

Davenant Foundation School

Chester Road
Loughton
Essex
IG10 2LD

Diocese: Chelmsford

Local authority: Essex
Date of inspection: 20th March 2012
Date of last inspection: November 2002
School's unique reference number: 136625
Headteacher: Mr Chris Seward
Inspector's name and number: Mr Andrew Scott 744

School context

Davenant Foundation School was founded in the 17th century as a Christian school. Today it is an ecumenical co-educational Christian academy, independent of any denomination. The school was formerly Voluntary Aided. It re-opened as an academy with a religious character in April 2011. It is situated in an urban setting on the outer fringes of London. There are 1,160 pupils (aged 11-18) on roll. Applications to the school are considered on the basis of parental commitment to the Christian or Jewish faith, as evidenced by attendance at a place of worship over the last seven years. The overwhelming majority of pupils are from a broad range of Christian backgrounds, and there are also a small number of Jewish pupils. Roman Catholicism is the largest single denomination. Over a quarter of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, and the majority of these are of African Caribbean heritage.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Davenant Foundation School as an ecumenical Christian school are outstanding

The school proudly asserts its Christian identity, which is seen by pupils, staff, governors and parents as the basis for its excellence. As one parent put it, 'The school's Christian ethos makes it what it is'. Christian beliefs, values and principles are integral to all aspects of the life and work of the school, and it is very clear and self-confident in its Christian heritage and in its present day Christian mission.

Established strengths

- The Christian beliefs, values and principles that are securely embedded in all aspects of the life and work of the school.
- The way these beliefs, values and principles are talked about, shared and lived out by all members of the school community.
- The outstanding quality of leadership in providing the vision and strategic and operational management necessary to maintain and develop the distinctiveness of the school as an ecumenical Christian school.

Focus for development

- Providing further opportunities for children to develop understanding of people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds by engaging with a contrasting school in the UK.
- Ensuring the Thought for the Day and accompanying prayer are used effectively by all form tutors.

The school, through its distinctive Christian character, is outstanding at meeting the needs of all learners

This is an excellent school in terms of the personal development of the pupils, the quality of relationships that exist within the school community and the academic standards that are achieved. Pupils are happy, outgoing and confident; they feel safe, secure, understood and supported; they are very orderly and well behaved with negligible incidents of bullying or racism; and they are highly motivated with very positive attitudes. They learn extremely effectively and academic results are excellent. Pupils, staff, governors and parents are all clear that the reason for the school's great success is that Christian beliefs, values and principles lie at its heart and are securely embedded in all aspects of its life and work. The school is fundamentally a Christian community catering for children and young people from a wide variety of Christian family backgrounds. The few Jewish pupils who attend are fully aware of its Christian nature and are fully integrated, as are many pupils with disabilities. A notable feature is the way that pupils and staff talk confidently and comfortably about their own religious beliefs. One parent said, 'This is a school where it is not uncool to go to church'. There is a refreshing openness and honesty in the quality of relationships. Pupils and staff are very much aware of each others' personal faith standpoints and this extends to governors and parents. The school is also mindful of the fact that during their teenage years,

