

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Archbishop Blanch Church of England Voluntary Aided High School

Mount Vernon Rd
Liverpool
L7 3EA

Diocese: Liverpool

Local authority: Liverpool

Dates of inspection: 21st – 22nd April 2008

Date of last inspection: 15th – 17th November 2004

School's unique reference number: 104705

Headteacher: Miss Jane Griffiths

Inspector's name and number: The Revd Canon Dr Peter Shepherd (395)

School context

This medium sized 11 – 18 girls' school mainly takes pupils from south and central Liverpool. Boys are admitted to the sixth form for courses in partnership with four other schools. Most pupils are white British, but a significant minority are of Asian Heritage. The proportion of pupils in receipt of free school meals or with Special Educational Needs is below the national average. The headteacher took up post in September 2007.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Archbishop Blanch as a Church of England school are outstanding

The school's mission is clearly articulated and provides both the direction and impetus for the school's distinctive character. This impacts strongly on the nurture and development of well rounded citizens, encouraged to take their faith commitment seriously. The school is a beacon of Christian service in its locality. Pupils speak highly of the dedication of their teachers and of the opportunities they are given to grow as young people of faith, within a multi-Faith community.

Established strengths

- High quality pastoral care, including excellent use of chaplaincy personnel.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.
- The overall quality of teaching in religious education.
- The quality of school leadership.

Focus for development

- Develop more formal strategies for monitoring and evaluating the nature and impact of the Christian distinctiveness of the school.
- Develop more formal strategies for monitoring and evaluating the impact of worship on pupils.
- Securely embed assessment policies across the RE Department.
- Review the Key Stage 3 RE Syllabus.

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

The school takes its distinctive Christian character very seriously. At the same time it also values the cultural and religious diversity represented by a significant minority of the pupil population. The life of the school is grounded in Christian values, and these are reflected both in the quality of internal relationships and in the school's active commitment to those in need. Pupils are well taught the centrality of forgiveness and reconciliation. Pupils and parents are very happy with the quality of education and care offered by the school. Bullying is rare and, when it occurs, is dealt with swiftly and successfully. Extracurricular opportunities are extensive and greatly valued. Levels of personal development are high and achievement is

celebrated and rewarded. Pupils work hard, are polite, friendly and behave well. They speak positively of the friendliness and approachability of staff, and of how much they enjoy school. Pupils are made to feel safe and secure in a school which values all its members and has clear expectations for the part they all need to play in fostering an inclusive and welcoming Christian community. Concern for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development penetrates the whole curriculum and ensures an all-embracing educational experience. An active school council fosters pupils' sense of ownership of, and responsibility for, their community. Sixth formers, in particular, exercise an important leadership role. The school chaplains, ordained and lay, make a significant and valued contribution to both worship and pastoral care. Parents speak warmly of the priority given to nurturing the distinctive Christian character of the school, of the commitment of staff, and particularly of the quality of the care and guidance provided. Particular appreciation was expressed for the way Asian Heritage children are supported and integrated. An active parent teacher association (PTA) encourages and enables parents to be involved in many aspects of the school's life. The school's Christian identity is powerfully promoted at all levels both within and outside the school community. Explicit Christian symbols are to be found around the school, although the ethos of the school is equally strongly expressed in the quality of its communal life and its unashamed proclamation of Gospel values.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

A wide and varied experience of worship is provided for all pupils, either in whole school, year groupings, or within forms. The latter is led by form tutors, who are well supplied with useful resource materials. Festivals and holy days are marked appropriately throughout the year and the Eucharist is celebrated regularly. The effective coordination of worship is presently shared between the headteacher and the head of RE. It is well planned and is enhanced by appropriate input from school staff and external visitors. Worship led by the school chaplain is particularly appreciated by pupils for its informal and participatory style. Pupils are especially involved in leading form worship. A Year 9 form reflected on the well-known 'Footprints' poem, supported by carefully chosen music and with prayer led by pupils themselves. Pupils participate reasonably well in larger group worship, although in the acts of worship observed their responses were somewhat muted. Appropriate opportunities are provided for personal reflection which is appreciated by pupils. Staff lead worship well, with good use of film clips and slides, but more could be done to engage pupils actively in the worship experience overall. Pupils may engage in additional, specifically Christian, activities, involving informal worship and bible study through the Christian Union and Youth Alpha groups. The Eucharist provides a special dimension to school worship, and successfully involves pupils in a variety of different ways. Important occasions for those of other Faiths represented in the school are also marked appropriately. Non-Christian pupils are invited to participate in collective worship so far as they feel able, with integrity: many find the experience both enlightening and personally uplifting. Parents are invited to special worship occasions and express great pleasure at having that opportunity. The Anglican dimension is affirmed in the way pupils are prepared for participation in worship and through the RE programme. Due emphasis on the importance of the cathedral link and the Anglican tradition of worship is balanced by a continuing concern to make worship relevant and accessible to young people. A quiet room is provided for private prayer and reflection. This is greatly appreciated in times of difficulty or grief. A worship committee, consisting of staff and pupils, considers various aspects of worship planning. They are beginning to provide a structure whereby more formal monitoring and evaluation of worship activities can be undertaken. These plans have not been identified, however, in a revised worship policy which is awaiting ratification by governors. Formal guidance for monitoring and evaluating the quality of the acts of worship is needed to inform properly future planning and development.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

