

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Hilda's Church of England Voluntary Aided High School

Croxteth Drive
Sefton Park
Liverpool
L17 3AL

Diocese: Liverpool

Local authority: Liverpool

Dates of inspection: 19th & 20th December 2007

Date of last inspection: 10th – 13th November 2003

School's unique reference number: 104721

Headteacher: Mr JC Yates

Inspector's name and number: The Revd Canon Dr Peter Shepherd (395)

School context

This average sized secondary school which serves the eight Local Authorities within Liverpool Diocese admits girls only into the main school; its mixed 6th form has relatively few boys. Pupils come from a wide range of social backgrounds. Around 85% are white British and there is a wide range of other ethnic groups. A few pupils have English as a second language, with a fewer than average number having learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Hilda's as a Church of England school are good

Christian values are promoted both institutionally and through all members of a community characterised by excellent relationships. The school impacts strongly upon pupils' personal development and the example set by staff at all levels is outstanding. Parents value what is done for their children. Important improvements have been effected in Religious Education and to a lesser extent in School Worship. The school's capacity to develop yet further its distinctive Christian character is secure.

Established strengths

- The commitment and vision of staff at all levels.
- Smaller group and Eucharistic worship.
- The management of RE.

Focus for development

- Review of the core RE syllabus.
- The organisation and evaluation of larger group acts of worship.
- Strategies to enable the Governing Body to monitor and evaluate the nature and impact of the Christian distinctiveness of the school more effectively.

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

Pupils' differing needs, abilities and interests are very successfully met both by the formal curriculum and also through a wide range of extra curricular activities. Pupil learning is supported and enhanced by a strong and effective pastoral system and they benefit tremendously from the care and support they receive. Levels of personal development are high and achievement of all kinds is recognised and rewarded. Pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is excellent. Attendance is considerably above average demonstrating a strong commitment by pupils to their own education. One spoke of feeling privileged to be a member of this community. Pupils work hard and want to do well; they are polite, friendly and behave well, feeling secure within the school environment. They speak positively of the commitment of their teachers and the encouragement given by them.

Parents report that teachers set excellent examples to pupils and applaud the inclusive ethos of the school. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils, who respond well to the confidence and respect shown to them. The school has wide ranging charitable commitments and pupils are clearly taught that it is a Christian imperative to serve those in need. Pupils are given various opportunities to take on responsibilities across the school, including a well-developed 'buddy' system for new pupils. A reinvigorated school council is fostering pupils' sense of ownership of, and responsibility for, their community, although there is room for a significant development of its role. Bullying is rare and, when it occurs, it is dealt with effectively. This is a school with a strong Christian sense of family. Children of other Faiths are fully included in this family whilst having their particular needs and priorities respected. A new school chaplain is already making a positive contribution to worship and pastoral care. Christian symbols are to be found around the school, but a less tangible Christian ethos is clear to all who experience it.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Worship has been significantly enhanced by the work of the relatively new Head of RE/Worship. All pupils have the opportunity to participate in a daily act of worship. Regular Eucharistic worship is an important constituent in an overall provision which ranges from form worship to larger group worship in the school hall. The Head of Department's Farmington Fellowship project is informing the development of a more participative and accessible form of Eucharistic worship, and the appointment of a new Head of Music has given this essential aspect of worship a new lease of life. Overall worship is well planned and a worship committee consisting of staff, governors and pupils provides a forum for some, yet still basic, evaluation of its impact. Form worship is particularly secure and is effectively resourced and monitored. Pupils and form teachers speak of form worship in terms which confirm their engagement with and commitment to it. However, less focused consideration has been given to the provision of larger group worship and there are significant ways in which pupil participation is still less than whole-hearted. One particular act of worship led by pupils, with the theme of 'homelessness', was delivered at far too much of a 'gallop'; and although it was well-conceived and presented, it fell into the ever-present trap of being more presentation than worship-enabling. 'Amens' at the end of prayers were distinctly low key and there was no opportunity provided for any communal singing. A performance by the Gospel Choir made a significant contribution to the creation of a more worshipful ethos. Nevertheless, numerous practical issues, particularly the allocation of sufficient time and the role of staff, require attention in order to ensure that such an ethos can be created and sustained from beginning to end.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Provision for, and the success of, Religious Education have been hugely transformed by the Head of Department, although there are still areas for development. RE is a core subject throughout the school. All pupils take the short course at GCSE, but an increasing number is opting for the full course. A Level is presently taught within a 6th form consortium, but plans to teach it on site are the direct result of this increased interest and participation. Examination results have improved dramatically over the past three years. Pupil work is marked regularly and fully. The secure assessment process informs both teacher planning and pupil improvement. Pupils report great enjoyment of a course in which varied and thought-provoking teaching methodologies are employed, and many commented in particular on how they were given the freedom to develop and share ideas. Many found the subject matter appropriately challenging and older pupils spoke of how a newly invigorated course had enabled them to 'grow into' rather than 'grow out of' faith. Many pupils were able to talk about religion in a clear and reflective manner, indicating a good ability to think both theologically and philosophically. In particular Christian faith is well related to 'real life' issues. It is also clear that World Faiths are taken seriously and treated equally respectfully. Important and productive links are made between religion and other areas of the curriculum. Parents reported that RE homework was set regularly and was appropriate to the age and ability of the child, and agreed with the judgement that the revitalised RE programme was "a breath of fresh air". A Year 8 group was able to make perceptive links between a bullying situation shown on reality TV and the messages of Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi. Sharply focused questions and excellent use of ICT informed this outstanding lesson, and pupils spoke articulately and thoughtfully about the issues. However, this was in contrast to a Year 7

