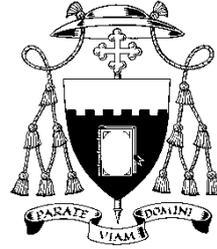




Diocese of Southwark



Diocese of Arundel and Brighton

INSPECTION REPORT

St Bede's School

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D/ES Number: 9364622

Headteacher: Mr Christopher Curtis

Chair of Governors: Mr Peter Townsend

Canonical Inspection under Canon 806 on behalf of the Bishop of Arundel & Brighton
and inspection of Denominational Education under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005

Date of inspection: 22nd-23rd October 2012
Date of previous inspection: 12th-13th December 2006

Lead Inspector: Mr Nicholas McKemey
Associate Inspector: Mr Peter Ward

Description of School

St Bede's is a larger than average (1669 students) voluntary aided ecumenical church school with a strong sixth form, serving a very wide geographical area. St Bede's foundation trust unites Roman Catholic, Anglican and Free Church traditions to provide an ecumenical Christian education. A majority of students are White British with most minority ethnic groups represented in small numbers. A smaller proportion of students than found nationally are eligible for the pupil premium or have special educational needs, reflecting the local norm. Over 90% of students come from families where at least one parent is a regular attendee at worship.

The school's music specialism has broadened into a new Leading Edge programme – as with 200 such outstanding schools nationally.

The school has accepted the Secretary of State's invitation to become an academy and is in process of applying.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1: Outstanding; Grade 2: Good; Grade 3: Satisfactory; Grade 4: Inadequate

The overall effectiveness of St Bede's at meeting the needs of students through the distinctiveness of its ecumenical character is good with certain outstanding features.

St Bede's has a footprint of outstanding practice in the care and nurture of students. The parents' response to the school's provision is overwhelmingly positive. "A gift from God" is how one parent described the support received at times of difficulty. This is habitually prompt and pro-active. Students' behaviour, inter-personal relationships and attitudes to learning and worship are universally outstanding despite there being limited opportunities for them to reach their full potential in Religious Education or contribute significantly to some of the formal assemblies.

All members of the school community give enormous appreciation to the role of the chaplaincy and the accessibility of chaplains in times of anxiety and loss. The chaplaincy is integral to the faith life of the school and its ecumenical ethos. The Religious Education lessons in which the Eucharist is embedded and explained for Anglican and Catholic students deepen faith and theological understanding.

Grade 2

Improvement since the last inspection

There has been considerable development in the life and facilities of St Bede's in recent years. The previous denominational [Section 23] inspection took place in 2006 and identified four areas in which it made specific recommendations. These remain areas for development in 2012.

What the school should do to improve further

Realise defined Christian values in distinctive policies and practices to enrich the Christian life of the school.

Develop the monitoring and evaluation of the Christian life of the school to ensure consistent appropriate high quality provision.

Ensure student participation in the preparation and celebration of daily prayer and worship at assemblies and in tutor groups

Ensure the consistent celebration of the daily act of worship in tutor groups

Review the Key Stage 3 and 4 and 16+ Religious Education provision, curriculum and examination specifications so as to ensure a comprehensive coverage of Christianity consistent with an ecumenical school, mindful of the guidance of the Anglican and Catholic dioceses, and an introduction to other significant religions.

Raise the consistent quality of teaching and learning in Religious Education to at least 'good' and specifically [1] use ICT more effectively to improve learning and [2] develop 'assessment for learning' so as to improve monitoring of progress and target setting

The Christian Life of the School

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in developing the Christian life of the school is good with certain outstanding features

The Governing Body, Headteacher and senior staff share a clear and focused vision that directs the life of this distinctive ecumenical school and is embraced by staff and students. The vision and mission objectives are rooted in Gospel teaching and lived out in the daily life of the school. As the school grows and develops, its leadership and management continue to review how specific Christian values can and should inform policies and practices of all aspects of life in an ecumenical school.

The senior leaders are effective in fostering the spiritual and moral development of students through the provision of worship, Religious Education and codes of behaviour but above all by the quality of individual care for each individual shown by the staff of the school. St Bede's students are noted for the maturity of their conduct and inter-personal skills when with their families, peers and friends or in public.

The school runs very smoothly but its quality assurance and self-evaluation procedures fail to identify precisely all elements key to the Christian life of the school. The schools' relationship with church communities and dioceses is of uneven quality, depending on personal contacts more than an established partnership strategy.

Grade 2

The Prayer Life of the School and quality of collective worship is good

The students greatly value the prayer life of the school and show great interest in the features of the different traditions. Most students understand the purposes of prayer and prayer is an integral feature in their personal lives, often complementing experience in their church membership.

Prayer is an integral part of the life of the school and each student has their own school prayer book. Prayer and worship are a feature of the regular weekly programme of assemblies and of tutor time when there is no assembly. In addition periodically each tutor group has a prayer service in the school chapel with one of the school chaplains. In assemblies and tutor groups the range of forms of prayer offered is limited and routine. There is also a range of informal and voluntary gatherings, where students who attend experience a wide range of approaches to prayer. During the school year there is an established range of activities including retreats and visits to such places as Canterbury and Northumberland, the land of St Bede, designed to root prayer and worship in the daily life of students. The chaplaincy team of Anglican, Catholic (appointment pending following a recent resignation) and Free Church lay and ordained chaplains are highly valued members of the school community and integral to the ecumenical character of the school and facilitate both ecumenical and denominational prayer and worship. Monitoring of the provision and evaluation of the impact of prayer and worship takes place but needs to be developed further in order to ensure that prayer and worship take place as planned and continue to address the contemporary school community.