RE is taught mainly by specialist staff throughout the school. Most pupils take the full course GCSE examination at the end of Year 10 and results are well above the national average. There is an issue as to whether the early start of GCSE is at the expense of those foundational elements which a full Key Stage 3 entitlement would provide, and whether the limited RE provision made in Year 11 is sufficient for a fully rounded programme of religious education. The present RE curriculum in Years 7 and 8 is awaiting further development to better reflect the new diocesan framework. This will enable staff to amend some of the less

well devised elements of the present course and provide a more secure foundation to mitigate the effects of the early start to GCSE. Advanced level Religious Studies is increasingly popular and examination results are generally good. RE forms a small part of the General Studies entitlement in the sixth form. The main focus of the syllabus is the Christian faith, but the other World Faiths are taught and treated with equal respect. RE makes a very good contribution to the spiritual, social, moral and cultural development of pupils. Lessons generally begin with a clear statement of learning objectives ensuring that the pupils have a clear idea of what they are to learn; these objectives demonstrate breadth and balance across key skills and concepts. The school judges the RE teaching to be good overall. This general assessment was confirmed by the inspection, where teaching ranging from satisfactory to outstanding was observed. Advanced level teaching is a particular strength of the department. A Year 12 lesson enabled pupils to apply the utilitarian principles of Bentham and Mill to a modern ecological problem. They showed a clear understanding of the issues, and the lesson was well supported by a power point presentation and carefully considered 'trigger' questions were used very effectively. The quality of discussion and debate was outstanding. A Year 10 lesson had excellent pace combined with carefully differentiated tasks as pupils considered the meaning of Christian marriage. Pupil participation in a wide-ranging discussion was very good indeed. They showed that they had a sound grasp of both the theological principles and the way they might be applied within a broadly secular society. Pupils report their enjoyment of and enthusiasm for RE, although there is evidence that some of the teaching - mainly in Years 7 and 8 - does not offer sufficient challenge or rigour. The department has well constructed policies in place for assessing pupils' work. They are trialling associated strategies for ensuring that pupils understand more clearly what they need to do to improve their work in the future. These policies are not yet, however, fully embedded across the department. Books are marked regularly, although not always to a consistent standard. Where assessment procedures are effectively applied pupils have a good understanding of their progress and level of attainment. There are interesting displays of pupils' work in the specialist rooms. Questioning is used effectively and some of the working materials provide appropriate extension opportunities for more able pupils.

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is outstanding

All senior leaders and the governing body take seriously their responsibility for maintaining and developing a school with a distinctive Christian ethos. School policies are firmly grounded in Christian values. In particular a carefully devised Spiritual Dimension Policy enables every department to reflect on its own contribution to pupils' spiritual development. The implications of working in a church school are made absolutely clear when staff appointments are made; all employees of the school clearly feel valued and supported. The number of long-serving members of staff is testimony to the commitment shown to the school and its mission. Senior staff and governors understand clearly how to challenge the school community to make real a Christian vision which drives all that the school does. Both formal and informal procedures are in place for consulting stakeholders, and these are very effective in practice. There are governor links for RE and worship, although formal reports to the Governing Body are relatively infrequent. More formal strategies which enable the governing body to evaluate the distinctiveness of the school overall are not yet fully embedded. It is quite clear, however, that the governing body understands, and is committed to, the further development of the school's Christian character. Some training has been provided for staff so that the Christian ethos may be better understood and further developed in every part of school life and work. The commitment and vision of the leadership and management of the school at all levels is undoubted. It is responsible for delivering high quality education and sound pastoral care to all pupils. Strong links are in place with the wider Church, and the other church schools in Liverpool. The headteacher, in particular, is to be congratulated in continuing her role in developing and maintaining excellent and productive relationships with other faith communities.