

Sol Christian Academy

115 Fairfield Street, Piccadilly, Manchester, Greater Manchester M12 6EL

Inspection dates

16–18 January 2018

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders and trustees are not monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching, or the curriculum, effectively. As a result, leaders have a generalised and overgenerous view of how well the school is performing.
- Leaders' plans to improve the school are superficial and focus purely on the state of the premises and compliance with regulations.
- Weak systems for training staff and managing their performance have limited the effectiveness of teaching across the curriculum.
- Arrangements for governance are lax. Trustees do not effectively hold leaders to account for the school's performance.
- Pupils make uneven progress across subjects. This is because lessons other than those taught through workbooks are not matched well to pupils' different starting points in the mixed-age classes.
- The teaching of writing is a weakness throughout the school.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders and staff actively promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. As a result, they prepare pupils well for life in modern Britain.
- Pupils make good progress on the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) curriculum, particularly in reading and mathematics.
- Assessment is used effectively to ensure that pupils access the ACE curriculum at a level that is appropriate for their ability.
- The school complies with all of the independent school standards
- Pupils behave well. Their behaviour is exemplary when they complete their Packets of Accelerated Christian Education (PACEs).
- Parents and carers are full of praise for the work of the school. Some credit the school for transforming the lives of their children.
- Children make good progress in the early years. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development compares favourably to the national average.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management, by:
 - using self-evaluation and development planning more effectively to drive improvements across the school
 - monitoring the quality of teaching across the curriculum more closely, focusing on the impact of teaching on learning
 - implementing clearer systems for managing the performance of staff, so they are set individual targets that align with whole-school priorities
 - ensuring that the curriculum is as well planned in all areas as it is for the core ACE curriculum so that pupils' skills are developed as well as their factual knowledge
 - extending the range of opportunities that pupils have to learn about other faiths
 - strengthening governance so that trustees are able to challenge and support leaders more effectively.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and consequently the progress made by pupils, by:
 - ensuring that teaching is as well matched to pupils' needs and abilities in all subjects as it is on the ACE curriculum
 - implementing a planned programme of training for staff, which provides teachers with opportunities to develop their practice by visiting other schools
 - increasing the range of opportunities for pupils to develop their extended writing.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The headteacher teaches full time. She spends a significant amount of time on routine operational matters. The chair of the trust board also currently teaches at the school in a full-time capacity. This has contributed to leaders not prioritising the strategic development of the school.
- Leaders do not possess a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have an overgenerous view of how well they, and the school, are performing.
- Leaders' self-evaluation documentation focuses solely on whether the school complies with the independent school standards. Their plans to improve the school are superficial and focus on improving the premises. Leaders do not have any formal plans to improve teaching, develop the curriculum and increase the amount of progress that pupils make in different areas.
- Teachers are not given enough opportunities to develop their teaching skills. There are limited opportunities for teachers to share good practice, particularly with colleagues from other schools. This has limited the development of teaching, particularly in subjects beyond the ACE curriculum.
- Leaders do not conduct regular checks on the quality of teaching and learning. When checks are made, they do not evaluate sufficiently the impact of teaching on pupils' learning.
- Leaders' systems for managing the performance of staff lack precision. Staff are not given specific targets that relate to the amount of progress made by pupils, and which align with the school's developmental needs. Teachers are therefore not made accountable for the progress of pupils and their contributions to wider school development.
- The school provides a curriculum which fulfils the requirements of the independent school standards. The PACEs cover the core subjects including: mathematics, English, social studies, science, word building and literature. These subjects are normally studied in the morning sessions. Throughout the afternoon, pupils study other subjects including French, design and technology and physical education. They also take part in cross-curricular enrichment projects on topics such as the FIFA World Cup and chocolate.
- Leaders' plans for the curriculum in subjects beyond the ACE curriculum lack breadth and depth. This is contributing to weaker teaching in subjects beyond the ACE curriculum, and the variability in pupils' outcomes.
- Leaders have ensured that the school's ethos is inclusive and that every pupil feels valued.
- Parents are happy with the work of the school and they value the quality of education their children receive. In many cases, parents have chosen to send their children to the school because their children have experienced difficulties in other settings. These parents speak in glowing terms about the impact the school has had on their children. They are delighted by the progress their children are making, particularly in reading and mathematics.
- The large majority of pupils are hugely positive about being at the school. Most enjoy

working independently on their PACEs, and value being able to complete work that is carefully matched to their abilities and needs. Typical comments from pupils include: 'I feel settled in myself and I feel accepted for who I am and what I believe in' and 'I bond with people better in this school and I feel better about myself.'