Grade 2

St Bede's is outstanding at promoting community cohesion and meeting the needs of all learners through its Christian ecumenical character

Every aspect of the schools operation is highly effective in generating respect and understanding for those of a different tradition or faith. The ecumenical character of St Bede's provides a culture of dialogue and harmony between those of different traditions as students have the theological literacy to explore and understand their peers' beliefs and opinions. It is clear from the responses of parents, staff and students that students from St Bede's progress into the worlds of higher education and employment as articulate citizens with a genuine moral compass.

The school successfully realises its aspiration of being a harmonious ecumenical Christian learning community in which students and staff irrespective of denomination or faith are valued and respected. Prayer and worship reflects the ecumenical character of the school while providing for denominational celebrations reflecting the Church's year. In formal and informal settings, members of different faith communities explore their shared and distinct beliefs, celebrate and work together for disadvantaged members of society. Leaders and managers at all levels ensure that, while respecting denominational differences, there is a distinct ecumenical character to school life.

Grade 1

Religious Education

Achievement and Standards in Religious Education are satisfactory

From 11 to 16 some students' achievement approaches their full potential and most students make acceptable progress and gain knowledge, understanding and skills at a satisfactory rate. Attainment in Key Stage 3 is broadly in line with that achieved by students in other subjects while in Key Stage 4 it is below that achieved in English and Mathematics. The percentage achieving GCSE Religious Studies grades A*-C has declined in recent years.

In the Sixth form some students' achievement approaches their full potential but most are making only moderate progress. Achievement in GCE A Level Religious Studies is satisfactory. Sixth form students generally display a good ability to reflect spiritually, think ethically and theologically, and have an awareness of the demands of religious commitment in everyday life.

Grade 3

The effectiveness of teaching and learning in Religious Education is satisfactory

The students have positive attitudes to learning in Religious Education. They show enthusiasm and curiosity in lessons but progress slowly when the tasks set are undemanding. The targets they are seeking to achieve are insufficiently challenging to ensure the highest possible outcomes, especially for the most able at all ages in the school. Teachers have a secure knowledge of the Religious Education curriculum and course requirements. The best teaching is either good or outstanding but a significant proportion does not match the abilities of the students. There are examples of GCSE students being taught at a level appropriate for younger students. There is little stimulation of independent study so that by the Sixth Form students are not applying the study skills required. In the best lessons assessment is skilfully used to underpin progress and students are aware of exactly what they have to do to meet their targets. In other instances tasks and assessment are not accurately matched to ability and students are hazy about the level they are on and how they can progress. ICT is not widely used to in engaging ways to further learning. At times encouragement is devalued by the acclamation of unremarkable contributions but in the most effective teaching praise is used critically to raise knowledge and understanding.

Grade 3

The quality of the curriculum in Religious Education is satisfactory at meeting the needs of the students

The overall content of the Religious Education curriculum is satisfactory. The best learning is stimulated when teachers plan and deliver units of study that challenge students to study and reflect in depth on the subject matter. In some cases the undemanding structure of the lesson resulted in students working well within their capabilities.

The curriculum in Religious Education provides an introduction to several world religions including Christianity, which specifically addresses the life and teaching of Jesus and the Christian Church and its beliefs, celebrations and way of life. Students make progress in their knowledge, skills and understanding and become aware of the demands of religious commitment in everyday life. The curriculum contributes to the spiritual and moral development of the students. 25% of curriculum time in Years 7-9 is devoted to denominational Religious Education, with pupils attending lessons with a distinct Anglican, Catholic or Free Church

syllabus. In Years 10-11, all students are prepared for GCSE Religious Studies examinations. All students study general Religious Education, known as Philosophy of Ideas, fortnightly in Year 12 and attend two days devoted to Religious Education in Year 13.

The content of the Anglican denominational Religious Education is excellent, enabling those of this tradition to know and understand their history, tenets and liturgy. A Year 8 student was heard to reflect on the nature her home church's services in the light of what she had learned at school.

Catholic denominational Religious Education allows Catholic students to study distinct Catholic beliefs such as the sacraments in Year 8. Denominational and curriculum religious education together does not fully meet the requirements of the Curriculum Directory for Catholic Schools and Colleges or the curriculum requirements of the Catholic Bishops' Conference.

Free Church denominational Religious Education enables those of this tradition to learn about their history, beliefs and practices and to meet members of their local clergy.

Grade 3

The leadership and management of Religious Education is outstanding

St Bede's has recently appointed a leader for Religious Education who has the secure subject knowledge and professional attributes to take the subject forward. The department is led with a clear and enthusiastic vision and a sympathetic understanding of the distinctive requirements of an ecumenical school. Their accurate analysis of the department's strengths and areas for development is informing a wide range of measures in order to promote high standards. They model good practice and are focused on improving learning and teaching for all students. The curriculum is being reviewed and changes have already been introduced. Clear line management and reporting enable the Governors to discharge their responsibilities in respect of Religious Education.

Grade 1