

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Blackheath Bluecoat Church of England Voluntary Aided Secondary School,
Old Dover Road,
Blackheath,
London,
SE3 8SY.

Diocese: Southwark

School's Unique reference number: 100195

Date of inspection: 25th & 28th June 2007

Date of last inspection: 23rd & 26th April 2002

Headteacher: Mr Paul Petty

Chair of Governors: Mrs Carrie Palmer

Inspector's name with National Society inspector's number: Pamela Draycott (161)

School context

The school serves students from three London Boroughs many of whom live in areas of high socio-economic deprivation. A high proportion come from Black African backgrounds and a larger proportion than found nationally speak English as an additional language. The proportion with special educational needs is above the national average. Many are from Pentecostalist Christian traditions with a small number coming from Muslim and other faith backgrounds.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Blackheath Bluecoat School as a Church of England school are inadequate

The school is a caring community of which students speak warmly. They feel cared for and safe. They know they are part of a church school. However, insufficient progress has been made since the previous inspection in making sure that the Christian foundation of the school explicitly runs through and drives all aspects of its life and work.

Established strengths

- The good progress made within the religious education (RE) department since the previous inspection which has meant that RE results, though still low when compared with expectations for Key Stage 3 and national results at GCSE and A level are now the highest when compared with other subjects in the school.
- The good decision made to improve the accommodation in which RE is taught moving it from being dispersed around the school to a distinct base for all lessons.
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Focus for development

- Improve the way in which the Christian character of the school explicitly guides and drives all aspects of school life and work.
- Improve standards in RE further by setting challenging targets for improvement and continuing to expand the range of activities and approaches used to help students learn effectively across all key stages.
- Ensure that teachers use computer technology and other digital resources appropriately and effectively to enrich students' learning in RE.

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

Students speak well of their school saying they feel safe and valued. They speak of the school trying to include everyone and are appreciative of that. Vulnerable students and those at risk are supported well and the staff most closely associated with this are able to articulate how they see this as part of the school's Christian witness. But the school's Christian values are not made explicit enough in directing its life and work. Insufficient attention is given to what is distinctive about its Christian character and how it serves the needs of all its students, including their academic development. The standards they are reaching in their academic work is very slowly improving but remains too low in relation to the national average. Behaviour in class and around school has improved but there is still some disruptive behaviour which slows the learning of others. The previous denominational report has not been used effectively as a basis for developing the school's Christian character. This is because it was lost. Coincidentally a number of issues identified in it have been focused on in the past four years. For example, crosses have been placed in classrooms and the RE department is now housed together in its own area. Large posters with verses from the Bible are in evidence but the places within the school used regularly for worship still do not have Christian symbols in them to help provide a focus for worship. Students' and parents' views on the Christian character of the school have begun to be sought but are not shared effectively or built into development planning. There is currently no strategic or consistent view of the impact that the Christian character of the school has on its life and work.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is inadequate

The planning for the worship programme provides a satisfactory range of opportunities for staff and students to meet together for worship. Students respond well to the experiences and opportunities given them through worship. However, its impact on school life is inadequate. This is because insufficient attention has been paid to it by governors and senior managers and inadequate progress made since the previous inspection. The quality of worship has not been monitored or evaluated effectively to ensure quality and inform developments. The planning provides for a daily act of worship including a class-based 'thought for the day' which students report doesn't happen. This means that the school is not meeting its statutory requirement to provide an act of worship every day for all students. Staff have received insufficient support in leading or encouraging students to lead such class-based worship. The explicitly Christian focus is sensitively handled to appropriately include the small proportion of students of other faiths and none. The weekly voluntary Eucharist is attended by a small but regular number and some students in the sixth form have organised their own prayer groups. These activities appropriately extend the range of opportunities provided by the school. The special services for year groups and the whole school held at various times makes a satisfactory contribution to extending students' experience of worship. These tend to follow the church calendar as do the headteacher's acts of worship which contributes to an understanding of Anglican worship. Students speak positively of opportunities given for them to participate more fully in leading worship rather than it always being 'done to us'. Whilst students listen well during worship and join in prayers appropriately it takes them some time to settle and they become restless very quickly afterwards. There is no visual or musical stimulus to help set the tone for worship in the areas used regularly as venues for these gatherings around the school. In response to suggestions from the deputy headteacher the governors have rightly recognised the need to refresh the worship opportunities provided. This was a point identified in the previous denominational inspection report. To move this forward he has very recently taken over responsibility for co-ordinating worship. As yet there has been little impact of this focus on developing the worship life of the school. This is because it is a recent initiative and so there has not been enough time for it to effect practice significantly. There is a policy written by the newly designated worship co-ordinator and verified by the governing body. It has not yet become an effective tool for improving worship. The worship co-ordinator is developing a proforma to standardise how worship is planned. It provides a useful starting point for those who lead worship and makes a contribution to how the school can begin to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of worship but has not yet made sufficient impact on planning and practice. The volunteer chaplaincy team makes a good contribution to the existing worship programme but the school has not drawn sufficiently on their skills and insights in developing worship.