- Leaders have ensured that a relentless focus is maintained on developing pupils' independence and resilience.
- Leaders and teachers actively promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school's active promotion of fundamental British values harmonises with its strong Christian ethos. As a result, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Although accepting and compassionate towards others, pupils do not have a broad enough understanding of different faiths. Pupils can recall studying Judaism, but little else.
- The school's curriculum is broad and covers all the required areas. There are some useful enhancements to the curriculum such as visits to the Museum of Science and Industry and the Manchester Jewish museum.
- By the end of the inspection, leaders had ensured that the school meets all the independent school standards.

Governance

- Trustees do not systematically hold leaders to account for the school's performance. They have not insisted that the school has a meaningful self-evaluation document or improvement plan.
- Trustees are too reliant on anecdotal evidence when judging the effectiveness of the school. The chair of the trust board teaches at the school and is actively involved in the school's leadership. As a result, he lacks the objectivity and distance to be able to challenge leaders effectively.
- The chair of the trust board is aware of the need to strengthen governance. To this end, two additional trustees have joined the trust board since the start of the academic year. There are now three members of the trust board. However, new trustees lack the knowledge and understanding required to challenge leaders effectively. As a result, they have not ensured that the necessary systems and structures are in place for the school to improve.
- The way that the trust board operates is lax. Meetings are infrequent and, when the board does meet, there is often no record of what has been discussed.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The headteacher is the designated leader of safeguarding and she ensures that all members of staff take their safeguarding responsibilities seriously.
- Training for staff and volunteers is given high priority, including for those who are new to the school. As a result, staff are knowledgeable about a range of safeguarding issues such as radicalisation and female genital mutilation.

- Members of staff know the procedures for communicating concerns to leaders. They are vigilant to any changes in pupils' behaviour and inform the headteacher diligently of any emerging concerns. Safeguarding records are detailed and specific.
- Leaders understand the significance of absence patterns as a potential indicator of safeguarding concerns. As a result, they have strengthened systems for recording the reasons for absence and for challenging the families of children who are regularly absent. Leaders understand their duties to inform the local authority if any pupil leaves to join another school or to be home-educated.
- At the start of the inspection some of the checks on staff's backgrounds had not been fully completed. By the end of the inspection, all relevant checks had been carried out and were recorded centrally.
- The school's safeguarding policy meets requirements and can be accessed via the school's website.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- There is a pronounced difference between the quality of teaching of the ACE curriculum and those subjects that are taught during afternoon sessions. Although pupils acquire a great deal of factual knowledge in different subjects, not enough is done to develop pupils' skills. In particular, the teaching of writing is a weakness.
- The ACE curriculum enables pupils to acquire a broad range of knowledge in different subjects. It also effectively develops pupils' skills in reading and mathematics. However, it does not facilitate the effective development of other skills, including those which are specific to different subjects.
- The teaching of subjects that are not part of the ACE curriculum is not well matched to pupils' needs. Leaders' plans for the wider curriculum lack detail or are very sketchy. As a result, the curriculum that pupils follow during afternoon sessions lacks coherence and is underdeveloped. Teachers do not match work to pupils' different abilities when they are teaching the wider curriculum.
- Many pupils do not take their work on the wider curriculum as seriously as they take their PACEs. The way in which some pupils present their work does not reflect the same high standards that are seen in the PACE booklets.
- In particular, teachers provide very few opportunities for pupils to develop the depth, fluency and creativity of their writing. There are also very few opportunities for pupils to develop their writing across the curriculum. As a result, the teaching of writing is weak.
- Teaching on the ACE curriculum is well matched to pupils' needs and abilities. As a result, pupils of all abilities make strong progress when this curriculum is being studied, particularly in reading and mathematics.
- Teachers have high expectations of the progress pupils should make on the ACE curriculum. Pupils respond positively to these high expectations. Their behaviour is exemplary whilst completing their PACEs and they demonstrate perseverance and independence to make solid progress.
- Pupils assess their own work routinely. As a result, teachers are able to track pupils' progress carefully. They intervene and provide additional support when pupils are not

making sufficient progress.

