

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Venerable Bede Church of England (Aided) Secondary School,

Tunstall Bank,
Sunderland,
SR2 0RX.

Diocese of Durham

Local authority: Sunderland

Dates of inspection: 20th and 21st March 2012

Date of last inspection: 23rd January 2007

School's unique reference number: 133391

Headteacher: Mrs Gill Booth

Inspector's name and number: The Revd Nicholas Chamberlain 508

School context

The school is a community-focussed comprehensive serving the Ryhope and Silksworth area of Sunderland whose distinctive Christian ethos has far wider appeal. Smaller than some neighbouring secondaries the school has mainly White British students and a proportion of students that is known to be eligible for free school meals that is above average and rising. During the last three years there has been a significant change in personnel among the school's senior and middle leaders.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of the Venerable Bede Church of England Aided Comprehensive School as a Church of England school are outstanding

A tangible, inviting and stimulating Christian ethos and meticulous and thought-provoking worship ensure that the distinctiveness and effectiveness of the Venerable Bede School are outstanding. Religious Education has been transformed. The school's leadership expresses the model of the Jesus who serves others first. In this school it is actions that really speak.

Established strengths

- The school's outstanding ethos establishes it as a Christian community that is safe, happy, affirming and with a clear commitment to living out its values in practice.
- Worship is creative in approach, meticulously organised and reviewed, and genuinely sustaining for students and adults alike.
- Outstanding organisation, assessment procedures and curriculum planning allied with very high quality teaching ensure that Religious Education is thoroughly enjoyed by students and leads to outstanding levels of achievement.
- Senior leadership of the highest calibre, inspiring creative response from all other colleagues and stakeholders, has transformed attitudes and expectations within the school.

Focuses for development

- To develop the courtyard and school hall as areas for spiritual reflection and worship.
- To extend Religious Education provision even further by developing the school as a regional centre of excellence for the subject.

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

The clear message from everyone with whom I spoke is that this is a happy school in which people are valued, doors are open, ideas are welcomed, learning is supported and respect is mutual. Compassion allied to fairness ensures that behaviour is generally very good. It is particularly impressive to note that those students who are aware that they have personal or behavioural issues to address act on their own awareness with the support of their peers and the subtle but skilled accompaniment of the staff. For example, if a student knows that he or she needs 'time out', then he simply leaves the room, a phone call is made, support is on hand and learning continues, both for the rest of the class and for the student who has withdrawn for a while. The drop-in facilities in which breakfast is available ease the way in and out of school for those who may arrive hungry or who have little opportunity for socialising at home. The bistro atmosphere in the dining hall, in which staff and students sit with each other, the engaging and thoughtful visual displays in the corridors and atrium

(including the video version of the worship theme of the week), the art works, the smart uniform code, the absence of mobile phones, the out of school clubs, the links with Lesotho, the charities supported, all help to build common identity and purpose. The atmosphere for learning and for personal and spiritual development is therefore outstanding. The students are proud of their school and the adults are committed to it. Everyone is treated as an equal. Christian values and practices underpin every aspect of the school's life but faith is never forced and the result is an environment in which there is genuine enquiry about the big questions of life. When something significant happens about which the students have views and feelings, such as the collapse of the footballer Fabrice Muamba during the inspection, opportunity is given to express these feelings in prayer, and some thought-provoking notices appear in display to help this process. Working with very tight resources, the ethos of the school is outstanding. It could be even more so if the projected development of the central courtyard as a reflective area could be achieved.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Conducted in a variety of venues and styles, there is nevertheless a coherence to worship that is very impressive. The weekly theme, expressed via video screens, other displays and during worship in different size groups is lovingly prepared and creatively developed. All the material that is provided and the worship that is offered is highly appropriate for the age of the students, their interests and their needs while also speaking to the adults of the school. Regular Eucharistic worship is valued by the whole community as is the contribution of friends and visitors. The planning, delivery and review of worship is a genuinely collaborative endeavour. The notion of the 'body of Christ' which emphasises the interconnectedness and genuine value of every person finds expression in the different contributions that so many make to the school's worshipping life. Students are not only engaged by worship, they lead and shape it and desire to do so even more.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Outstanding attainment levels, highly positive attitudes towards the subject, pioneering work in introducing Personalised Spiral Learning and exceptional staff commitment all ensure that Religious Education is now a leading department in the school. Students speak candidly of their enthusiasm for RE. Encouraged to learn and to explore their own and others' beliefs in lessons they speak of how what they study in class 'stays with you through the day'; a development that they warmly welcome. Commenting on the transformation that has occurred in this subject they now invite even greater dialogue with adults and teachers both in and out of lessons: 'nothing is forced on us, the students enjoy it so much that they want to join in, the adults should be more open about their own beliefs'. – This last comment indicates how safe the students feel and the outstanding impact that their learning is having on them. Much of this transformation can be attributed to the way in which the department head has consolidated and led his team. The school has much to offer other schools in RE.

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

The Venerable Bede has made rapid positive progress since the last SIAS inspection. Much of this is attributed by many in the school to the impact of the senior leadership team and most especially to the Head. She would point to the commitment and achievement of many other people. My assessment of the evidence is that by trusting and empowering the staff, by being fair with the students, by expecting high standards from herself first and only then of others, the Headteacher has lovingly reshaped what was good about the school and used these positive values and underlying ethos to lay firm foundations for the future. The school has an exceptionally clear assessment of its strengths, weaknesses and capacity to improve and there is a genuine commitment to succeed for the sake of the students that is heart-warming and authentically Christian. All points of development from the last inspection have been achieved. The Governing Body is a decisive contributor to the school's ethos. The Deputy Head who has particular responsibility for assisting the head teacher in developing the church school ethos, leads the Christian Ethos group and is another key contributor to the school's ethos, worship and programme for spiritual development. The close links with local parishes and clergy that were previously noted have been maintained. The achievement of the school's leadership and management in implementing Christian-focussed distributed leadership has had outstanding impact and should ensure that the Venerable Bede will be a purposeful and forward-looking institution capable of further outstanding growth.

