

# Sol Christian Academy

115 Fairfield Street, Piccadilly, Greater Manchester M12 6EL

## Inspection dates

12–14 June 2019

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

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The proprietor, headteacher and the chair of the governing body have worked tirelessly to address the areas for improvement identified during the previous inspection. As a result, all aspects of provision, including teaching and learning, and pupils' achievement, are now good.
- The proprietor and governors make sure that stringent safeguarding procedures are in place and adhered to and ensure that all the independent school standards are met.
- Pupils attain highly, some make outstanding progress in their Packets of Accelerated Christian Learning (PACEs) in subjects including English, mathematics, science, bible studies and social studies.
- The headteacher, who is also the early years leader, leads by example and is well respected by staff. Some aspects of leadership are still developing, for example, performance management, which lacks precision. The advice given to teachers on how to improve their practice is not sharply focused.
- Teachers have exceptionally high expectations of pupils. Effective support is available to ensure that pupils meet, and exceed, their individual PACE targets. Pupils' reading skills are strong. Opportunities for them to read for pleasure are somewhat limited.
- Pupils' behaviour is usually exemplary, particularly when they are completing their PACEs. Pupils are highly disciplined and determined to succeed. Attendance is well above average.
- All children make at least good progress in the early years. Almost all attained a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year in 2018. However, outdoor learning and play areas are limited and lack stimulation.
- Parents and carers are highly complimentary about all aspects of the school. Typically, they commented that, 'Our children are safe and valued and are making good progress in life.'
- Senior leaders' work to enhance pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is very effective.

### 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 the quality of leadership and management by:
  - sharpening procedures for assessing teachers' and teaching assistants' performance
  - providing clear advice to teachers on how to improve their practice.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning provision by:
  - providing more opportunities for pupils to read for pleasure and extend their knowledge of the work of different authors.
- Improve the quality of early years provision by:
  - ensuring that the outdoor learning and play areas are stimulating and more effective in promoting children's learning.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- The headteacher and the chair of the governing body have been steadfast in their determination to improve the school from requiring improvement to good. With the full support of the reinvigorated governing body and staff, leaders have resolved most of the areas for improvement identified at the time of the previous inspection. Most notably, leaders have improved the quality of teaching, pupils' achievement and broadened the curriculum.
- The proprietor and governors have a precise understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Together with the headteacher, they ensure that stringent safeguarding procedures are in place and that all the independent school standards are met.
- Leaders have strengthened teaching, employing highly effective English and mathematics teachers. Staff have successfully developed pupils' fluency in writing, a weak area at the time of the previous inspection. They now provide support to deepen pupils' mathematical understanding effectively. All staff are set targets as part of their performance management. However, these targets are very general and do not hold staff closely enough to account for the quality of pupils' learning. In addition, advice given to teachers on how they can improve their practice is somewhat limited.
- Staff speak very highly of the school. All know exactly what the school is aiming to achieve, and all subscribe to the school's Christian values and ethos. New staff say that induction procedures are thorough, especially in relation to safeguarding. All staff are appreciative of professional development and training, particularly in relation to meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This is especially pertinent, given the increase in the number of pupils admitted to the school with complex learning difficulties.
- Leaders have revised the curriculum, allowing more time for pupils to engage in activities which enable them to work in partnership with their peers. Such activities complement pupils' PACE work, particularly in English, where pupils have more time to write discursively on a wide range of topics. Studying other subjects, such as geography, history, music and philosophy, broaden pupils' knowledge and understanding of the wider world. Pupils regularly excel in these subjects. While most pupils have strong reading skills, few opportunities are available for them to read for pleasure and develop their appreciation of the work of different authors.
- Leaders' promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and appreciation of British values is good. Pupils are aware of cultural diversity. They celebrate various customs and religious traditions, including Chinese New Year and Eid. In addition, pupils have a full appreciation of the principles and values of Christianity, upon which their learning and personal development are built.
- Pupils have a much-improved awareness of the major world faiths, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism and Islam. They have visited various places of worship and have a strong empathy with those less fortunate than themselves. Pupils raise money for various good causes and are passionate about protecting the environment.