- Staff only give guidance to pupils once they have independently tried to understand the subject matter in their PACEs. When pupils are genuinely stuck, adults intervene effectively to ensure that pupils continue to make good progress.
- Teachers set pupils an appropriate range of homework for their age and ability. Pupils enjoy completing their monthly book reviews and preparing for their oral presentations.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are polite, friendly and confident. They usually take pride in their work and look exceptionally smart in their uniforms.
- Pupils' attitudes to completing their PACEs are exemplary. They demonstrate independence and resilience and develop effective study habits.
- Teachers ensure that pupils discuss issues in an open and balanced manner. Pupils enjoy debating different issues, such as whether we should have a royal family and whether school uniform should be banned. As a consequence, pupils become thoughtful and open-minded. Pupils enjoy researching, and delivering, their monthly oral projects. This helps pupils to build their confidence and develop their presentation skills.
- Pupils have a clear understanding about different types of bullying, including cyber bullying, prejudice-based bullying and physical bullying. Pupils are clear that bullying does not happen at the school. They are equally adamant that should it happen, teachers would deal with it effectively.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They are knowledgeable about the potential dangers of being online. They have also received talks from members of the emergency services on how to keep safe in the community.
- Leaders have engaged effectively with a local community group that aims to raise the aspirations of children from minority ethnic backgrounds. Pupils also receive information from a range of sources on different future career options. Pupils in the secondary phase have access to an appointment with an independent careers adviser each year. As a result, almost all pupils have clear ideas, and high expectations, for what they want to do in the future.
- The school's choice to follow the ACE curriculum does expose pupils to some stereotypical depictions of different groups. In particular, women are depicted as being subservient to men. Positively, leaders use this controversial material as a prompt for discussing the validity of such depictions. All pupils spoken to were vehement that their views differed markedly from those portrayed in their PACEs. Pupils could recall how they have discussed issues such as sexism and other forms of prejudice. They explained how they disagree with all forms of discrimination in the strongest possible terms. Typical views from pupils included: 'God makes us all equal' and 'Our Christian values stress the importance of mutual respect.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave very well around the school site and at break and lunchtimes. They are respectful towards staff and each other. This level of consideration ensures that the school is a calm and orderly environment.
- Pupils' behaviour is impeccable when they complete their PACEs. Low-level disruption is exceptionally rare during these lessons.
- Leaders have had a positive impact on improving the behaviour of pupils who have displayed negative behaviour in other settings prior to joining the school.
- Teachers use rewards effectively to promote achievement and reward commitment. They use sanctions proportionately and to good effect. As a result, serious misbehaviour is exceptionally rare. Leaders have never had to exclude a pupil and it has been a long time since a pupil has been removed from a lesson for poor behaviour.
- The vast majority of pupils have excellent attendance. Overall rates of absence are broadly in line with national averages. The school has suitable systems in place for supporting and challenging the families of the small number of pupils who are absent regularly from school.
- Pupils' behaviour in subjects beyond the ACE curriculum is not as strong as when they are completing their PACEs. Some pupils can lack focus and do not approach their work with the same care and commitment.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils make good progress in mathematics and reading. They also quickly develop interpersonal skills and a strong moral compass.
- A significant number of pupils join the school having experienced difficulties in other schools or after a period of being home-schooled. Some of the pupils arrive at the school with low prior attainment, having stagnated in the months or years prior to joining the school. On the whole, these pupils make rapid progress when they join the school and some catch up with their peers.
- The school has started to use recognised commercial tests as an additional measure of pupils' attainment. These tests suggest that pupils generally attain as well as their counterparts in the mainstream sector in reading and mathematics.
- Pupils of all abilities make good progress on the ACE curriculum. The most able pupils, particularly those who have been at the school for a long time, make quick progress with their PACEs. They relish the independence that the ACE curriculum provides, and they gain enormous satisfaction from completing work that is typically aimed at older children.
- The school works in partnership with a number of maintained special schools to ensure that pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make good progress at the school.
- Over the last few years, all pupils who have been entered for the Year 2 and Year 6 statutory assessment tests have reached at least the expected standard.

- A number of pupils have been supported to sit entrance examinations for grammar schools at the end of the primary phase. All these pupils now attend selective grammar schools.
- No pupils have yet sat any externally accredited examinations or completed the International Certificate in Christian Education (ICCE). This is because of the current age profile of pupils at the school.
- Pupils do not make good progress in subjects beyond mathematics and reading. As a result, pupils' achievement is too narrow. This is because leaders have not prioritised the development of the curriculum and teaching in subjects beyond the ACE curriculum.
- In particular, pupils do not make good progress with their writing. Pupils generally write neatly and in a cursive style. However, they do not develop the depth, fluency and sophistication of their writing to the levels they are capable of reaching. As a result, there is a clear difference between pupils' reading skills and their writing ability.
- Leaders do not do enough to promote the development of pupils' subject-specific skills. For example, although history is studied as part of the 'social studies' PACEs, the curriculum focuses narrowly on the acquisition of selected historical facts. As a result, pupils do not learn about important historical concepts such as cause, consequence, significance and interpretation. In turn, this impedes the development of important historical skills.

