



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Peter's Church of England Voluntary Aided Secondary School

Quarry Lane
Exeter
Devon
EX2 5AP

Diocese: Exeter

Local authority: Devon
Date of inspection: 25th June 2009
Date of last inspection: 24th March 2006
School's unique reference number: 113553
Headteacher: Mr Mark Perry
Inspector's name and number: Mr Andrew Rickett 201

School context

St Peter's is a larger than average size comprehensive school whose children come from the city and surrounding area. The majority of the children are from a white British heritage. The number of children with learning difficulties or disabilities is above the national average. The school was granted initial specialist language status in 2003. They moved into new buildings in 2006 when the language status was reaffirmed.

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

St Peter's is a Christian community where students and adults can openly live out their faith. It is an inclusive community where all beliefs are respected and those with no faith are equally valued. This has a strong effect on the spiritual growth of the students and makes a vital contribution to their personal development.

Established strengths

- The commitment to promote the Christian character of the school.
- The acceptance and appreciation by the whole school community that Christianity is a normal part of some people's lives.
- The quality of religious education.

Focus for development

- Ensure the consistency of the quality of tutor group worship.
- Ensure provision is made so that all students may have the opportunity to access full course GCSE Religious Studies.
- Develop closer links with local church communities.

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

The strength of the Christian distinctiveness of St Peter's is in its encouragement of the

growth of the students' spiritual awareness. Throughout the inspection students spoke of their appreciation that the school provides them with many opportunities to discuss issues of faith and belief and that this is done in a spirit of openness and exploration. As one student said, 'we are informed of the various types of beliefs and left to make up our own mind but supported in that choice'. By achieving this so successfully the school lives out its Christian vision in its daily life and does so with integrity which recognises and respects the individual person. By creating the environment in which this can happen, an understanding has developed between all members of the school community that accepts Christianity as a normal part of someone's life. This is evidence of the progress the school has made since the last inspection. The Christian ethos has been made more appealing and there is a sense that to be spiritual is a good thing, that it is acceptable to explore this deeper dimension. This was evident in the way that students spoke about how important it is to have a spiritual awareness. For example, one student explained how we have a thirst for 'spiritual food' and that without it our lives are empty. Pupils are very well supported in their learning and those that have difficulties have a wide range of assistance to enable them to succeed. Pupils are very confident and articulate and are aware of their talents and abilities whilst also possessing a sense of humility. An important aspect of the school's approach to its Christian ethos is the work that it does with the international community. It successfully uses its language status as a way of fostering a better understanding between different groups of people and it actively seeks links with a range of diverse cultures so that this can happen.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Since the previous inspection, the place of collective worship in the life of the school has been significantly enhanced. The importance of collective worship in the life of the school is reflected in the commitment made to ensure that with the move to the new building, all students experience a daily act of worship. The school fulfils its legal requirements by doing this. A careful programme has been devised so that all students experience a variety of worship styles which include regular key stage acts of worship led by the chaplain and year group worship which is led by committed members of staff. Smaller tutor group acts of worship are supported by the chaplain who provides material that makes it possible for either staff or students to lead them. Students speak of these times as offering them something positive and especially appreciate the time to be still and reflect. There does however, need to be a greater consistency in the approach to tutor group worship. The acts of collective worship that takes place in the hall and are led by the chaplain, are clearly a special times set aside to worship God. A sacred place in the hall has been designated as the chapel and this is very highly respected by all members of the school community. The chapel creates an environment where students and staff are ready to show respect and reverence. Worship leaders whilst recognising that the focus is clearly on the religious aspect of the message, engage the students through the use of humour and so deliver the message in an appealing way. For example, in one act of worship observed the chaplain caused great amusement by trying to feed about 750 students with five loaves of bread and two fishes. However, the point of the story was very strongly made. Students say that worship themes are relevant to their lives and that that they particularly appreciate that school life is linked to spiritual growth. The school's commitment to its Christian ethos is seen in the regular celebration of school Eucharist which is attended by all students three times a year. Students recognise that this is an important part of the way through which they express their Christian ethos. Students say that prayer is an important part of being a Christian and that it is important to respect this. Responses to a recent questionnaire show that students however do not necessarily want more formal prayer. The chaplain has identified the need to widen the approach to prayer. It is an area that he is keen to explore with the student worship group and governors worship committee.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Standards in RE have been rising considerably for the last four years. The use of

differentiated assessments in Years 7-9 provides opportunities for students to attain higher levels. That they are successful in doing this is evident in the latest assessment data which shows that by the end of Year 9 students' attainment is now comparable with other core subjects and significantly above national expectations for RE. The number of students achieving higher levels at the end of Year 9 is particularly impressive. A greater accuracy in moderating student's work particularly in Years 7-9, has given a clearer picture of the very good progress that students make. Standards in Year 10 and 11 are outstanding. Results are excellent for those students taking the full course GCSE, being well above school targets and significantly exceeding national targets. Results for short course GCSE also show that students achieve above expectations. Students make excellent progress in RE throughout their time at the school and standards overall are outstanding. The profile of RE has been significantly enhanced during the past four years and the subject now has a high standing in the school curriculum. This is reflected in the number of students who take the full course GCSE which currently stands at approximately 26% of students. This number is growing and the school needs to consider how it can manage this success by ensuring that it can provide the opportunity for all students to have access to the full course. An imaginative and extremely successful series of enrichment activities ensure that there is an appropriate allocation of curriculum time for students to experience the RE syllabus. Students speak very favourably about these opportunities to enhance their understanding and regard them as essential elements in their learning about RE. For example, the recent visit of a Christian music group, which led a concert for all students, was very popular because it presented faith in a contemporary way that students could easily relate to. The overall quality of the teaching and learning seen during the inspection was very good. Lessons were very carefully planned. They moved at a good pace and had a good balance between direct teaching and student interaction through discussion.

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

The headteacher's personal commitment to the promotion of the Christian ethos is strong. He cares very much that it makes a difference to the lives of the students and ensures that the religious character of the school is a central part of the school vision. The governing body is very effective at monitoring the impact of collective worship and RE on the life of the school. They are passionate about developing the Christian ethos and care deeply that it is a living part of the school. The chaplain is making a considerable difference to the quality of collective worship in the school. He brings to it great integrity and this openness and genuineness have made it more accessible for all students. He is very highly regarded by the whole community and his commitment to his teaching has made him in addition an established and respected member of the RE teaching staff. He is strongly committed to encouraging both students and adults to develop a deeper spiritual awareness as they respond to the world around them and is keen to see this develop through tutorial sessions. The fact that he is an integral part of school life is testament to the support and encouragement that he receives from the staff in general. The commitment of staff towards the school's Christian character is something that is a strong feature of the school and which makes a considerable difference. The RE Coordinator leads her department superbly. Working together with her team, she has transformed the profile of RE and has made it a subject that students truly enjoy. It is a dynamic subject in the school and the Coordinator ensures that there is a good balance between a drive for even better standards and creating a learning environment where students feel that they are making good progress. The school is developing its links with local church communities. For example, the school prayer cycle is sent to local churches and the chaplain visits them as well as local schools. The leadership and management recognise that this is an area that could be developed further. Parents are very supportive of the school's Christian vision and particularly appreciate that its ethos gives their children space to make up their own minds about matters of faith.