- Pupils enjoy visiting local places of interest, including the Manchester Science Museum and the Jewish Museum, and receive music tuition to develop their keyboard and ukulele-playing skills. Pupils enjoy the arts, music, dance and singing, all of which help to develop their understanding of British values. The school has an active pupil council, members of which are keen to put democratic principles into practice. Council members canvas their peers' views on matters relating to end-of-term outings and charitable activities.
- Without exception, parents and carers who spoke with the inspector and those who submitted text messages during the inspection, praised the school highly. All are of the view that their children are safe, happy at school and making good progress. Typically, parents commented that, 'our children come home with increasing enthusiasm and determination and engage us in their homework activities', '...pupils' behaviour and understanding of life in modern Britain is excellent' and 'We always get constructive feedback during parents' evenings.'
- The school works closely with local grammar schools. This is to fully understand entry requirements and to support Year 6 pupils' smooth transition to Year 7. In addition, the school has links to Manchester City Council, mainly for training purposes. To ensure that the assessments of pupils' and children's work are accurate, the school seeks advice from the accrediting body for PACEs and the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) curriculum.

## **Governance**

- Governors know the school well. The chair of the governing body, previously a teacher at the school, is based in the school. He is acutely aware of, and has been responsible for spearheading, the school's recent developments. All governors know there is more work to be done, particularly in relation to managing staff performance.
- Governors meet regularly with the headteacher. They know the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement are good, because they are regularly in school, talking with staff and pupils and looking at work in pupils' study files and books.
- Governors ensure that the school is financially buoyant. They are prudent with the school's tight budget, which first and foremost focuses on ensuring that pupils have access to textbooks and PACE unit workbooks. Governors have worked with the headteacher to improve the school's limited early years outdoor learning and play areas, which they are committed to revitalising further.
- Governors are proud of the school's academic success and the ever-increasing numbers of pupils gaining entry to local grammar schools. They are aware of the changing nature of the school and ensure that resources are available to meet the needs of pupils with education health and care (EHC) plans.
- Governors are trained well. Most are from academic backgrounds and have a deep understanding of both education and community matters. They are kept abreast of developments in education and take advantage of training offered through the local authority, voluntary and community sector and the church.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There is a strong culture of

safeguarding in the school and staff are vigilant. The school has a current safeguarding policy available on its website, which has been developed with close reference to the latest government guidelines on keeping children safe in education.

- All staff sign declarations to say that they have read the school's safeguarding policy and associated policies. Staff, the proprietor and governors have had 'Prevent' duty training, which is part of the government's agenda for tackling radicalisation and extremism.
- The school leaves nothing to chance when it comes to safeguarding. Staff know exactly what to do if they have a concern about a pupil's safety and/or welfare.
- The school's designated safeguarding leaders, as well as the safeguarding governor, are trained well and conversant with the latest developments relating to children's safety and welfare.
- All appropriate checks are made on staff to ascertain their suitability to work with children. Risk assessments are regularly carried out to make sure that school premises are safe and secure. In addition, school trips and educational visits are risk-assessed, helping to ensure pupils' safety.