Early years provision

Good

- The headteacher is also the teacher and leader of the early years. She has a good understanding of how young children learn and has ensured that children benefit from good provision. Despite this, leaders lack a clear understanding of the provision's strengths, relative weaknesses and what needs to be done in order to improve the provision further.
- Leaders have ensured that effective procedures have been established to baseline children's abilities when they join the provision.
- There are strong systems in place for continuous assessment. Adults use precise information about what children can do when planning learning opportunities. However, staff do not ensure that these assessment procedures are followed thoroughly for all children.
- Children are taught effectively and adults have high expectations of what they can achieve. Children benefit from a varied range of opportunities to develop their skills in all of the prime areas of learning.
- Teachers are attentive to children's needs. When children are ready to access a more formal style of learning, teachers skilfully provide these opportunities.
- The teaching of phonics is a particular strength, and children make rapid progress in this area.
- Leaders make daily use of the school's outdoor provision. Although this provision is small in size, leaders have worked creatively to ensure that children benefit from opportunities to develop their skills in all the prime areas of learning when playing and learning outside.

The prime areas of learning relate to children's physical, social and language development.

- Staff liaise effectively with parents. Parents contribute to the initial assessment of their children's abilities and needs. They are also encouraged to regularly update the school on the progress their child is making at home, including any 'wow moments' that are worthy of being shared. Parents are invited to take part in weekly languages lessons alongside their children. They are also encouraged to attend other fun events, such as the opportunity to be given a 'make-over' by their children.
- Children are keen to do well and their behaviour is good. They are interested in their learning. They learn and play well with their peers and enjoy strong relationships with adults.
- Children make good progress throughout the early years. Since the school opened, every child who has finished the early years has attained a good level of development. Many have exceeded expectations. As a result, the overwhelming majority make at least good progress.
- Teachers ensure that children who join the school with skills that are typically low for their age receive close support. As a result, these children make quick progress and catch up with other children nationally.
- All safeguarding and welfare requirements are met.

School details

Unique reference number	139831
DfE registration number	352/6008
Inspection number	10038934

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	2 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	36
Number of part-time pupils	3
Proprietor	Kingdom Trust
Chair	Mr Tabeth
Headteacher	Irene Tabeth
Annual fees (day pupils)	£3,600
Telephone number	0161 6372944
Website	www.solacademy.org.uk
Email address	admin@solacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	21–23 October 2014

Information about this school

- Sol Christian Academy opened in 2013. The school is located near to the centre of Manchester. At its first inspection, in October 2014, the school was judged to require improvement.
- Most pupils are from homes of parents of the Christian faith. However, an increasing proportion of pupils are from homes of faiths other than Christianity. The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is slightly above the national average.
- The school currently has no pupils in the sixth form. This has been the case for a number of years.

- The school is registered for up to 50 pupils. There are currently 36 pupils on roll. The number of pupils has increased significantly during the current academic year.
- The headteacher and chair of the trust board form the senior leadership team. Both leaders currently teach full-time at the school.
- The school follows the ACE curriculum. This is an individualised Bible-based curriculum. Pupils follow this curriculum each morning. They work at their own pace and level in six core subjects. In the afternoon, pupils are taught other subjects and participate in enrichment activities.
- Pupils work towards achieving the International Certificate of Christian Education (ICCE) qualification. Pupils can also choose to work towards the completion of different GCSE qualifications in key stage 4.
- The school's aim is to provide 'excellent individualised Christian education to children'. The school is run on the principles of cooperation, trust and commitment.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector toured the school site, accompanied by the chair of the trust board.
- The inspector observed teaching and learning across the school. He observed teaching of the ACE curriculum and other subjects.
- He observed pupils' conduct in lessons and at other times of the school day.
- The inspector held meetings with the headteacher and the chair of the trust board. He spoke to two other members of staff. He met the member of the trust board who is responsible for safeguarding. He also met formally with two groups of pupils and spoke to others at other times during the school day.
- The inspector scrutinised a sample of pupils' work from both the primary and secondary phases.
- The inspector reviewed documents to confirm compliance with the independent school standards and provide other inspection evidence.
- The inspector spoke in depth with four parents. He also spoke informally with others.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's online Parent View survey. There were also no responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. The inspector took account of six responses to the school's own pupil survey.

Inspection team

Will Smith, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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