

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

### **Ashford Christ Church Church of England Voluntary Aided Maths and Computing Specialist College**

Millbank Road

Kingsnorth

Ashford

TN23 3HG

**Diocese: Canterbury**

Local Authority: Kent

Dates of inspection: 18 – 19 March 2008

Date of last inspection: February 2003

School's Unique Reference Number: 118845

Headteacher: Catherine Barber

Chair of Governors: Mrs N Smyth

Inspector's name and number: Richard Peers 125

#### **School context**

Ashford Christ Church School is a larger than average secondary school in an area where about a third of students attend selective Grammar schools. Attainment on entry is thus well below average. The families served by the school include a high proportion in low socio-economic groups. There is considerable movement of students in and out of the school during the school year

#### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Ashford Christchurch Mathematics and Computing College as a Church of England school are inadequate**

Ashford Christchurch Mathematics and Computing College is an inadequate Church school.

#### **Established strengths**

- The outstanding Christian leadership of the Headteacher focussing on the needs of the pupils through teaching and learning
- The determination to enable students to succeed through high quality teaching and learning
- The good leadership of the Head of RE

#### **Focus for development**

- To work with Governors, the diocese and other Church of England secondary schools in similar challenging circumstances to formulate a vision of how the SIAS criteria can be lived out at Ashford Christ Church
- To create a listening culture in which everyone feels valued and in which professional rigour is matched with personal warmth as a way of modelling Christian values
- To appoint an ordained chaplain to be the resident theologian and spiritual director for the school and to ensure that the spiritual needs of both staff and students are met
- To ensure that students gather for worship more than once a week

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

Although the school is currently inadequate there is much good practice in place which now needs embedding to ensure a positive impact on students.

The school building is well maintained and cleaned and some areas, such as an IT suite, have been developed to a very high standard. Students respect these and know that it shows the value which is placed on them.

Senior Students and Sports Leaders programmes are good initiatives to encourage students to exercise responsibility. Students value this and understand that it will help them prepare for

life.

Students do not always feel safe in all areas of the school. Although they recognise that major incidents are dealt with well they believe that minor incidents occur 'all the time' and are not addressed. They report that there is some level of disruption in nearly all lessons and that it is hard for them to make the progress they would wish to. They do not believe they do as well as they could in most subjects and that students in all but the top sets underachieve. They believe that the best teachers are those who 'befriend' them and who teach lessons which are carefully structured and which address a variety of learning styles.

Students do not generally feel proud of their school and do not believe that it embodies Christian values in the way people treat each other. As one student put it 'If you didn't know the name you wouldn't know it was a Christian school.'

This is a school in challenging circumstances where there is not much joy in its day to day life.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is inadequate**

The development of learning communities within the school has begun to have a significant positive impact on the lives of students. These communities each have a distinct culture of their own and students feel loyalty to them. Two acts of worship seen were well ordered and effectively used music, images and open questions to engage students in the meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus. It was hard to hear in the hall and students were rather passive during the worship, but they did understand what the point of the presentation was and the significance of Holy Week for Christians. Students only gather for worship outside their tutor rooms once a week at the moment and there is not much sense of ritual, symbol or familiarity in the worship. Worship in the tutor rooms is very variable indeed and in many cases students spend the time chatting. Some staff, however, are delivering sessions of a high quality and one teacher used a piece of video that captured students' interest. Another member of staff spoke about her own experience of feeling protected by angels as a sign of the presence of God. Students were interested and engaged with this and asked good questions.

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is satisfactory**

Standards in RE are satisfactory. The Head of RE has a good understanding of the needs of his department. He has an excellent understanding of the use of data to track and measure progress and is himself an outstanding classroom practitioner. His subject knowledge is excellent and students know and appreciate his passion for his subject. Students also spoke very positively about the teaching of the other specialist in the department who teaches with great energy and enthusiasm and plans his lessons to a very high standard indeed. A large number of RE lessons are taught by non-specialists and sometimes subject knowledge is inadequate. There is a very significant amount of low-level disruption during lessons and although they are well planned, most students fail to make the required progress.

Year 7 are taught in an imaginative and interesting 'Project Based Learning' humanities curriculum. Students enjoy this and recognise that it is an interesting introduction to school. However, they found it hard to recognise which parts of it constitute RE and they are not assessed using RE criteria as part of this.

The department has been well supported by an Advanced Skills Teacher and this has raised expectations and improved the quality of planning and teaching.

### **The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school is satisfactory**

The Headteacher has an outstanding determination to bring her school to success. She has led a much needed process of moving the school to focus clearly on the progress of students using appropriate data. She has very clearly embedded the use of learning objectives and other non-negotiables in lessons to ensure that planning is of a very high quality indeed.

Policy documents for collective worship and RE do not yet represent a sufficiently vibrant or positive vision of how RE and collective worship can be vital tools in raising standards and self-esteem. The diocese is not involved in appointments in the school and has not been involved in developing evaluation of worship or policy writing.

Governors give generously of their time. The Chair of Governors and other Governors spoken to have an outstanding knowledge of their school and the issues it faces. They have

confidence in the leadership of the Headteacher and recognise that she has moved the school a long way in delivering educational best practice. The Governing Body includes considerable expertise which could be utilised for the benefit of the school. The role of the Governing Body as a 'critical friend' is beginning to develop both aspects of that task.

Governors are eager to appoint an ordained chaplain and pupils and staff recognise this lack in the school's current leadership.

The school's self-evaluation of its distinctiveness is generally accurate but this has not yet resulted in plans that will address this sufficiently thoroughly. This is partly because there is insufficient knowledge of the criteria for Church school inspection on the part of some Governors. Within the school leadership there is not a recognition that the criteria can be used as developmental tools for the school's ethos.

Parents can describe occasions when their issues have been dealt with well. Others, however, feel that it is difficult to make contact with the school, that communication is poor and appointments delayed. Parents recognise that the appearance of the entrance area to the school and the 'polish' of the front of house arrangements leave much to be desired. As one parent commented, 'A smile counts for a lot'.

Relationships with the local churches are good. Students know that the local clergy are committed to the life of the school and are regular visitors. Students appreciate the times in past years when the school has used local churches for study and would like to have more opportunities for this.

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College Millbank Road Kingsnorth Ashford TN23 3HG March 2008