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

**Good**

- Teachers are trained to a high standard and have good, respectful relationships with pupils. Teachers encourage pupils to be independent learners, expecting them to take the lead in their learning and challenge themselves with difficult PACE units.
- Teachers have exceptionally high expectations of pupils and encourage them to be curious. As a result, pupils enjoy discovering new things and make strong progress in a range of subjects, including those which are not part of the PACE curriculum, such as history, philosophy, music and information and communication technology (ICT).
- Pupils have excellent word-processing skills, as shown in their well-informed and thoughtfully produced work on renowned anti-slavery campaigners, the lives of historical political figures and the future of Britain after Brexit. Pupils benefit from good tuition in ICT, which has developed their skills well, helping them to produce interesting presentations, which are delivered to their peers in class and during assemblies.
- Teachers have a good knowledge of pupils' individual learning needs. They are conversant with each pupil's targets, as detailed in their EHC plans, as well as pupils' PACE performance scores. Support is available for all pupils, including those with SEND and the most able.
- Mathematics teaching is strong. This was exemplified during the inspection, when teachers supported pupils well, allowing them to practise and refine the skills they needed to complete the more challenging mathematics PACE units. Pupils reported that they find such sessions invaluable, giving them the confidence to attempt the most difficult PACE units in areas such as range, mode and median, dividing and multiplying mixed fractions, and algebra.
- Good teaching and allowing more time in the curriculum for English, in addition to English language and literature PACEs, is having a big impact on broadening pupils' appreciation of literature. Some pupils can name and have read various Shakespeare plays, including Romeo and Juliet and Anthony and Cleopatra. However, pupils' knowledge of the rich

cannon of English literature and world-renowned authors is somewhat limited, as is their appreciation of poetry and other forms of writing.

- Pupils enjoy writing. This was evident in a key stage 3 class, where pupils learned about the characteristics and conventions used in newspapers. Pupils enjoyed dissecting various newspaper articles. The teacher's strong subject knowledge ensured that pupils soon familiarised themselves with the essential ingredients of the genre, including using homophones to create word plays and delving into readers' knowledge of popular culture to create titles for articles such as, '...top of the flops'.
- Science teaching and additional support for pupils in this subject are strong. Current and past pupils who spoke with the inspector were eager to share their knowledge and understanding of general science. The workbooks of pupils in key stages 1 and 2 and their extended projects show pupils' good understanding of plant and animal classifications, astronomy and concepts such as resistance, pressure and force.
- Almost all pupils who completed the inspection survey said that teachers help them to do their best in every lesson. They also indicated that work is usually challenging, and teachers make sure that everyone understands what they are learning in most lessons.
- Teachers encourage pupils to follow their aspirations and develop their individual skills and talents, which they do in drama, art and singing. Most pupils access one-to-one music tuition to develop their keyboard skills. In addition, they enhance their knowledge of chords and strumming patterns while playing the ukulele.
- Teachers adhere to the school's feedback and assessment policy. Inspection evidence indicates that pupils take note of such advice, which they said helps to improve their learning.

## 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 self-disciplined. They assess their own progress before engaging in formal end-of-unit assessments. Such self-discipline prepares pupils well for their next stage of learning after leaving the school, as well as for adult life.
- Pupils are very positive about the school, which both challenges and supports them in equal measure. Among pupils' comments were, 'Since the school is small, you get more help if you need it, if you don't get help you rush your work and make mistakes' and 'I feel better here because everyone looks out for you. You are independent and can work at your own pace...I always challenge myself.'
- Pupils are encouraged to eat healthily and engage in regular exercise. All pupils have packed lunches. When and if lunchboxes contain unhealthy foods, the school works with parents and gives advice on healthy options. Through the personal, health, social and citizenship aspects of the curriculum, pupils learn about nutrition, as well as the harmful effects of tobacco, alcohol and illegal drugs.
- Pupils relish break and lunchtimes, where they use the school's large hall to engage in physical activities and play team games, including basketball, football and badminton. Pupils have access to the local park, where they play tennis. In addition, pupils access

Manchester City Football Club's facilities, where they learn ball control, tackling and other football-related skills.