Religious Education is good

Standards show a rising trend and are good when compared with other subjects across the school whilst remaining below national expectations for both GCSE and A level courses. In Key Stage 3 students' written work is below expected levels for RE for the age group but their oral work is slightly better. This means that most make good progress but that literacy difficulties hold back some. In order to improve standards further the department has rightly identified the need to focus on providing ways, other than written, in which student achievement can be demonstrated - for example by developing discussion and reflection activities and assessments. Students respond well in RE and enjoy the opportunities given to present their own ideas and beliefs. They usually listen with respect to other people. Behaviour is improving but there is some low-level disruption which means that sometimes a few students stop others learning as quickly as they should. The department is aware of the need to target learning more effectively on those working at higher levels but at present these students are not sufficiently challenged. The quality of teaching is variable. No lessons seen during the inspection were inadequate and one was outstanding. The head of department is beginning to develop his role in monitoring the quality of learning and teaching across the department and this is beginning to make an impact on improving the overall quality of learning and teaching within the department.

Since the previous inspection in 2002 and the RE Departmental Audit carried out by external advisers in 2004 the department has made good progress led by a committed head of department. Detailed schemes of work have been developed and students are more engaged and interested because different ways of teaching are used to provide some variety in lessons. The use of computers and other digital media to make learning better and more interesting is undeveloped. Recently the department had digital projectors installed in each room but need training to use them effectively.

Changes are being made to the Year 7 curriculum in September 2007 which means that RE lesson time has been reduced from two to one period a week, with an explicit RE focus being made part of the skills based component of the curriculum for Year 7. The implications of this for the quality of learning and teaching have been considered and plans put in place to ensure RE's contribution to students' learning is maintained through the curriculum changes. Insufficient thought has been given to how the impact of these changes on students' learning will be monitored and evaluated. Over the academic year 2006-07 students in the sixth form did not receive their full entitlement to RE as the conference programme was reduced to one day. Plans are in place to rectify this for the coming year with three conferences planned. Further consideration of the content and delivery of these conferences is necessary to make them effective learning opportunities for all those involved.

The leadership and management of the school as a church school are inadequate.

There has been a drive to raise academic standards which has begun to show some improvement. This focus has not taken into account sufficiently the school's Christian vision and ethos which has not been a recent priority in planning and development. This means that insufficient progress has been made since the previous inspection in embedding the school's Christian character into all aspects of its leadership and management. The governors are aware of the need to give formal attention to the impact of the school's Christian foundation on how they conduct their role and support and challenge the school in its Christian service of the students. However, they have not yet effectively addressed this but are beginning to ask some searching questions of the school in this regard. The headteacher and deputy headteacher can articulate their respective visions for the school as a Christian community, but other staff and students and their parents/carers have not been involved in the development of a shared Christian vision for its future. A beginning has been made by focusing developments through the very recent use of a self-evaluation toolkit written by the deputy headteacher and shared with a small number of others. Responses to this are embryonic but provide a useful starting point for further development. The recent school improvement plan includes a section on school ethos which governors have not yet effectively monitored. The leadership of RE within the school has improved since the previous inspection but too little progress has been made in the leadership for planning and developing worship across the school.

