

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Townsend Church of England Voluntary Aided Secondary School

High Oaks
St Albans
Hertfordshire
AL3 6DR

Diocese of St Albans

LA: Hertfordshire

SIAS Inspection: 12th-13th March 2008

Previous S23 Inspection: March 2004

URN: 117555

Headteacher: Mr. Wellbeloved

SIAS Inspector Name: Catherine Large

SIAS Inspector No: 482

School Context

Townsend Church of England Secondary School caters for pupils between the ages of 11 and 18. The school is situated to the north of St. Albans and draws its 836 students from over sixty primary schools. Originally established as a separate boys' and girls' school, its facilities were extended in the 1970s upon merger. The Heathlands School for the deaf has shared the school site formally since 1991 and now has 45 students in their Townsend secondary department. Subsequent building extended the facilities in the 1990s. It is a very popular and oversubscribed school. It has received a number of accreditations for its provision, including the Charter Mark for excellence in public service, Healthy Schools and awards in a range of subjects. High priority (60% of residual places) in the Admissions Policy is given to students on the basis of Foundation/Faith. The number of students from ethnic minority backgrounds is in line with national averages. The number of those claiming free school meals is well below national averages. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those in the integrated provision of Heathlands, is in line with national averages.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Townsend Secondary as a Church of England school are good with certain outstanding features

Townsend has a well established and distinctive Christian character and, as a church school, has an excellent impact on the personal development of its pupils. It is very committed to its 'Respect for all' policy and pursues a range of strategies to improve achievements for all groups in the school. Since the last inspection the school has been successful in improving the quality of religious education and collective worship although the long term absence through illness of a teacher has restricted progress in some aspects. The school recognises the need to promote further the Christian vision for the school and the potential of the staff to do this is outstanding.

Established strengths

- The strong commitment to the Christian ethos of the school, led by the headteacher, senior managers and governing body.
- The effectiveness of the 'Respect for all' policy which is reflected in the school's inclusion strategies and roots the high quality of relationships in core Christian values.
- The spiritual, moral and social development of students and their positive attitudes to religious education and collective worship.

- Links with the Cathedral and Abbey Church of St. Albans and Christian youth workers
- The provision of full course GCSE for all students in Years 10 and 11.

Focus for development

- Strengthen further the strong Christian identity of the school by establishing a team, representative of all stakeholders, to have responsibility for reviewing provision and impact and for proposing developments.
- Widen opportunities for students' participation in planning, leading and evaluating collective worship in school.
- Strengthen the specialist teaching team in religious education in order to support developments.

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

Students express confidence in their teachers and in the Christian ethos of the school. They recognise and value the care and support that they experience and respond positively in their learning and behaviour. Transfer arrangements are excellent, helping students from the diverse primary school communities to settle well. There are effective strategies in place to support the social and learning needs of all students. The 'Respect for all' policy sets the benchmark for learning and community. Students are adamant that issues of bullying are dealt with firmly and speedily. A clear programme for monitoring the effectiveness of teaching and learning brings benefit to all learners and the school has put in place a range of strategies to support the diverse needs of the students. For example, the school makes use of mentors for African – Caribbean and Muslim boys. There is a strong sense of community in the school and pastoral care is very effective. Relationships at all levels are outstanding. The Heathlands unit for the deaf is well integrated into the school community, students joining in some lessons and all mainstream students are given opportunities to undertake a course in sign language. Overall spiritual and moral development is outstanding. Students respond very well to a wide range of local, national and global charitable fund raising activities and to opportunities to take responsibility for themselves and others. They show very positive attitudes to the Christian values promoted by the school. Students have good opportunities to contribute to school life and to their own achievement through School Council and formalised interviews and surveys about their subjects. A well structured 'Learning for Life' curriculum programme makes a strong contribution to personal development. For students with religious convictions, there are opportunities for worship, for example, in the regular Communion services held in the school. During Ramadan, Muslim students are offered a prayer room. Sixth form students contribute very well to the life of the school, through mentorship schemes, links with form groups and the organisation of social activities.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Since the last inspection, the school has improved the quality of provision and opportunities for a daily act of collective worship for all. There is a coherent programme of themes which focuses on a range of broadly Christian values and makes links with the church calendar. It links themes for whole year group's worship to themes in the booklet given to teachers for their form group worship. Students are attentive and respond positively to the opportunities for prayer and reflection. Facilities in the hall have improved significantly since the last inspection, enabling leaders of worship to use focal points and images as an enhancement of their message. This also ensures that the deaf students are able to participate and understand more effectively. Worship observed during the inspection had a good impact on

