

Unique mix of denominations

ONE unique thing about St Francis Catholic and C of E Academy is its commitment to share both Catholic and Anglican understandings of Christianity.

The principal and the vice principal have a good understanding of the mission of the school and recognise its historic foundation.

They ensure that the religious character of the school is preserved through its daily worship and curriculum.

The academy's Christian distinctiveness group includes children, a Catholic priest and two Church of England vicars, and it meets regularly to work out how to weave Christian values into all aspects of school life.

The group recently met with pupils on the school's values



Children in the Early Years class at St Francis C of E Academy

council. They are ambassadors for the school's values of Love, Courage and Friendship, and are designing a 'spiritual garden' in school which will hopefully be ready for Easter.

This might include an area to pray, specific plants and wind chimes, and could be used by those of all faiths and none.

The academy was also recently praised for its work with children in the Early Years.

"That success is down to the skills of our teachers and assistants, who are knowledgeable, caring and provide a huge variety of activities," said its principal Fiona Perkins.

Forging better links with church

ST COLUMBA C of E academy was the first academy to be sponsored by our trust back in 2012.

It is now experiencing positive changes, with a fresh board of governors, growing links to its local church and ambitious targets for attendance, English and maths.

Community worker Sally Dewberry has helped to create dedicated prayer areas to build stronger links between the academy and St Columba Church.

The peaceful room features four prayer spaces, encouraging children to write a pleasant note to someone, give thanks, say sorry and place lit candles on a map to offer thoughts to places



Volunteers read with children at St Columba C of E Academy in Fareham

in difficulty.

The church also runs a regular Pray Bake Read project allowing worshippers to pray for and bake cakes for school staff.

The academy launched a creative drive to increase attendance in September, which includes monthly rewards.

Attendance has already improved. Its Maths Mastery initiative helps children to apply maths concepts in greater depth.

It also encourages children to read more out of school hours, hosting Hampshire Library Services' summer reading challenge.

and was found to have improved to become 'good' in all areas.

St Francis Catholic and C of E Primary Academy in Ventnor became an academy in July 2017, after its predecessor school was also found to be inadequate. The trust has already stabilised leadership, and significant improvements have been made in all key areas.

And St Columba C of E Academy in Fareham has recently benefited from a new skills-based governing body, carefully chosen by the trust to navigate the academy through a period of big change and development.

Fiona Perkins, principal at St Francis, said: "The support from the trust is very good. We share the trust's drive, determination, and ambition, and we have good communication to ensure that we succeed together. The sense of a developing family of schools within the trust is really valuable.

'We share the trust's drive, determination and ambition'

"We can work together on employing people in non-teaching pastoral roles or sharing assessment systems across the schools.

"Our children are very ambitious – we did a recent survey and they said they wanted to be biologists, teachers, scientists, farmers and so on. We need to equip them to do that, by providing the right curriculum. We can be more creative and innovative about what we teach, and if we provide greater flexibility, standards will rise too."

Like the majority of C of E schools in our diocese, the trust doesn't select pupils on the basis of faith



Rosanna Spurr, 10, Poppy Fuller, 11, and Erin Street, 10, at St Blasius Academy

– children of all faiths and none are welcome and attend. The academies exist to serve their local communities, rather than to attract Christian children from a wider area, thus living the mission of social transformation.

The trust is led by a board of directors with a wealth of experience in education, faith, HR and governance. Chief executive officer Amanda Johnston has a 16-year track record in primary education, including headteacher positions in both Portsmouth and Winchester dioceses.



Amanda Johnston

The trust is unique in operating across two dioceses, which Amanda Johnston believes is hugely beneficial. "We are large enough to provide economies of scale, but small enough to know our academies and their staff and children well," she said. "We provide localised and bespoke school improvement and school-to-school support that benefits the whole community."

Amanda leads on strategy and co-ordinates training and development across the trust family. The trust is currently working to provide high quality middle-leadership training,

recognising the desire to 'grow our own' leaders for the future. She also facilitates principals and governing bodies from our academies to share best practice with each other and with the diocesan church school family.

There are Church of England academies in our diocese that are run by other sponsors – for instance, Charter Academy in Portsmouth is run by Ark Schools, while Hook-with-Warsash C of E Academy became a 'stand-alone' academy at a time when schools deemed 'outstanding' were allowed to convert in this way.

Although they are not currently part of P&WDAT, they still benefit from being part of our church school family.

The trust would be delighted to hear from any church or community school that would like to discuss conversion to academy status, and individuals who are passionate about nurturing children in education and inspiring them to achieve.

For more information, visit the website at www.pdwat.org or contact Amanda on 023-9289 9682 or amanda.johnston@portsmouth.anglican.org