

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Aidan's Church of England Voluntary Aided High School

Oatlands Drive
Harrogate
North Yorkshire
HG2 8JR

Diocese: Ripon & Leeds

Local authority: North Yorkshire County Council
Dates of inspection: 17th October 2006
Date of last inspection: December 2002
School's unique reference number: 121719
Headteacher: Mr Dennis Richards
Inspector's name and number: Dr David Sellick 148

School context

St Aidan's C of E High School is a specialist science college and an international school in the centre of Harrogate. The Sixth Form is a facility shared with St John Fisher R.C. High School. Pupils are admitted from about 60 primary schools with a preference for practising Christians of all denominations in the Anglican Archdeaconry of Richmond when over-subscribed.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Aidan's VA C of E High School as a Church of England school are outstanding

Established strengths

- Teaching and Learning in Religious Education
- The commitment of the whole staff of the school
- The overwhelming joy of learning emanating from all the students and pupils

Focus for development

- Enhance ambience of the Chapel space
- Modernise the Eucharist liturgy
- Add pupil representatives to the Chapel (Collective Worship) Committee
- Extend consultation with pupils towards some more explicit whole school participation in decision making.

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

All learners and staff feel that their views are taken seriously and that they are fully respected as persons. All pupils spoken to were adamant that St Aidan's was a Christian school and that was what made it such a good place in which to be. Most impressive were students who had joined the Sixth Form from other schools who were delighted how welcome they were made from the moment of arrival. Students said that the Christian ethos is open, inclusive and St Aidan's is a very tolerant school. The activities for extensive charitable fund raising are thoroughly enjoyed and also something of which the pupils feel proud to be a part for the insight they get into the needs of others less fortunate than themselves. The pupils all enjoy excellent personal relationships with all the staff; there are opportunities for the pupils to be consulted on many issues. The half-time Chaplain contributes to the strong pastoral care adding a spiritual dimension for the benefit of pupils, students and adults. As a former curate in Harrogate he enjoys excellent relationships with the Anglican and other clergy of the town. The Head contributes additionally to the religious life of pupils by attending their confirmations (and the equivalent in other denominations) in their home churches. There are no confirmation classes in school but there is an annual service in school for all confirmed during the preceding year

and their families. 'Aidan's Flame' music group visits local churches to support services. The Chamber Choir was 'BBC Songs of Praise Choir of the Year in 2006'.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding.

The Acts of Worship are exceptionally well planned and monitored through the oversight of a coordinator working with a small staff Chapel Committee. Worship for Year groups is generally led by Senior Managers. Tutors lead their own forms in classroom worship using a weekly "Thought for the Day" sheet. There are occasional special services involving more than one year group. Each pair of form groups attends a service of Holy Communion once a term celebrated by the Chaplain. There is a very clear Worship policy statement including a commendable reminder to show respect for other Christian traditions and generosity of spirit towards other faiths. A list of suggested themes includes key festivals from non-Christian religions. Staff are expected to attend the larger acts of Collective Worship with their forms. A worship band, "Aidan's Flame", drawn from Y 10 and above musicians who "have a heart for worship", play for Year Assemblies providing a strong spiritual dimension. An innovation from September 2006 is that one Form act of worship should be pupil devised and led under the guidance of their form tutor. The Y 9 pupils told me they were looking forward their turn to lead in this way.

Holy Communion is celebrated in an area called The Chapel but which also serves as a Sixth Form cafeteria. However Y 9 and 13 pupils agreed that the space is rendered suitable for worship enhanced by the robed Chaplain who is also the 'lead' minister when larger services are held in local churches and in the school's Constance Green Hall. There are termly staff communions and there is a monthly Parents' Prayer Group.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding.

In 2006 over 90% of the whole year cohort had A* - C GCSE grades in Maths, English (Lang) and RS; but in RS an impressive 63% achieved A* or A. Of the 29 A Level subjects offered RS was the 9th most popular with over 60% getting A or B, this being pleasingly comparable with other subjects. Both parent and pupil questionnaires record high levels of satisfaction with RS. All the schemes of work are of the highest quality, with the new lesson monitoring system illustrating the quality of teaching. Thorough pupil reports praise success and indicate clearly how future learning targets can be achieved. Pupils' written work (and teachers' records of class discussions) indicate a good knowledge of religions; they are able to articulate reasons for beliefs and practices. Conversation with Y9 pupils confirmed this. Pupils, including those from different denominations, are well aware of specifically Anglican issues. Y7 pupils clearly enjoyed a morning's work in a nearby church and photographs of earlier groups at work were well displayed to the delight of the pupils. A large proportion of Citizenship and PSHE is delivered through RS. This is achieved without detriment to RS because the 3 different GCSE syllabuses from which the pupils can choose all include a paper on Christian Ethics. The schemes of work for Years 7 – 9 prepare for the GCSE work and all Sixth Form pupils take AS General Studies which is also largely taught by RS staff ensuring that moral, ethical and theological issues are covered in a contemporary context; this contribution to their education was warmly appreciated by Sixth Form students.

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

There are highly effective pastoral and spiritual links between the school, the parents and the Christian communities in the town and Archdeaconry; this reaches out to the wider community as well via the excellent newsletter, 'Causeway'. It is made quite explicit that the school is run on Christian principles. Neither staff nor the student body regard academic success as the all consuming goal, though the undoubted successes in this regard are celebrated but in a style that exudes gratitude for the privilege of opportunities to be enjoyed. This is evidenced by the quality of care given by staff and pupils to pupils having Special Educational Needs. This extends to

those who work to alleviate need and suffering among less fortunate people in both the UK and overseas which resulted in £36,000 raised for charities in 2005-06. This ethos permeates through the leadership and management in formal statements and can be experienced by spending even a single day in the school. Using theological language, St Aidan's is clearly seeking first the Kingdom of Heaven and then finding that pleasure, success and fulfilment are there too.

SIAS report : October 2006 St Aidan's VA High School, Harrogate HG2 8JR