

Board of Education

Church House
Cathedral Close
Blackburn BB1 5AA

Tel (01254) 503070 Fax (01254) 699



**Diocese of
Blackburn**

 THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

St Christopher's Church of England High School, Accrington

Address: Queen's Road West, Accrington, BB5 4AY

Telephone Number: 01254 232992

Fax Number: 01254 355215

Status: Voluntary Aided
Diocese of Blackburn
Local Authority: Lancashire

Type of school: Secondary
Age range of pupils: 11 - 16
Gender of pupils; Mixed

Chair of governors; Mr F Whitehead

Headteacher: Mr A Coates

Inspection date; 31st January – 1st February 2007

Date of previous inspection: 16th – 19th April 2002

Inspector; The Revd Canon Dr P Shepherd

Director of Education Revd. Canon Peter J Ballard

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Summary Judgement

St Christopher's is an outstanding Church of England secondary school which has been able to realise a clear Christian vision impacting strongly and positively on the quality of the education provided. It is in many ways an exemplary model of a Church of England school. This is due to the enormous commitment of staff and governors, supported by the enthusiastic support of its families, to the delivery of excellent education within a community immersed in Christian values.

School Context

St Christopher's is an 11-16 CE Voluntary Aided school of around 950 pupils situated in a socially deprived area of Accrington. 76% of pupils are drawn from the local catchment or similarly deprived areas, and the school is particularly committed to raising aspirations and providing real life opportunities for these pupils. The school also takes pupils from many other areas and is heavily oversubscribed. Parents are strongly supportive. The number of families taking up free school meals is relatively low. Pupil attainment on entry is slightly above the national average. Examination results at GCSE are very good, and have improved significantly in recent years.

Established Strengths

- The visionary leadership of the Headteacher and the support of staff, governors and parents in promoting a school with a distinctive and authentic Christian character.
- The quality of relationships within the school community.
- The provision of chaplaincy and pastoral care.
- The maintenance of an efficient and effective education which meets the needs of all pupils, and does so despite a relatively low school budget share.

Focus For Development

- Senior staff and governors to put more formal systems in place to monitor and evaluate the impact of Worship and RE on pupils' spiritual development.
- Tutorial worship to be more carefully monitored in order to ensure that all children experience a meaningful act of worship each day.
- The RE Department to use the established assessment procedures in religious education more effectively to inform future planning

How well does the school through its distinctive Christian character meet the needs of all learners?

The school is outstanding in the way that its distinctive Christian character impacts on and meets the needs of all learners. School policies are overtly Christian documents and informed by the deep faith of those responsible for them. Pupils are in no doubt as to the expectations the school has regarding how the Christian life is to be lived both within and without the school community. Pupils' differing needs, abilities and interests are met by a creative approach to the curriculum and a wide range of extra curricular activities, and this is supported and enhanced by a strong and effective pastoral system. An active school council ensures that pupils are fully involved in considering how their school community can be constantly developed and improved. Pupils are friendly and generally behave well. They feel safe and secure within the school environment and speak warmly of the friendship of teachers, and of the effectiveness with which any difficulties are dealt with. The chaplaincy team is used well (and appreciated) not only for leading worship but also in providing pastoral support to designated year groups. Levels of personal development are high and all kinds of achievement are recognised and rewarded. Of particular note is the celebration of the 'pupils of the month', chosen against a wide range of positive criteria. Pupil attendance is considerably above average and demonstrates their satisfaction with their school and their commitment to investing in their own education. Teachers have been proactive in identifying the spiritual, moral, social and cultural strands of their own subjects, and as a result pupils are able to take a holistic view of the curriculum, recognising how every part of their school life is related to the overriding objective of active Christian discipleship. A year 9 Spirituality Day was clearly a great success and had a profound impact on many pupils. The school's commitment to service is represented in part by its wide ranging and very successful charitable activities. The school's code of conduct is firmly based on Christian moral and spiritual values such as justice, forgiveness and reconciliation. This means that when pupils do find themselves in trouble, they are both encouraged and enabled to make a fresh start. Christian symbols are to be found around the school, but apart from these the Christian ethos of the school is clear to all who experience it. The school has provided a small

but very comfortable chapel, which pupils may use for private prayer, particularly in times of difficulty or grief. A Youth Alpha course was described with particular fervour by a group of pupils, who had clearly grown in their faith because of this experience.

What is the impact of collective worship on the school community?

