

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Ripley St. Thomas Church of England Voluntary Aided High School

Ashton Road,
Lancaster
LA1 4RS

Diocese: Blackburn
Local authority: Lancashire
Dates of inspection: 22nd & 23rd January 2008
Date of last inspection: 5th March 2005
School's unique reference number: 119796
Headteacher: Mrs E. Nicholls
Inspector's name and number: Revd. Dr. R. W. Buckley 338

School context

Ripley St. Thomas is a comprehensive school serving Lancaster and the surrounding area. The ability of pupils on intake is above the national average. The majority of students are of white British Heritage. The school was founded in 1864 for "The education of fatherless children". It is now designated as a Language College, International School and a Training School.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Ripley St. Thomas School as a Church of England school are outstanding

This is a school where students enjoy the learning experience. Collective worship and reflective opportunities permeate the whole of school life. The spiritual development of all stakeholders is nurtured by the work of the chaplaincy and Spirituality Days. Both are outstanding. In Religious Education classes the faith background of the students comes through very strongly. The RE Department makes a major contribution to the life of the school.

Established strengths

- The School has a clear Christian vision of its role in the community which is well articulated by the senior leadership team and Governors.
- The standard of Religious Education Teaching is good with many outstanding features.
- Religious Education and worship enable students to articulate their faith with eloquence and confidence.

Focus for development

- Produce from the school mission statement, a short phrase that articulates the ethos of the school.
- Define, implement and monitor strategies to combat the small degree of underachievement in R.E. amongst boys and the most able.

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

This is underpinned in an excellent way by the School Self evaluation Form (SEF) which reiterates on nearly every page that this is a church school. Every member of the school community is valued as "a child of God". All stakeholders are listened to and this informs decisions. This is exemplified by the introduction of healthy options in the canteen and the Head's provision of staff training in response to the concerns of senior students to a possible eating disorder case. Pupils speak openly about the enjoyment of life and learning. They are very appreciative of the effort staff put in on their behalf. Every pupil interviewed was confident that they were safe in school because of the visible presence of staff and could name at least one adult to whom they could go in a crisis. Many mentioned the chaplain in

this respect. The mentoring scheme and Team against Bullying (TAB) were appreciated by those who use the service and the students who provide it. The school's "International" status and the sixth form entitlement to an International enrichment course leads to a significant number of students taking a gap year to work as volunteers in the developing world. All this contributes to what a senior student described as the "unique" atmosphere of the school. "We will be sorry to leave" he went on "but we have been well prepared to move on."

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Worship is central to school life. Every day is sandwiched between an opening prayer and a sharing of the grace. Assemblies, church services and school based worship have an outstanding impact on the school. The Anglican tradition is fully represented in liturgy, celebration of the Christian Year and the openness to the wider community. Pupils are above all grateful and respond to the opportunities to lead worship. "We feel released and given confidence to express our faith" said a Key Stage 3 student. Another said "School worship feels so real and your faith really comes to life" There are a variety of worship styles. In the assembly observed use was made of a singing group, a band, and PowerPoint to project thoughtful images and the words of responsive prayers. Some students regretted that not all their colleagues responded as enthusiastically as they would have liked! The school hold spiritual days for each year group looking at topics such as Eucharist, Christian response to justice issues and reflecting on life's journey so far. This has a spectacular impact on pupils. "The Chapel service was great". "I liked it when we acted out the Lord's prayer". "Today I felt closer to God than I ever felt before". "I think that after today I would like to go back to church because I will be understood and get listened to". These are just some of the positive responses received. Worship is supported by all departments. A rehearsal was seen of an input to Holocaust Memorial day at Lancaster Priory utilising art work, live music, poetry and dance. A wide variety of extra curricular activities support the formal worship programme.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Teaching is good with a number of outstanding features. Notably the wide variety of teaching and learning strategies that are used and the willingness of teachers to take risks. Pupils appreciate this and say it makes learning fun. "Bible races" were enjoyed at K.S. 3 and enabled pupils to find references quickly. They were then able to relate, in some detail, both a literal and mythological interpretation of miracles. G.C.S.E. results are above the national average and along with A level results have shown a constant improvement over the last four years. R.E. is now contributing fully to this "high achieving" school. Year 11 pupils were able to use a PowerPoint presentation to relate the theme of stewardship to ecology and the "Shrinking the footprint" initiative. Sixth form lessons are characterised by humour and academic rigour. Excellent written work was seen on the contribution of Dawkins and Kant to the relationship between morality and religion and the argument for the existence of God. A good monitoring system has enabled the department to identify under achievement amongst a small group of boys together with the most able. Teachers are skilled in combating this but there is no formal strategy to overcome the problem. The silent settler at the start of each lesson contributes significantly both to learning and spiritual development. The Department Head makes an outstanding contribution to Spirituality Days.

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

This stems from the Head, Leadership Team, Governors and Chaplain. Quality professional development time has been used to define what it means to lead in a Christian context. The staff have found this very useful. The strong relationship with local clergy, churches and the Diocese helps the school to flourish. Teachers feel valued and able to share their professional skills. They quote "thank you" notes, workforce remodelling and the welfare committee as just three ways in which this is manifested. There are a number of opportunities for them to develop their own Christian spirituality and vocation. The sixth form feel that this "has a spin off effect on us". New staff are given a Bible as part of their welcome to Ripley. Foundation Governors are fully involved in many aspects of school life and make an input to worship and the spirituality days. The distinctive nature of the school as a church school is illustrated in the central role of the thoughtful chaplain, the vision and leadership of the head teacher and the pervading caring ethos. This is what the Governors and leadership

team want and it is clearly and effectively established. This vision is clearly communicated to and caught by the wider body of staff and all stakeholders. All year groups were keen to explain the symbolism of the school badge in this context.

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