



St Aidan's Church of England High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 121719
Local Authority North Yorkshire
Inspection number 292213
Inspection date 17 October 2006
Reporting inspector Susan Bowles HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Oatlands Drive
School category	Voluntary aided		Harrogate
Age range of pupils	11–18		North Yorkshire HG2 8JR
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01423 885814
Number on roll (school)	1833	Fax number	01423 884327
Number on roll (6th form)	614		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Claire Kelley
		Headteacher	Mr Dennis Richards
Date of previous school inspection	18 November 2002		

Age group	Inspection date	Inspection number
11–18	17 October 2006	292213

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors. A section 48 inspection was carried out on the same day. The inspectors met with a range of staff, pupils and students. A number of brief observations of lessons were conducted. Inspectors visited assembly and form times, restaurants and extra activities. Discussions with some staff and nearly a thousand questionnaire responses from parents further informed the writing of this report.

Description of the school

St Aidan's Church of England High School is a specialist science college and an international school located near the centre of Harrogate in North Yorkshire. The sixth formers are part of an ecumenical associated sixth form of over 900 students, the rest coming from the neighbouring Saint John Fisher Catholic High School and other schools in the area. Pupils are admitted from a large number of primary schools, many of which are some distance away. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average. The attainment of students on entry is well above average. A few pupils come from minority ethnic groups, speak English as an additional language, or are looked-after children. The proportion with statements of special educational needs is slightly below average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Parents, pupils and staff are very clear that St Aidan's is an outstanding school in all respects and inspectors fully agree. Standards are consistently and exceptionally high, and this includes the extent to which pupils develop broader interests and personal qualities. In a climate of all-round high expectations, pupils are known as individuals and highly effective efforts are made to ensure that each one makes the best possible progress. They are happy at school and appreciate the Christian values which imbue it. St Aidan's has twice before been judged outstanding. Since then, specialist status in science and recognition as an international school have helped the school enhance its resources further. It is making the most of all of them, as is easily seen in the well used library and heard from the equally well used African drums. It is excellently led, has dealt with all areas raised in the previous inspection and constantly seeks out opportunities to do better.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Parents, teachers and students believe that the associated sixth form is something special and inspectors agree. It provides an outstanding all-round education for its students, founded on high expectations. Standards are very high and students' achievement is outstanding. Students value the 'family feel' of it. It uniquely maintains the identity of the two separate schools, yet operates as one highly successful unit. A shared, distinctive religious character underpins the ethos, resulting in an environment where students feel valued and are able to make terrific progress. It successfully achieves its aim of providing a Christian environment in which all students have the opportunity to fulfil their academic potential. Excellent value for money is achieved by sharing resources, staff expertise and experience and through the specialist status.

Students have superb attitudes to learning. Relationships between teachers and students are excellent, and are founded on mutual respect and trust. Examination results have risen year-on-year, testimony to exceptionally high quality teaching. Teachers are subject experts; they provide interesting tasks, extensive opportunities for independent and personalised learning and a strong focus on examination preparation.

Students regard the sixth form as a 'half-way house' between school and university. They particularly like the 'mix of people', which they feel prepares them well for making new friends and adapting to future university life. A significant number of students continue their studies into higher education, including the best universities in the country.

The sixth form councils represent the views of the student body very effectively. They actively raise money for charities and campaign for healthier living within school. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is outstanding as a result of countless opportunities to explore different beliefs, artistic events, high-level

debates and social gatherings. As a result, students are becoming caring individuals and responsible citizens.

The two senior management teams work closely together to operate a fully integrated sixth form with an excellent curriculum and a clear vision of strengths and areas for development. As a result of their inspirational management and the sterling work of the senior tutors, results have improved and the curriculum now offers a rich diversity of choice. More and more students are attracted into the sixth form.

What the school should do to improve further

- The school has outstanding capacity to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Achievement is excellent and continues to improve. Pupils start with attainment which is well above the national level, and make very good progress throughout their time in the school. In 2005, their outstanding academic achievement by age 16 placed the school in the top 6% nationally. A high proportion gained five or more good GCSEs including English and mathematics, and early indications are that this proportion has risen to 87% in 2006. Achievement is consistently outstanding in mathematics, and continues to improve. Students start in the sixth form with a wide range of prior attainment, and make excellent progress. There is no significant variation between groups of pupils. Boys overall do as well as girls. The school effectively overcomes obstacles to progress for the few with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, vulnerable pupils and those at risk of disaffection, who achieve well.

Achievement is outstanding in the broader sense, too. Beyond lesson times, the school fizzles with music, sport and drama, while displays and use of the library reflect pleasure in wider reading, creative writing and art. Many pupils experience the satisfaction of performing publicly at very high levels.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils enjoy coming to school and their attendance and behaviour are excellent. They have very positive attitudes to learning and speak enthusiastically about all the opportunities that the school offers. The uptake of the range of extra-curricular activities and visits is very high.

Younger pupils are occasionally restless and concentration can falter, though excellent behaviour is maintained. As pupils move through the school, this inattention disappears: pupils concentrate fiercely and are fully involved in their learning. The excellent

relationships between staff and pupils underpin the success of teaching and learning. Many of the exchanges between teachers and pupils are huge fun and enjoyed by all.

Pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is highly valued by parents and a strength of the school. Year 7 pupils speak glowingly about assemblies being 'fun' and Year 10 pupils comment on the importance of Christianity in the ethos and atmosphere within school. Pupils develop a strong sense of responsibility and an understanding of global concerns. They work extremely hard for charities, often on their own initiative.

Pupils understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle and appreciate the school's emphasis on providing excellent, highly nutritious food and drinks, both at lunchtime and through the day. They feel safe in school and appreciate the need for keeping safe outside school.

The excellent examination results provide a very good foundation for most pupils' future economic well-being. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 who are in danger of losing interest in school, follow a work-related learning programme that is carefully tailored to their needs. The school provides good careers guidance and work experience and is now introducing more opportunities for pupils to take part in activities involving enterprise and business.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils' excellent outcomes are the result of outstanding all-round provision. The great majority of teaching is good or excellent. Teachers pass on their excellent subject knowledge very well, and most use a lively variety of interesting and challenging activities and offer good opportunities for group and independent learning. Though a few lessons are more pedestrian, they are still effective. Adults demonstrate the best professional values. Pupils are willing to work hard: they collaborate and discuss well and take great care with their written and practical work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum meets the needs of all pupils very well, and is kept under review. Groups of pupils who make slower progress in mathematics and those taking combined science courses have raised their grades in GCSE examinations following the introduction of better tailored courses. Provision for information and communication technology has much improved, with discrete teaching and purposeful use of new technology by pupils and teachers across the curriculum. The school usefully tracks the minority who do not participate in its many extra activities, in order to remove obstacles and cater for

the range of interests. As enthusiasm and proficiency grows, the school has provided further group activities, some run with the help of enthusiastic ex-pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school provides outstanding care, guidance and support for its pupils. As one parent, among many, says: 'The pastoral care is second to none; all staff are extremely approachable and any problems are dealt with straight away with kindness and consideration.' Nowhere is this care more obvious than in the school's exemplary dealings with vulnerable pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In this school, every child really does matter; every pupil is treated as an individual and the school goes to great lengths to meet each pupil's needs, whether in adjusting the curriculum for individuals in Years 10 and 11, making arrangements with other schools or colleges or ensuring that all pupils are enabled to take part in important activities. Arrangements for child protection are in place and the procedures for risk assessment are used as a model of good practice in the local area. The school's care extends, importantly, to ensuring that pupils make the best possible progress. While most pupils cause little concern in this respect, the few who do cause concern receive much effective support. Reports to parents now make clear what pupils need to do next to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The excellent quality of leadership and management is highly significant to the effectiveness, efficiency and inclusiveness of the school. Its hallmark is the constant search for ways to make small but significant improvements. It can explain how high standards have been sustained and improved, and recognises where there is further headroom for improvement of achievement. The governors, headteacher and senior management team work well together to evaluate and give a clear direction. Senior staff lead by example, modelling the concern for each individual which is shown by the whole staff and mirrored by the pupils' consideration and cooperation. They manage projects, such as reforming catering to change eating habits, successfully. The improvement plans make good use of evidence, including surveys and comparisons with challenging benchmarks. Those responsible for subject leadership are well supported in self-review and developing the professional skills of staff. The school balances a push for consistency with respect for the individuality of good teaching. This approach is improving the quality of provision and raising achievement still further.

The school has fully addressed the points raised by previous inspection. It has made strong progress on its strategic plans, including the development of extended services giving pupils access to high quality refreshment and learning opportunities before and

after the normal school day. There are no weaknesses in arrangements to ensure that children are safeguarded. By making very good use of its resources, staff expertise and experience, specialist status and partnership with others, the school provides excellent value for money.

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	1
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	1	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

I am writing to thank you for contributing to the recent inspection of your school and to summarise our findings. I am grateful for the many ways in which you helped us in our work, particularly those who guided us around the school, met us for discussions, and showed us their work. I am also grateful to the many parents who gave us their overwhelmingly positive views through the questionnaire.

We think yours is an outstandingly good school. It helps you to achieve exceptionally well, not only in your examinations, but as people. You have exceptionally good opportunities, helped by the school's specialist status in science and its international dimension, and you make the most of them. You work hard in lessons and your commitment to the many activities you are involved in is impressive. Your behaviour is excellent, and your attitudes to learning grow better the longer you are in the school. We could see how you act on your concern for others in the school, the local community and the wider world.

You told us that you feel very well supported by the school, and we can see why: each one of you is important in the eyes of the headteacher and all the adults in the school. They do an excellent job in helping each one of you do the best you can. Having sampled the school's great catering, we can see why so many of you have adopted healthy lifestyles. You enjoy most lessons, and we think you are taught very well, but we agree with you that a few lessons could be more varied and interesting, and this is something your teachers are working on. We also feel that even more can be done to give you opportunities for enterprise education and the headteacher agrees. We are confident that your school will continue to seek out ways to improve itself, and that you will play your part.

With best wishes for the future.