

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Aidan's Church of England High School

Oatlands Drive, Harrogate. North Yorkshire HG2 8JR

Diocese: Ripon & Leeds

Local authority: N/A

Date of inspection: 2nd October 2012

Date of last inspection: 17th October 2006

School's unique reference number: 121719

Headteacher: Mr John Wood

Inspector's name and number: Mr R D Masterton No. 483

School context

St Aidan's High School is significantly larger than average with 1964 students and is located in the centre of Harrogate admitting students from both the town and surrounding district. Some preference is given towards families of practising Christians. The proportion of students with learning needs and disabilities is below average as is the proportion of minority ethnic students. There is a shared sixth form with St John Fisher Roman Catholic High School. The school has specialist status in science and languages and became an academy in 2011. A new headteacher has been appointed since the last inspection.

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

St Aidan's fully embodies the vision for sustained excellence and effectiveness that stems from distinctive and inclusive church school provision. All groups of students succeed at all ages and the school deservedly has gained the trust and respect of the communities it serves. Its committed leaders and managers are already putting into effect the ways it can next improve.

Established strengths

- The school ethos of joy in learning and working together that is shaped by Christian values.
- Students' outstanding achievement, maturity, service to others and spirituality.
- The quality of collective worship and religious education that energise the life of the school.

Focus for development

- Further develop students' involvement in planning, leading and reviewing collective worship and extending their formal contribution to the running of the school.
- Promote the links with church academy and other schools to promote and share expertise in teaching, Religious Education, leadership and management.

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

Every aspect of school provision is shaped by Christian values. They are applied to the way that all subjects are conceived and taught. They are used to generate and sustain the excellent working relationships between all members of the school community. They underpin the mission of the school that inclusively enables every student to succeed. Students, their parents and staff at all levels recognise, celebrate and in their different roles develop and sustain the powerful Christian ethos of the school. An outstanding curriculum and expert teaching nurtures and values all aspects of students' growth and development and they are infused with Christian-inspired dimensions. This ranges from the rich use of devotional music to inspire collective worship, the inclusion of Christian ideas in curriculum subjects and goes right through to the way students are encouraged to initiate and lead activities as forms of service to their community through multifarious forms of extra-curricular activity. In this environment students learn quickly, grow to become responsible, caring members of the community and they truly flourish, academically and personally. Moreover they fully recognise how well St Aidan's shapes their development and they are very proud to be growing up in the school. The joyous daily work of the school is characterised by the way students are all known individually, the high priority given to individual students' needs and the culture at every level of serving each other. Extensive input from clergy governors and the chaplain offers a ministry to supplement and support personal well being. The resulting Christian ethos fashions students' spiritual development in very many ways. Their response becomes as equally important as the work of the staff in making the St Aidan's community a truly inspiring and uplifting environment in which to learn and work.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship makes a profound contribution to school life. Major events (that parents enjoy attending), year group assemblies held twice each week, Eucharist services in the school, and the morning registration 'Thought for the Day' all contribute, in different ways, to shaping the thoughts and actions of the school community. Collective worship offers students the opportunity to contribute creatively in different ways but especially through music. The outstanding school music provision has been extended with choirs and an ensemble that perform especially to inspire collective worship and thus to welcome students who wish to creatively contribute to worship and praise. Year group assemblies are carefully staged, well rehearsed and generate an anticipation of something special such as the way the life of Robert of Knaresborough was related in order to mobilise a response to inspire school harvest festival giving. (The extent of school charitable giving is staggering.) Students recall readily and enthuse over many of the acts of worship they have experienced, they willingly join in community hymn singing and parents tell of the way their children have spoken at home having been inspired by what they have experienced. The programme for collective worship is carefully planned by senior staff, new contributors are encouraged to lead, Anglican worship traditions are richly represented and a parallel programme supports form teachers leading the 'Thought of the Day'. The chaplain co-ordinates effective contributions from visiting clergy. Collective worship forms an essential part of other school activities such as a recently organised faith-based retreat. It is resourced well and it is unquestionably the single most important and recognisable Christian expression of the mission of the school.

The effectiveness of religious education is outstanding

Religious Education is the beacon subject in this school where achievement in all areas is outstanding. In 2012 every student reached an accredited standard in RE at age 16 and 97% of this year group gained a C or higher grade at GCSE, much higher than any national comparator. A level results in the sixth form are also very good with the proportion of students gaining high grades being significantly better than the national average. An expertly managed team of specialist teachers, who are well resourced, offer lessons where teaching is consistently good and frequently outstanding that students greatly enjoy: Year 9 students are helped to confront the stereotypes and prejudices surrounding refugees from a Christian perspective; Year 10 students learn of the reasons why Mark's gospel was written and sixth formers are introduced to the requirement for philosophic precision when meeting the writing and ideas of theological scholars. Gifted teaching, assessment and reporting in RE means that students make rapid progress in a subject that offers space for their own ideas and maturity to develop and which explicitly teaches the values the school holds dear. Through their RE, students understand clearly the social attitudes, responsibilities, commitments and fundamental values that stem from Christian faith and biblical teaching. In RE students also meet ideas from different cultures and faiths which are then supplemented by the many opportunities the school offers for them to travel and meet their peers and religious ideas in other contexts. RE forms a key element of students' spiritual growth and developing maturity. The subject, although compulsory, is well liked and this is demonstrated by how hard students work to succeed.

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

The strength and resilience of the governance and leadership of St Aidan's is evident in the way that excellence has been sustained over a long period. An uninterrupted record of outstanding provision and outcomes as a church school, even with changes in senior personnel, indicates strength of management at every level and the soundness of the way that staff are professionally developed to work effectively in the context of a church school. The outstanding qualities of the leadership team, reinforced with the challenging input from governors who are all passionately committed to school success have created a school whose ambition is achievement by everyone in many domains of human accomplishment. Inspection issues from the previous report have been tackled; rebuilding the chapel, changing the liturgy of school Eucharist and growing the contribution from students in collective worship and school organisation. There is expert, accurate, self critical analysis of school effectiveness using the tools of the National Society. Leaders and managers continually identify the correct priorities for improvement and instigate action long before issues can become serious. School staff are continually engaged in sustaining excellence and working for improvement driven by the highest levels of skill and personal commitment. The mission of the school is shared and cherished by parents, students, staff and governors and it is thus fully understandable why more and more people in the communities served by the school seek admission for local children. St Aidan's staff are increasing the commitment they give to supporting other church schools and their teachers to become more effective.