

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

### Northbrook Church of England Voluntary Aided Secondary School

Ennersdale Site  
Leahurst Road  
Lewisham  
London  
SE13 5HZ

#### Diocese: Southwark

School's Unique reference number: 100749

Date of inspection: 22-23 January 2008

Date of last inspection: November 2004

Headteacher (Acting): Esther Holland

Inspector's name with National Society inspector's number : Jan Thompson 92

### School context

Northbrook is a small Church of England secondary school of some 500 boys and girls, in the Borough of Lewisham. Founded over 100 years ago, the present school recently moved to a temporary site, awaiting a new building. The school is oversubscribed. Two thirds of students are from minority ethnic groups, mainly black Caribbean and black African. Many students come from deprived inner London areas and the number with special educational needs is above average. Sixty percent of students enter on Christian criteria, although not necessarily Anglican. The deputy headteacher took over as acting head in September 2007.

### **The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Northbrook as a Church of England school are good.**

This school takes its Christian distinctiveness seriously and is given excellent leadership in this by the acting headteacher and the new chair of governors. They are driving forward a programme to improve standards, based on Christian values that affect the whole life and work of the school. All students are valued for their God-given uniqueness and encouraged to develop their full potential as responsible citizens.

### Established strengths

- The headteacher is a capable and very committed Christian leader, who is well supported by the senior leadership team and the governing body.
- The school promotes spiritual and moral development well.
- Religious Education (RE) has a high profile in the school.

### Focus for development

- Strengthen the Anglican elements in Collective Worship, including experience of the Eucharist.
- Improve students' understanding of the levels used in RE in Key Stage 3.
- Give more time to RE in Year 11 for students taking the full course GCSE.

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

This is a happy, friendly school where Christian values underpin its life and work. Students are very well cared for, whatever their needs, and all members of the school 'are valued for their God-given uniqueness' (Vision Statement). The school prayer, frequently used and appreciated by students, asks for God's help in finding their vocation, for their own happiness and that of others.

Students' spiritual and moral development are well supported by Collective Worship and RE and also by extra-curricular Christian clubs. There is a strong core of Christian belief in the school and students are open to religious influences whilst also being helped to think critically about religion in RE. A start has been made in ensuring that the present building gives students Christian inspiration. This is mainly through a large wooden cross and framed posters. One of these quotes from the Bible (Philippians 4:8), which encourages students to strive for all that is true, right and excellent; and this is the basis of some regular awards given by the headteacher. The school has no chapel or quiet area on the present site, but there are plans for its inclusion in the new school building.

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

Worship is valued by many in this Christian community. Tutor-group Collective Worship follows a daily Bible reading booklet; and where tutors invest time in this, students speak very highly of it. They value the guidance they get from the Bible passages and the opportunity for prayer and reflection. They spoke of worship as 'setting you up for the day' and having a calming effect. One said 'It helps me to look inside myself' and another, of no faith, said that it inspired him to do better. Students also understand the main purpose of worship as gathering together to think about God, to bring to him their concerns, to thank him for their life and to say sorry for things they have done wrong. Students are less enthusiastic about the larger gatherings of year groups in the hall. Although they give students plenty to think about and finish with a prayer, in some ways they are more like an assembly than an act of worship and can lack a worshipful atmosphere. This is not helped by the teachers who stand throughout, rather than sitting with their tutor groups. Students used to benefit from attending the parish church twice a term in year groups, but the church is too far from the present school site to be used except for big festivals. The vicar now conducts a weekly act of worship in the school hall. These focus on the Church's seasons and festivals but do not include much Anglican symbolism or ritual. The practice of holding a monthly voluntary Eucharist during lunchtime was not very popular and has also ceased on the new site because of practical difficulties.

### **Religious Education is good.**

RE is the second most successful department in the school and is part of the school's specialist status bid. Although students enter Year 7 with below average standards overall, they make good progress in RE and most achieve in line with the national average in the short course GCSE. Fifteen students were entered last year for the full course examination and these attained standards well above average. The governing body has adopted the Lewisham Agreed Syllabus for RE, which provides a suitable basis for RE at the present and will be reviewed when their new syllabus is published. The department is well led and is expanding, with another full-time RE specialist this year. Full course GCSE will be taken by more students in future, although at present they still have only 50 minutes a week in Years 10 and 11, which is not enough for a full course. Higher level skills are developed well from Year 9, when students learn to see different sides of a religious argument on social issues and to express their own views. However, students in Years 7 and 8 are not yet using the level descriptions well enough to help them improve as independent learners. RE is a very popular subject, described as 'fun' and 'exciting' by some Year 7 students. Older students see its relevance in a multi-faith society and they also like studying Christianity at some depth. Lessons are very well structured, with a range of good resources, strategies and activities. Most students respond enthusiastically to this. For example, some Year 9 students gave informative and enjoyable Powerpoint presentations on Islam at the time of the inspection. Nevertheless, some pupils, particularly in the lower sets, have a short attention span and waste time in lessons. However, the majority work hard, cover a lot of material, and deepen their understanding of religion. The subject matter and the encouragement to think for themselves make a big contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

### **The leadership and management of the school as a church school is good.**

The senior leadership team and governing body successfully promote the Christian character of the school, with the result that students defend it and parents support it. For example, the new

school prospectus captures the essence of the school as a Christian community by quoting the school prayer on the printed cover. The acting head teacher and new chair of governors, in particular, give a strong lead on this and have a good understanding of what needs to be done to make improvements. This report confirms the sound judgements of the school's self-evaluation. A shared Christian vision for the new school has been worked out with all stakeholders and forms the basis of the school development plan. The very first key issue is to 'Change the climate and culture of the school to more strongly reflect the Christian ethos'. Staff are involved in this and model the school's Christian values in their hard work, commitment and the respectful way they treat the students. The head of RE plays a significant role in Christian activities in the school, such as organising the Bishop's Lent Appeal in school each year and taking some students to the cathedral to present the money raised. There is an excellent relationship between the school and the local vicar. He has been chair of governors and is currently the link-governor keeping in touch with RE. He is also part of the group that co-ordinates Collective Worship, along with the head of RE. There are also good relations with Southwark Diocese, whose support is appreciated.

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