The impact of collective worship on the school is good. Worship is clearly central to the life of the school. It is well planned and resourced, and good records are maintained. There is at present only informal and somewhat limited evaluation of the impact of worship on pupils. Acts of worship are generally well led and sometimes inspirational, and pupils clearly enjoy them and participate reasonably well. An act of worship with pupils in Years 7 and 8 used a Disney video clip to good effect, as pupils were challenged to think about the implications of being stewards of God's creation. In another Year 7 act of worship on the same theme, pupils spoke well and sometimes movingly about their pets. Pupils know their adopted school prayer and are able to respond to traditional Anglican greetings, but there are not sufficient opportunities for personal prayer and reflection in evidence. Staff attend worship and sing with vigour although pupils do not always display the same confidence. The physical setting for worship in the Studio is not conducive to pupils' spiritual development and in the main hall the worship leader is not sufficiently audible without amplification. Special occasions during both the Church's year and pupils' school lives are usefully marked with regular communion services for various groups. There is a strong Anglican flavour to the worship and the little book of prayers given to every pupil in Year 7 is to be commended. There are good links with local churches and a strong and productive ecumenical dimension is evident. Visits by groups such as 'the Life Team' are particularly valued by pupils, who spoke of them with great enthusiasm and warmth. Worship is organised via year groups, combined year groups, and forms. Form/tutorial worship is less secure, and children report varied use of this time by staff, not always with a worship element. This aspect of worship requires particularly careful monitoring and rather more guided support for staff.

How effective is the religious education?

Religious education is good. The school follows, in part, the Lancashire Agreed Syllabus. 50% of the syllabus for Years 7 & 8 focuses on Christianity. Pupils begin the GCSE syllabus in Year 9 because the time allocation in Years 10 & 11 is less than that given to equivalent GCSE subjects. Otherwise the time allocation for RE meets the recommended minimum 5%. The vast majority of pupils take a GCSE in Religious Studies. There is an issue as to whether the early start of GCSE is at the expense of the loss of certain foundational elements which the full Key Stage 3 entitlement would provide. RE is given a fair cut of a particularly small financial settlement. The Head of Department is to be commended on his success in gaining additional funds outside the system. However, a number of older textbooks do need quite urgent replacement, as they do little to enhance the subject. Pupils are, nevertheless, enthusiastic about RE and report their enjoyment of it. Departmental staff are clearly committed to their work and generally produce good, competent lessons, particularly reflected in GCSE results well above the national and the school average. Visits from outside speakers enhance pupils' learning. A Year 7 lesson creatively utilised pupils' experience of body language to help them understand Muslim prayer practices. Teachers have put in place effective systems of assessment and utilise levelling in order to help pupils understand what standards they are achieving. However, there is only limited evidence that this information effectively informs teachers' future planning and differentiation is patchy. As a result there is some evidence that pupils, particularly the more able, are not always sufficiently challenged. Some low level indiscipline, which was not always dealt with effectively, was observed; as a result some learning was unnecessarily disrupted. Teachers sometimes appeared reluctant to take 'risks' when pupils raised interesting, albeit difficult questions, preferring instead to keep to the planned agenda. As a result, some RE lessons observed missed important opportunities whereby pupils could be enabled to reflect personally on immensely important issues: a vital part of RE's contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development. A lesson on 'care for our planet' made good use of video material, and the follow-up discussion enabled pupils to display knowledge gained through other subjects. Pupils spoke warmly of their RE teachers' approachability and commitment. They showed a good grasp of the Bible, both stories and interpretation, but their knowledge of Christian history and of some of the worldwide Christian traditions was more limited. The Governing Body has no formal link with the RE Department.

How effective are the leadership and management of the school as a church school?

The leadership and management of the school are outstanding. This begins with the Head's vision and personal faith commitment, both of which are articulated clearly to both staff and pupils, and in which he

is strongly supported by his senior team and the governing body. Pupils, too, are given opportunities to lead, and the school council members form an impressive, committed and appreciative group. Governors have a clear understanding of their role, and exercise it with great skill and effectiveness. They clearly fulfil the role of 'critical friend' ensuring that the professional staff are both supported and challenged. Staff recruitment policy is based on sound principles, and applicants for posts at the school are left in no doubt about the distinctive Christian ethos of the school which they are required to support. Parents, too, are fully consulted on matters of significant school policy, and the parents interviewed expressed total confidence in the Head and his staff. The school evaluates its work, particularly its Christian distinctiveness, with great thoroughness, and improvement planning is rigorous and secure. The school has benefited from its partnership with Diocesan officers, and the Head continues to nurture his contacts with the wider family of church schools. The school has productive and supportive links with the local Christian community.