- Pupils of all ages have a good understanding of internet safety. When asked about using computers responsibly pupils said, 'When you are on the computer, always have an adult supervising you', 'Never give out your personal details', 'Use a nick-name' and 'Look at the website's https, if it doesn't have a lock on it, it's not safe.'
- Mobile phones are not allowed in school. However, because some pupils walk to school, mobile phones are allowed. When pupils arrive at the school, they inform their parents. Thereafter, mobile phones are given to teachers to be looked after for the day.
- Pupils indicate that the CCTV cameras make them feel safe. In addition, they stated, 'We have telephones around the school, all the phones ring when someone presses the outside door buzzer.' Pupils also feel safe because 'there are lots of staff around the school'. Pupils are confident to report concerns to any member of staff, secure in the knowledge that any such concerns will be dealt with swiftly.
- External careers advice and guidance is improving. As a result, most pupils have clear ideas about future occupations and understand that there are different education, employment and training options available to them after they leave school.

## **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- There are very few incidents in the school's behaviour log. This is because pupils' behaviour is usually impeccable. All incidents recorded are for minor infringements of the school rules and are mainly linked to talking in class or not paying attention to teachers.
- Pupils, including those in key stage 1, are very mature and highly disciplined. They take responsibility for their own learning when engaged in activities linked to their PACE. This requires them to maintain focus and sustain concentration.
- Pupils have very different skills and abilities; some have been out of education for extended periods, others have been in trouble in previous schools for poor behaviour. However, all at Sol Academy are highly respectful to adults and each other. Not all pupils are of the Christian faith, a small proportion are Muslim, others have no faith. However, all pupils adhere to the Christian values of the school.
- Pupils are adamant that there is no bullying in school. They know what racism is and say it never happens in school because, 'We are all of the same race.' Pupils understand that homophobic bullying can happen when someone is treated unfairly because they are in a same-sex relationship. Pupils stated, 'Whoever they are we, would treat people the same because that's what Christians do.'
- Pupils praise each other's achievements. This was evident during a celebration assembly, when pupils received merits and awards in recognition of their sterling work and good efforts during the week. During the assembly, pupils gave a presentation on British values, which was warmly received by their peers.
- Parents are positive about pupils' behaviour, describing the school as purposeful and disciplined. Teachers are equality positive about behaviour, indicating that the school encourages calm and orderly conduct and is aspirational for all pupils.

- School records indicate that pupils' attendance is currently very high. This includes pupils who previously attended school infrequently.

## Outcomes for pupils

**Good**

- Pupils make good progress from their different starting points in a range of subjects, including reading, writing, mathematics and science. Some pupils start at the school having spent significant periods out of education. However, pupils soon settle into school life and make the same good progress as their peers.
- Senior leaders have revised procedures for assessing pupils' skills and abilities on entry to the school. Effective systems are in place for monitoring pupils' progress throughout the year. All PACEs, including those for English, mathematics, social studies, bible studies and science, contain end-of-unit assessments. These are initially carried out informally by pupils, before formal assessments take place.
- The school's own data indicates that most pupils score between 85% and 95% in their assessments, some routinely score 100%. There are no significant differences between the performance of boys and girls in any subject. A small number of pupils took the Year 2 and Year 6 statutory attainment tests in 2018, and all of them attained highly.
- Highly effective one-to-one and small-group support is available for pupils. The school has an excellent track record in supporting pupils wishing to take the entrance examinations at the end of key stage 2 for entry to local grammar schools. School records indicate that all such pupils have been successful and have entered the school of their choice. Previous pupils who met with the inspector indicated that they were well supported for their learning in key stage 3, particularly in mathematics, English and science.
- Pupils make good progress in science and regularly apply their scientific knowledge and understanding to practical activities. Science PACE booklets include many practical activities, which pupils are expected to complete at home. Pupils who met with the inspector said that they enjoyed science. Their workbooks and extended homework projects contain examples of experiments including testing water pressure and creating and storing kinetic energy.
- Pupils enjoy reading and some are highly accomplished fluent readers. Those who read for the inspector, did so with good intonation and confidence. Younger pupils are especially good in using different voices and emphasis to bring their stories to life. However, pupils' knowledge of different authors and writing styles is limited. While English PACEs contain extracts from various books and require strong reading skills, few opportunities are available for pupils to read for pleasure.
- Pupils make strong progress in mathematics, as shown by diligently and neatly completed units in their PACE workbooks. Pupils are highly disciplined and challenge themselves with difficult calculation and problem-solving activities. Typically, pupils seek support only when they get stuck. Thereafter, they participate in one-to-one mathematics tuition sessions. Inspection evidence indicates that such sessions are highly effective, supporting pupils' good, and sometimes outstanding, progress in mathematics.
- Pupils' progress in history and philosophy are strong. Evidence of this is in pupils' folders and workbooks, which contain well-written and painstakingly researched work on topical issues, such as Brexit, including balanced arguments for and against leaving the European



