leaders are now far shrewder in the way that pupil premium funding is spent.
- The school makes good use of its extra funding to help pupils in Year 7 catch up in English and mathematics. Additional reading programmes and small-group work in mathematics have ensured that pupils make faster progress in gaining literacy and numeracy skills.

- Leaders have a good understanding of what makes effective teaching. Clear systems for monitoring the quality of teaching, including the 'curriculum reviews' of each subject, provide leaders with accurate information about the strengths and weaknesses of teaching at the school. This information has enabled leaders to improve teaching significantly whilst creating a culture in which the professional development of staff has a high priority. One teacher at the school echoed the views of others when he told inspectors that he felt school leaders really invested in him and were committed to maximising his professional development.
- Leaders have increased the range of opportunities for professional development available to members of staff. Leaders have become very outward facing and work with a range of external partners, including other local schools, to share best practice and develop teachers' expertise. As a result, training opportunities are sharply matched to the needs of the school and those of individual members of staff.
- Leaders have recognised the need to improve systems for managing the performance of staff. This has led to the introduction of a new and ambitious system of appraisal. Leaders are well aware of the importance of using performance management more effectively to tackle weaknesses within the school.
- Middle leaders are clear on the school's priorities. Some, such as leaders within humanities subjects and the pastoral leaders, are highly effective at maintaining very high standards within their areas. Others are in the process of driving significant improvements. A small minority, however, are not bringing about improvements with the necessary sense of urgency.
- Leaders provide pupils with a broad and balanced academic curriculum that serves its pupils well. Pupils are taught all the subjects in the national curriculum in key stage 3 and this provides them with a solid foundation for future study. All pupils study a broad academic curriculum in key stage 4. The success of this curriculum is demonstrated in the very strong rates of progress made by lower- and middle-ability pupils and the faster progress of the most able.
- Leaders have been very effective at developing pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum. Pupils are supported to develop their extended writing within a range of subjects and teachers have appropriate expectations for the depth, detail and technical accuracy of pupils' writing. Teachers provide pupils with regular opportunities to discuss and debate and this plays an important role in the impressive development of pupils' speaking skills.
- Leaders have not made the development of pupils' mathematical skills across the curriculum a high enough priority in the past. Leaders are aware of this and are in the process of preparing plans to introduce a broader numeracy strategy in the near future.
- Pupils benefit from a diverse and extensive range of extra-curricular opportunities. Pupils participate in a wide range of sports, from trampolining to futsal. Among other opportunities, they can also join the eco-group, the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) club or work towards a Duke of Edinburgh's Award. The school has a strong tradition of musical prowess.

- Leaders give the development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding a high priority. They also place a high value on the promotion of British values. Planning for both aspects across the curriculum is thorough, methodical and precise. Assemblies are very well planned and make a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual development. Special days, when the usual timetable is suspended, focus on key aspects of British values and help equip pupils with the skills needed for life in modern Britain. As a result of this work, pupils have a strong sense of moral purpose. The commitment of the pupils to worthwhile causes was demonstrated recently when a group of teachers and pupils from the school slept 'rough' for the night to raise money for local homeless people.

## **Governance of the school**

- Governors know the school very well. They are very proud of the school's strengths and demonstrate total commitment to improving areas of weakness. The governing body evaluates its own effectiveness regularly and this led to a total restructuring of the way the governing body operates at the start of the 2015/16 academic year. As part of the restructure, four committees were created to provide closer scrutiny of the school's work in key areas. The skills and expertise of governors are now matched very closely to their areas of responsibility and this is clearly improving the quality of governance.
- The governing body regularly holds leaders to account for weaknesses in performance. Governors have also challenged leaders to rationalise the use of the school's budget.
- The governing body has demonstrated strong strategic oversight and vision by supporting the headteacher to create a senior leadership structure that has led to better provision for pupils. In particular, it supported the introduction of a leader for key stage 3 as well as a leader responsible for the progress made by disadvantaged pupils.
- Governors play an active role in the school's performance management system. Governors work closely with the headteacher to make decisions about which teachers should receive pay increases.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The work the school does to keep pupils safe is exemplary. Leadership of this area has been highly effective in creating a culture of safeguarding within the school. Staff are very vigilant about signs of neglect and abuse, and systems for making referrals to the designated safeguarding lead are understood by all and used effectively. Record-keeping is precise and the school liaises well with a range of external agencies and with pupils' parents.
- Staff receive regular training on different aspects of safeguarding, including e-safety and how they can help keep pupils safe from people with extreme views or from being radicalised. There is a clear induction programme for staff new to the school and those who work part time.

- Teachers clearly understand what to do if they have concerns about the behaviour of a colleague.