lesson where a number of rather different concepts were presented in a potentially confusing manner. The present RE curriculum was put in place very much as an interim strategy and is now ready for further development. In particular there are areas where topics in Key Stage 3 are unnecessarily repeated at GCSE and where a much sharper focus would be beneficial. The KS3 course would benefit in particular from the replacement of textbooks which deal with some core concepts in a confusing and misleading manner, negatively impacting on two of the lessons observed. RE makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual development, although the present course tends to place rather more stress on learning about than learning from religion. Overall syllabus revision, particularly identifying appropriate skills and concepts, will support improvement here. There are at present only two fulltime specialists and further development of the subject would benefit from another specialist appointment. There can be little doubt that the position of RE in the school, once very much the 'Cinderella' of the curriculum, has a secure and exciting future.

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

The leadership of the headteacher and his senior team, based on their strong personal faith commitment, is outstanding and continues to drive the development of the school effectively. Their vision is informed by a clear understanding of the practicalities of what is needed to ensure that pupils' needs are met fully. Effective monitoring and evaluative systems are in place and the senior team is able to communicate clearly and accurately what is required to staff and pupils alike. Appropriate in-service activities relating to the distinctive nature of a church school are promoted and, where necessary, provided. Parents spoke warmly of the priority given to the Christian ethos of the school, of the commitment of staff, and particularly of the quality of the care of pastoral staff. The combination of academic excellence and Christian nurture was declared a "win-win" by parents. Communication between home and school and the effectiveness of school discipline came in for specific praise and there is clearly a very strong and productive home-school relationship. Parents were less enthusiastic about the effectiveness of communication with and by the Governing Body. Governors are clearly committed to the school and, in general terms, appear to have a good understanding of their role. However, in certain important areas that understanding has not translated sufficiently rigorously into practice. School policies are a case in point, with several in need of revision particularly regarding their proper embedding in an understanding of the distinctive nature of a school with a Christian foundation; reasons provided for delaying this exercise were unconvincing. Furthermore, despite a particularly critical denominational report in 2003, the school's worship policy, last revised in 1999, is only now under review. This limitation of the critical process has hindered certain developments in larger scale school worship. Governors evaluate the impact of the school's Christian distinctiveness via a range of committees but with a somewhat limited range of evidence. Nevertheless, improvement since the last denominational inspection has been good and the school evidently has the capacity to improve further.

SIAS report December 2007 St Hilda's CE High School, Croxteth Drive, Sefton Park, Liverpool. L17 3AL