Union. Pupils' work on British values and political institutions is good, indicating their substantial appreciation of democracy and the rule of law.

- Pupils with SEND make good progress, because they are well looked after by caring staff, who are trained well to meet pupils' special educational needs. The headteacher ensures that teachers are conversant with pupils' targets, as included in pupils' EHC plans. This is evident in both pupils' behaviour and progress. For example, SEND pupils concentrate for increasingly long periods in class. PACE work in English shows that pupils' letter formulation, grammar, punctuation and spelling improve with each unit of work.
- Pupils with little or no English settle into the school quickly. This is because of the care and attention given to them by adults and the thoughtfulness of their peers. For example, in mathematics, skilled teachers write down calculation and problem-solving activities which pupils understand and can follow. Software is available which translates English into Arabic and vice versa. English-speaking pupils play counting and memory games with their non-English speaking peers, whom they enthusiastically welcome into the school.

### Early years provision

**Good**

- Nearly all aspects of the early years provision are good. Staff have a good understanding of the education, welfare and personal development requirements of children in the early years and a full appreciation of how young children learn. Staff have very strong bonds with children and very high expectations in relation to what children can achieve.
- Children enter the Nursery and Reception classes with different skills and abilities in the various areas of learning. However, most make exceptionally strong progress. At the end of the Reception Year in 2018, almost all children attained a good level of development. Currently, children are making strong progress, particularly in reading, writing, speaking and listening.
- Workbooks indicate that children make strong progress, as shown by their well-developed mark-making and writing skills and their understanding of mathematics. Older and the most able children write a range of words, including 'anchor', 'apple', 'enter' and 'juice', and put words into simple sentences such as 'Ray and George kept a sharp lookout'. Older children readily count to 10, some count in twos while others count backwards from 10.
- Children with SEND make good progress. They are encouraged to fully participate in learning and are as likely to respond to questions as their peers. Children with little or no English are well supported. As a result, they quickly develop strong speaking and listening skills, make good progress and soon catch up with their peers.
- The quality of teaching is good. This was evident as children developed their number skills. All children relished the opportunity to stand up and count to 100, with actions and without shouting, in tune with the number song. Thereafter, the teacher carefully checked children's mathematical understanding. Almost all children wanted to share their learning. Most children correctly calculate the following:  $12+5$ ,  $7+9$  and  $3+7$ , while those finding mathematics more difficult confidently calculated sums including  $5+5$ . Staff encouraged children to work out 'sums' independently, but were at hand to provide help when it was needed.
- Children behave well and follow instructions closely. They are familiar with the daily

phonics routine and like to demonstrate their good knowledge of letters and sound. This was evident as Nursery class children correctly identified the short and long sounds associated with the letter 'a', which they incorporated into different words, before writing letters and words neatly on the board.