the students. Whilst there are some variations in the response from students about the impact of their form based worship, there is a general recognition that worship is a regular and important feature of their school day. There has been some staff training on worship since the last inspection but the school recognises the need to strengthen further the monitoring and support of worship. A major and positive factor in the success of worship in the school is the involvement of a group of Christian youth workers, STEP, who regularly contribute to worship, to RE and to the Christian Union activities. A well established tradition in the school is the Cathedral services which take place on four occasions each year. These are well supported by the clergy and bring benefits to students in their understanding of Anglican life and practice. For example, some students help with sacraments, write and read prayers, read from the Bible and contribute to the music through the choir and orchestra. The Cathedral services are the only occasions in the year when the whole school is able to worship together because of the small school hall. Students respond well to the opportunities to take communion or receive a blessing. It is a major commitment of money and time by the school which reflects the importance it attaches to these occasions. On a day to day basis, students' active participation in worship is satisfactory depending on the opportunities provided by the leader. Students express a willingness to be more directly involved in the planning and delivery of worship and some would welcome a chance to contribute their ideas. The Christian Union meets regularly to extend the opportunities for students to worship together. There is good potential for further development as pupils and staff display positive attitudes.

The effectiveness of religious education is good

Religious education is well established and supported. Since the last inspection, there have been distinct improvements in the quality of planning and aspirations. For example, recent innovations have strengthened the Year 9 curriculum in response to diocesan and national developments. Overall, the curriculum is well balanced, taking good account of the school's church status and the expectations of the local Agreed Syllabus. Standards at Key Stage 3 are in line with national expectations. Students have strengths in applying religious teaching to everyday life and in voicing their opinions and beliefs. They show positive attitudes and behave well. Written work sometimes lacks detail and evaluative comment. By the end of Year 11, standards are at least in line with national averages and in the year previous to the inspection, results were well above national averages. This is commendable as all the year group follow and enter the full GCSE Religious Studies examination. Standards in the Sixth Form are above average. In lessons, Advanced level students display maturity and skill in analysing and applying the views of theologians and philosophers to real life issues. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning observed ranged from satisfactory to outstanding. The best teaching during the inspection was seen in the examination groups where the expertise of specialist staff had the greatest impact on learning. The subject benefits from the support of the STEP team of Christian youth workers. Students in Years 7-9 lack direct experience of other faiths through visits and visitors or by using opportunities for e-learning. Year 10 students do benefit from a day visit to a range of churches and a local mosque. Time allocations for the subject match those of similar schools and are currently under review as part of the school's proposals for the Key Stage 3 curriculum. The subject leader has vision and skill and there are solid strategies in place for the monitoring of teaching and learning. The department is well supported by the senior line manager. During the last eighteen months, the department has been without its full strength of specialist staff due to the long term absence of a colleague. Non-specialist staff and supply staff have been well supported but there have been some serious implications for developments and for maintenance of day to day teaching. In particular, the department's aim to improve students' understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses and to set targets to improve, has been impaired. Marking in some students' exercise books is inadequate. The school is well aware of the problems caused by the lack of a full specialist team and has given strong support while seeking actively to rectify the

situation.

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

There is strong support for the church status at all levels of leadership and management. The school's status is evident in documentation and in the many signs and symbols around the school. Plans are in progress to re-model the school's entrance hall and update other areas of display to enhance the identity of the school as a church school. Students are clear about the Christian ethos and many gave this as the reason for parental choice of the school. Since the last church school inspection, the school has addressed all the issues raised. There is good communication with parents and a very strong parents' group that supports the school in many ways, not least by fundraising. Links with feeder schools are excellent. The headteacher gives strong leadership and he, as well as other senior managers and the governing body, are very committed to the church status of the school and respond effectively to any issues that might appear to weaken it. For example, they campaigned, with some success, against the Local Authority's decision to withdraw funding for school buses. Links with the Cathedral are very good. Links with the wider church communities in the city are under-developed. Since the last inspection, the school has preserved its well established Christian ethos and this is evident in the quality of relationships and care and in its support for religious education and collective worship. The school is not complacent in seeking to improve. There is a good range of plans in place to strengthen further its Christian identity. In this, it has good support from the Diocesan education advisor and from the Cathedral. The school has shown its commitment to religious education and to its Christian context by making its bid for specialist school status in Humanities. At present it does not have a clear and secure monitoring and evaluation process in place for its overall self-evaluation as a church school, a process which draws on secure evidence and analysis. A group, representative of all stakeholders, could support the leadership and management team of the school in this area of development. School leadership has outstanding capacity to develop further the church ethos and status.

SIAS report March 2008 Townsend VA Secondary School, St. Albans, Herts. AL3 6DR