**Quality of teaching, learning and assessment****Good**

- Pupils display very positive attitudes to learning. They arrive at lessons well equipped and ready to learn. Pupils enjoy productive and harmonious relationships with their peers and members of staff. Time is rarely wasted in lessons.
- Most pupils benefit from good teaching across a range of subjects and this enables them to be successful in their studies. Teachers use their strong knowledge of their subject and of the pupils to generate enthusiasm during lessons. Resources are often used imaginatively to engage pupils and accelerate progress.
- Teachers use questioning skilfully to assess pupils' understanding and develop their thinking. Teachers are particularly skilled at structuring discussion and debate. Pupils are very respectful of different opinions and are often presented with the challenge of seeing things from different perspectives. This helps teachers to challenge stereotypes.
- Teachers regularly set homework that consolidates and extends learning. Pupils complete homework diligently and understand the importance of developing independent study skills. Pupils usually present their work with care and most of their exercise books are easy to revise from.
- Teachers assess pupils' understanding effectively through regular assessed tasks. This enables teachers to identify what pupils can do and what they need to do in order to make further progress. The majority of pupils respond well to this feedback and it is clearly evident that they use it to make secure progress.
- Parents receive regular and useful information on the progress their children are making. Progress reports clearly identify whether or not pupils are on track to achieve their targets. They also provide clear information on the behaviour, effort and organisational skills of their children.
- Teachers have high expectations of what low- and middle-ability pupils can achieve. They provide the right amount of challenge for these pupils and, as a result, they make solid progress. Teachers do not, however, always have high enough expectations of what the most able pupils can achieve. Teachers do not always provide enough challenge for the most able and this largely explains why high-ability pupils make slower progress than they could.

**Personal development, behaviour and welfare****Outstanding****Personal development and welfare**

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. The staff know and care for pupils exceptionally well. Pupils feel very safe and well supported and they thrive within a culture of harmony and respect. Pupils enjoy each other's company and that of other adults within school.

- British values are promoted effectively alongside the school's Christian ethos. Pupils regularly participate in discussion and debate around a range of issues and this has created a warm respect for those with different faiths and beliefs. The school's work to promote equality is excellent and strengthened by features such as the provision of a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender club.
- Pupils say that bullying is rare within the school. Pupils know whom to speak to if they encounter bullying and they are confident that members of staff will resolve any issues effectively.
- Parents are extremely supportive of the school's work. The overwhelming majority of parents feel that their child is happy and safe at the school and would recommend the school to others.
- Pupils respond positively to the school's work to keep them safe. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe online and are aware of how to manage risk outside school.
- Pupils benefit from high-quality careers guidance. Pupils receive careers education throughout the school and pupils in key stage 3 quickly develop strong and sensible aspirations for what they would like to do for their future careers. Pupils are supported effectively by the school's careers adviser as they move through the school. The careers adviser knows the pupils very well and supports almost all pupils to move on to an appropriate destination when they leave Year 11.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils behave extremely well in all areas of school. They are sensible, mature and courteous towards others outside lessons and when moving around the site.
- Pupils are proud of their school. Pupils of all abilities demonstrate resilience and enthusiasm in lessons. They persevere with work they find difficult and respond well when teachers explain things in a different way to support their learning.
- Pupils very rarely misbehave in lessons. Teachers manage rare incidents of low-level misbehaviour effectively using the school's behaviour management systems. The school attaches a great deal of importance to basic standards such as wearing the uniform neatly and having the correct equipment. Pupils respond positively to the 'clue card' initiative that closely monitors different aspects of these standards.
- There are very few incidents of serious misbehaviour in the school. Pupils are very rarely excluded because they respond to the school's insistence on high standards of behaviour from all of them.
- Pupils' attendance is excellent. Pupils are keen to have high attendance, and no group of pupils is disadvantaged by regular absence. This is the result of members of staff effectively promoting the advantages of good attendance alongside robust procedures for monitoring absence and supporting individual pupils whose attendance drops.

## Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Over the last three years, the proportion of pupils who have gained five or more GCSE grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics, has increased by almost a fifth and is now significantly above the national average. The overwhelming majority of pupils therefore leave the school with very strong attainment. Disadvantaged pupils are now twice as likely to attain these results compared with the situation three years ago.
- Almost all pupils are successful in transferring to academic or vocational courses of their choice after Year 11, and this has been the case for many years.
- The examination results at the end of Year 11 in 2016 show that pupils made broadly average progress from their starting points when they joined the school. Pupils made much more rapid progress in some subjects than in others. They made exceptionally strong progress in humanities subjects, but their progress in mathematics, science and modern foreign languages was slower. Progress in English has quickened, and is in line with the national average.
- Different groups of pupils in Year 11 made varying rates of progress from their starting points in 2016. Lower ability pupils made strong progress, middle-ability pupils made progress in line with national averages and high-ability pupils made progress that was less than national averages. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils made progress that was broadly in line with the national average. Girls made more rapid progress than boys.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well. Leadership of the special educational needs department is a real strength of the school. Leaders within the department know the pupils very well and support for pupils is sharply matched to pupils' needs. Teaching assistants are valued highly and systems for their performance management are robust. Teachers use information in the excellent 'pupil passports' to ensure that all pupils are well catered for in lessons. The progress made by pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has therefore accelerated greatly in recent years and their progress is now broadly in line with that of all pupils nationally.
- Leaders are currently projecting that standards at the end of Year 11 in 2017 will be broadly similar to those achieved in 2016. The school's own data shows that pupils are making much faster progress in other year groups. Boys are also identified as making progress almost as quickly as girls. The most able pupils are also making faster progress than they were, although it is still not as rapid as that of pupils with lower prior attainment.
- The school's use of pupil premium funding has made a considerable difference to the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. The school's data suggests that the differences in progress between disadvantaged and other pupils have disappeared.
- Leaders are currently in the process of moving to a new assessment system that will enable teachers, leaders and parents to track progress more rigorously.