many young people go through periods of doubt and possible rejection of religion. The school is sensitive to this issue and in the 'good' and 'outstanding' Religious Education (RE) lessons observed, questioning of this nature was fully accepted. RE makes an important contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. The RE curriculum is described by the school as 'unashamedly Christian in focus' yet it also ensures that pupils learn about other major world religions, developing understanding of and respect for adherents to other faiths. In addition to RE, the school is clear about the contribution of the creative arts, personal and citizenship education, assemblies and collective worship, charity work and the activities of the Christian Union to SMSC development. Every area of the curriculum has an important part to play with regard to SMSC development, but the school is less secure in its understanding of how other subjects can contribute. The school is supported in its Christian mission by the work of two highly committed and effective pastors attached to a local church. The thriving Christian Union, the newly formed girls' Bible reading group and the Mission Week activities are supported by the pastors who are a regular and visible presence around the school. They also lead assemblies. The headteacher describes the school as 'outward facing', with students actively engaged in a variety of activities at both local level (e.g. charity work, placements in primary schools and parties for senior citizens) and global level (e.g. school links and international programmes in Europe, India, South Africa and Iraq). These activities make a positive contribution to community cohesion and are very much seen as practical expressions of the school's Christian vision. While the school has formed successful and reciprocal partnerships with several schools abroad, it has not done the same with a school of contrasting character in the UK. The one area where the school's Christian identity is not obvious is in the visual environment, which lacks any Christian symbols or artefacts.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Assemblies and collective worship play a very important part in the life of the school. These occasions are used to make explicit the Christian beliefs, values and principles upon which the school was founded and which it continues to promote vigorously. The school takes collective worship seriously. It is well planned and well resourced. All pupils attend assemblies twice a week and on these occasions opportunities for pupils to pray are always provided. Every tutor group has responsibility for leading one assembly during the year, and in the great majority of instances, all pupils participate. On Mondays and Fridays there are visiting speakers, including representatives of local churches and a Jewish rabbi. Every term special services are held which enable the pupils to experience forms of worship and liturgy of a traditional Christian nature, including denominational worship. A service is held in the local Roman Catholic church for pupils and parents joining the school. There are also services for leavers and for Christmas, Easter and Ash Wednesday. The Ash Wednesday service incorporates a Eucharist led by the local Anglican Rector. On the weekdays when pupils do not attend assemblies, their entitlement to daily collective worship is met through the Thought for the Day and accompanying prayer. A great deal of work goes into the planning of the Thought for the Day, and in many tutor groups it is used successfully with pupils reading out the thought and prayer to the rest of the class. Some of the thoughts clearly make a deep impact on the pupils and several parents recalled occasions when their children wanted to discuss the daily thought with them. It was also clear that not all form tutors use the Thought for the Day as intended. One of the ways in which the school monitors the effectiveness of collective worship is through pupil surveys. A recent questionnaire indicates that one third of pupils doubt the effectiveness of Thought for the Day, saying that it fails to set a positive tone and that it does not help them reflect on spiritual and moral issues. On a more positive note, the same survey indicates that at least 80% of pupils see assemblies and collective worship as well planned and delivered and as promoting a positive Christian ethos. The Key Stage 3 assembly/act of collective worship that was observed was confidently led by a Year 8 tutor group, and the pupils present were very well behaved, respectful and attentive throughout.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as an ecumenical Christian school is outstanding

The school's distinctive Christian character is directly attributable to the outstanding leadership and vision provided by the headteacher, the rest of the leadership team, the governing body and the member of staff who leads on RE and collective worship. All members of the school leadership team are committed Christians, as are members of the governing body. This gives the school a unity of purpose. The leadership group is proud of the school's Christian heritage and is continuing to build on the school's many successes. There is general agreement among all members of the school community that the school asserts its Christian character more confidently now than was the case a few years ago. As one parent explained, 'The school now celebrates its Christianness (sic) in a way it did not

used to'. The school's mission statement, website and key documents make it abundantly clear that this is a school with a distinctive Christian identity. As the introduction to the school development plan states, 'First and foremost we are a Christian school. In a time of continued change and development, the teachings of our faith remain constant'. One of the SDP's stated objectives for 2010-2014 is, 'To ensure all students ... recognise our distinctive Christian ethos within the context of a modern, multi-faith society'. Pupils, in common with parents and other members of the school community, speak enthusiastically and proudly about the school's Christian ethos and recognise how activities in which they are involved at local levels and further afield are enabling them to engage with a modern, multi-faith society. Parents feel that a genuine partnership exists between them and the school. They say that communication with the school is good and they find the school highly supportive. They value the regular prayer letters and the twice termly evening prayer meetings held with members of staff.

SIAS report March 2012, Davenant Foundation School, Loughton IG10 2LD