- Some children, including those under four years old, sustain their engagement and concentration for extended periods. This is evident during reading, as the most able children read clearly and accurately. Children use their knowledge of letter sounds, and their good comprehension skills, to support their understanding and enjoyment of the written word.
- Children are very sociable and enjoy sharing their ideas during snack time. They are well-mannered and have good dining etiquette. Many have an excellent command of the English language and communicate their views clearly and listen to their peers respectfully.
- Children are confident, curious and cooperative learners. They enjoy finding out new things with their friends and solving problems. This was evident as children mixed various colours to paint tyres in the outdoor learning and playing area. Children demonstrated their good knowledge of colours, explaining that green and yellow can be mixed together to make brown.
- Children enjoy exploring the properties of water, engaging in sand-play and construction activities and dressing up for role play. Children use rulers to measure objects and help with their counting and enhancing their gross motor skills on the rope bridge and balancing bars. In such activities, children demonstrate the characteristics of effective learning. However, the outdoor learning and play area contains limited resources and is not as stimulating as it could be. In addition, the limited activities available are not closely linked to the different areas of learning.
- Workbooks indicate that staff continually check on children's progress and their skills are assessed at regular intervals. Workbooks also reveal all children make at least good progress over time. Children are set targets. For younger children, these are linked to simple mark-making and recognition of numbers. Older children's targets are linked to punctuation, writing in sentences and calculating using different operations. Parents are encouraged to share details of their children's learning and development at home.
- Parents are highly positive about all aspects of the early years provision. Those who spoke with the inspector and submitted text messages, typically commented, 'My children call the school their second home...they make very good progress' and 'I have recommended the school to a number of parents, my child is doing exceptionally well.'
- Staff in the early years adhere to the same effective safeguarding procedures in operation in key stages 1 to 3.

## School details

Unique reference number	139831
DfE registration number	352/6008
Inspection number	10092286

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	46
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Kingdom Trust
Chair	Elvis Tabeth
Headteacher	Irene Tabeth
Annual fees (day pupils)	£3,600
Telephone number	0161 637 2944
Website	<a href="http://www.solacademy.org.uk">www.solacademy.org.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:admin@solacademy.org.uk">admin@solacademy.org.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	16–18 January 2018

## Information about this school

- Sol Christian Academy aim is to provide 'excellent individualised Christian education to children'. The school is run on the principles of cooperation, trust and commitment. The school opened in 2013 and is located near to the centre of Manchester.
- 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 with SEND is slightly above the national average, as is the proportion with EHC plans. A small proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language.

- All pupils are from minority ethnic groups, the vast majority are of either African or of African-Caribbean heritage. At the time of the inspection, there were no key stage 4 pupils or post-16 students on roll. The school is registered for up to 50 pupils. There are currently 46 pupils on roll.
- Children in the Reception class attend school full-time. Those in the Nursery class attend school on a full- or part-time basis.
- The headteacher is also the early years leader and the coordinator of the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school follows the ACE curriculum. This is an individualised Bible-based curriculum. Pupils work at their own pace and level in six core subjects. In addition, pupils are taught other subjects, including music, art, history, philosophy and French, and participate in enrichment and various physical activities.
- Since the previous inspection, the curriculum has broadened, and the school day has been restructured to allow pupils to study a wider variety of subjects. Two additional teachers have been recruited, who are mathematics and English specialists. A new teaching assistant has been appointed, who works in the early years.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed learning in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. Pupils' work was scrutinised during observations and separately.
- Meetings were held with the chair of the governing body and the headteacher throughout the course of the inspection. The inspector met with a group of pupils and held informal discussions with pupils throughout the course of the inspection. The inspector also listened to key stages 1, 2 and 3 pupils read and scrutinised the responses of 13 pupils to the inspection questionnaire.
- The inspector took account of five staff responses to the questionnaire completed during the inspection. The inspector read seven text messages submitted by parents and held one-to-one meetings with six parents. The inspector also held a telephone conversation with a governor. There were too few responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, to be considered.
- The inspector examined a range of documentary evidence. This included pupils' EHC plans, checks on the quality of teaching and teachers' performance, and safeguarding documentation, including risk assessments. In addition, the inspector scrutinised the school's development plans and reviews of its own performance.
- The inspector checked various records of pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour and the school's records and checks on the suitability of staff to work with children.

## Inspection team

Lenford White, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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