- Leaders have been very successful in creating a culture where reading for pleasure is seen as vitally important. The pupils heard reading during the inspection clearly enjoy reading and talked confidently about their preferred genres and authors. Pupils are required to bring a book of their choice to school and they enjoy undertaking quiet reading during the school day. Pupils read with fluency and confidence. They select texts that are appropriate for their reading ages and are able to work out the meanings of words that are unfamiliar to them.
- The school's efforts to improve the literacy of pupils who join Year 7 without securing national expectations in reading are proving largely successful. Leaders use additional funding effectively to improve different aspects of literacy development. The vast majority of targeted pupils make significant gains in their reading and spelling ages and many catch up with their peers in school. This plays an important part in the strong progress made by low-ability pupils throughout the school.

### 16 to 19 study programmes

**Outstanding**

- Leadership of the sixth form is very strong. Rates of attendance are exceptionally high and students' punctuality is excellent. The proportion of students completing their studies compares very favourably with national averages.
- The progress that students make in the sixth form in relation to their GCSE grades is impressive and has been well above national averages for a number of years. Students make particularly strong progress on the most popular courses such as psychology, sociology and English language. Both male and female students make equally strong progress and there is no difference in the progress made by disadvantaged students and others. Sixth-form leaders clearly understand what they need to do to improve the sixth form further. Leaders are working to increase further the proportion of high grades being achieved by the most able students.
- All students who have not attained a grade C or above in English or mathematics receive appropriate teaching and support. The success rates when students retake these examinations are significantly above national figures.
- The sixth form caters on a foundation pathway for a small cohort of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This pathway provides students with a highly personalised curriculum that focuses on the development of functional English, mathematics and information technology, as well as options such as creative media and health and social care. Students make excellent progress on the foundation pathway and benefit from high-quality support provided by a range of specialist staff.
- Students take advantage of valuable enrichment opportunities, ranging from the 'extended project' to computing and from the 'pre-professional programme' to music. Students also participate in a vibrant range of extra-curricular activities such as lunchtime lectures and 'the broadsheet club'. Many students choose to take advantage of the extensive opportunities to gain leadership experience. In addition to joining the sixth-form council, students can become subject ambassadors, form captains or mentors to pupils in the main school.

- All students undertake work experience during their time in the sixth form. As well as completing a full week of work experience in Year 12, many students also participate in regular work experience that supports their aspirations for the future. Students are well supported with their career planning. The careers adviser knows all students extremely well and provides valuable personalised guidance to each of them. Preparation for higher education is extensive and the vast majority of students leaving the sixth form move on to places at their chosen universities.
- Leaders have a detailed understanding of the quality of teaching across the sixth form. They also have highly effective systems in place for tracking students' attainment and holding teachers and middle leaders to account for their progress.
- Students are very committed to their studies. They respond well to the high-quality written feedback they are given by their teachers and make rapid progress. Students value the support they are given by members of staff, particularly by pastoral leaders and their form tutors.
- Students are well supported to keep themselves safe. Students are given regular information through assemblies and form time on a range of topics, such as e-safety and the dangers of alcohol. Leaders also employ a number of innovative strategies in response to risks that are particularly prevalent in the local area. For example, all students in Year 12 took part in a course that highlighted the dangers of driving. Students are also provided with opportunities to find out more about issues that might be particularly relevant to them through events such as the 'health fair'.

## School details

Unique reference number	137421
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10012459

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,307
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	294
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Frank Whitehead
Headteacher	Richard Jones
Telephone number	01254 232992
Website	<a href="http://www.st-christophers.org">www.st-christophers.org</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:info@st-christophers.org">info@st-christophers.org</a>
Date of previous inspection	3–4 November 2011

## Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- Accrington St Christopher's Church of England High School is larger than the average secondary school. It converted to academy status in September 2011.

- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is lower than the national average.
- The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups and of pupils who speak English as an additional language are lower than the national averages.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is lower than the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in lessons across a range of subjects and year groups, including some joint observations with school leaders. They also carried out a scrutiny of pupils' work.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils, and talked with others informally during break- and lunchtimes. Discussions were held with staff, including senior and middle leaders and classroom teachers. A meeting was held with the chair of the governing body and four other governors. A meeting was also held with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors scrutinised information about the school's performance and a range of documents. These included the school's self-evaluation, its development plan and a selection of policies. They also looked at the school's own records of feedback from parents.

## Inspection team

Will Smith, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Andrew Cooper	Ofsted Inspector
Mike Merva	Ofsted Inspector
Elizabeth Haddock	Ofsted Inspector
Pritiben Patel	Ofsted Inspector
Phil Hyman	Ofsted Inspector
Dawn Farrent	Ofsted Inspector

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