

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St. Margaret's Liverpool Church of England Voluntary Aided High School

Aigburth Road,
Liverpool
L17 6AB

Diocese: Liverpool

Local authority: Liverpool

Dates of inspection: 12/13th September 2007

Date of last inspection: 25/26th March 2003

School's unique reference number: 104720

Headteacher: Dr. David Dennison

Inspector's name: Elizabeth Collins

School context

St Margaret's is an average sized 11-16 comprehensive school for boys with a mixed sixth form. Students come from across Liverpool and some neighbouring authorities. Only a small minority of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds and both eligibility for free school meals and the number of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are below average. The school is a specialist Technology College and holds the National Healthy Schools Award.

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

The school's Christian foundation is felt to be explicit to its very being and a reference point in all its work. This is seen in practice as students and staff establish high standards in all aspects of the community's life within an ethos of mutual respect and love, valuing and caring for the individual. All are encouraged, regardless of position, to fulfil their potential and engage in service to the wider community.

Established strengths

- The distinctive character of the school which enables students to grow, mature and achieve in a Christian context.
- Exceptionally good relationships at all levels of the school community.
- Outstanding wider community links which are used to the benefit of all concerned.
- Very good provision for moral and social development.

Focus for development

- To develop the role of the foundation governors in monitoring and evaluating the distinctiveness of the school's ethos;
- To revise the collective worship and RE policies so they reflect more fully the school's distinctive Christian character.

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

The central place of the Mission Statement, school aims and objectives is seen by their prominence at the head of all school documentation and their regular presentation around the school. From the newest parent and child to 'old boys' returning as governors, or to support business enterprise projects, the implicit relationship between St. Margaret's and the Church is recognised, understood and very much appreciated. Students feel that the whole ethos of the school offers something which will be 'with them for life'. In a safe and secure environment they are challenged and encouraged to aim high, regardless of their starting point. They are further nurtured to consider closely who and what they choose to be for the future. Relationships are excellent at all levels. Students are aware of how this strength

influences themselves as well as that of staff. The boundaries of the staff/student relationship are clearly understood, but without their impeding on the feeling that teachers are also 'friends'. Values and moral awareness are exceptionally well embedded. A strong sense of responsibility for self and others is keenly expressed - be it by Key Stage 4 students and sixth formers acting as 'Bully Busters'; the newest Year 7 boy understanding that travelling across the city is easy as there is 'always someone there to keep an eye on you', or by members of the school council recognising the value of the work they do for all members of the immediate and wider community. Social and cultural awareness and the expectations of living a community life and being conscious of the 'common good' are very well developed. There is a strong sense of religious development and many grow in spiritual awareness. The atmosphere of the school environment encourages the desire to work and play successfully together. Art displays are an asset and show a sensitivity not always present in the work of male students in schools. Although some parts of the building are a little 'tired' and there are no real areas for quiet and reflective moments there is a real enthusiasm and imagination for this to be rectified in the designs and plans for the refurbished chapel and adjoining quiet space.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

The place of both collective and corporate worship is fully understood and is appreciated by all members of the school family. Celebration of the Eucharist is paramount in marking significant points in the life of all students. The adjoining church of St. Anne's was full for the Year 7 welcome Eucharist. The vast majority of parents attended, recognising the importance of this event in the new stage their sons were beginning. The positive response to the different policies of local churches in admitting young people to communion is appreciated by the students, so no one is barred from receiving the sacrament. A clear programme is in place for daily collective worship. Topics are open-ended and could reflect Biblical, social or moral teaching depending on the presenter and the group of students. Staff are well supported with materials for form worship. Students are involved in different ways in public worship, especially through music, but there is scope for far greater participation, especially in the Eucharist. Occasional acts of worship and prayer times are organised by the Christian Union groups which support individual spiritual needs. Staff Eucharists ensure that all members of the community have good opportunities for personal religious and spiritual development. Considerable efforts are made to maintain the tradition of singing hymns – both traditional and modern. This and the regular celebrations of the Eucharist help all to be familiar with the central tenets of the Anglican Communion, although there is room for set responses to be introduced on occasions in daily worship. Student membership of the worship committee and feed-back through the school council allow for some evaluation of this essential element of daily life. The worship policy is, however, inappropriate to the foundation of the school and there is no structured format for foundation governors to monitor and evaluate worship.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Standards of attainment in RE are good or better at all levels. Students enjoy their studies and at GCSE level have attained grades above the national average for the last three years. More recently, levels have been reached which are higher than those attained in other subjects in school. Most recent gains at the end of Key Stage 3 show a marked improvement on previous years. Religious studies is a popular subject at AS and AL, although students' progress and levels of attainment are less secure than those lower down the school. Learning is generally good. Less able students often make good progress and can ask searching and sometimes profound questions. In one lesson a boy argued his point on the validity of non-canonical gospel material in an informed manner and was not easily dissuaded from his view by the authority of the teacher! Thoughtful observations about forgiveness, including the pertinent question, 'Why should I?' gave good opportunity for spiritual and moral reflection. Teaching is at least satisfactory with many elements which are good. The desire of students to test the boundaries of personal thinking is, however, sometimes curtailed by too much teacher talk. This desire to 'give' the adult, answer and, sometimes a traditional 'religious' response, rather than to prompt deeper thinking can inhibit students' keenness to explore religious/ultimate questions. The scheme of work supports the

Christian character of the school well. At Key Stage 3 it gives good opportunity to also explore other faiths, but the choice of examination options limits this higher up the school and especially at AS/AL. Some students saw this as a 'good thing' and failed to see the need for an understanding of anything except their own faith. The lack of a subject action plan and other documentation which reflect the place of RE within a church school limit opportunities for monitoring and evaluating and tracking progress in specific issues.

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

There is a very clear awareness of the distinctive ethos of the school by all associated with it and especially those with roles in management and leadership. They are actively engaged in articulating and promoting the ethos and, in nurturing all involved in the day-to-day life of the school into understanding and becoming part of the vision. The strong links with parents and a wide range of personnel and organisations across the diocese, the local education authority, higher education and the world of business offer a good sounding board for evaluating the school's progress and its public effectiveness. Opportunities in the 'world of work' are used extremely effectively for students to see men and women exercising a Christian ministry in the 'real world' and not just in church and school. All these encounters contribute to a genuine strength of the school and add another dimension to how students can judge their school as a 'critical friend'. Governors are well informed through a rigorous committee system and by regular headteacher reports. These offer an implicit snap-shot of the school's ethos. The mission statement, aims and objectives give a well formulated picture of the school's distinctiveness, although this is not identified so clearly in the actual text of significant school policies. This is a further restraint on secure and reflective monitoring and evaluation of the school's Christian character.

St. Margaret's Liverpool Church of England Voluntary Aided High School, Aigburth Road, Liverpool L17 6AB September 2007