

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

Richard Coates Church of England Middle School

Thornhill Road,
Ponteland,
Newcastle upon Tyne,
NE20 9QB

Diocese: Newcastle

Local authority: Northumberland

Dates of inspection: 24th February 2010

Date of last inspection: 1st, 2nd March 2007

School's unique reference number: 122370

Headteacher: Mr Paul Rusby

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

School context

One of two middle schools in Ponteland, Richard Coates, which is of average size, serves part of the town, a wide rural catchment, and some Newcastle suburbs. Almost all students are from White British heritage. While the proportion of pupils with special educational needs is below average, a higher than average number of these students holds a statement of special need. In recent years there have been significant changes to staffing. The school holds many awards.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Richard Coates Church of England Middle School as a Church of England school are outstanding

Outstanding progress since the last inspection, led by an inspired head teacher and highly able governing body, is transforming the school into a Christian community of the highest quality. This is a school of which the students and staff are rightly proud and to which increasing numbers of parents are pleased to send their children.

Established strengths

- A very positive, forward-looking and engaging, yet deeply embedded Christian ethos, ensures that this is a stimulating learning environment for adults and children alike.
- Thoughtful and thought-provoking worship, enriched by high quality music and well-structured images, is appreciated by children and stimulates their hunger for more.
- A dynamic subject-leader, consistently high quality and very well-structured teaching and learning and pioneering work in assessment contribute to the outstanding Religious Education.
- The highly dynamic head teacher, focussed staff leadership team, active and involved Governing Body and powerful partnership with the parish are driving the school forward as a Christian school that is attractive and welcoming to all.

Focus for development

- Meeting the children's desire to participate more fully in shaping and leading collective worship will further enhance this facet of the school's life.
- The planned review process of the school's aims should be used as a way of ensuring that all stakeholders can increasingly fully own and articulate the school's vision of itself as a Christian foundation.

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

While there are many reasons why the school is an outstanding Christian environment, three are particularly crucial: the role-models provided by the staff; the smart and up-dated buildings; the connectedness between what is learnt in lessons, what is explored during worship and what is expressed by the surroundings. The smart buildings showcase both the children's achievements and

some of the Christian concepts and values that illuminate and inspire these achievements. At Richard Coates, the whole person matters, and the whole person is celebrated in art, craft, photograph and displayed work. The school's motto 'let your light shine' is not some kind of 'add on' remark but a statement of fact and intent that is understood by the children and acted on by everyone. The students greatly value the way in which, in their words 'the staff try really hard to explain things'. They appreciate teachers' specialties, their approachability, the number of guests who come into the school and the number of clubs and other opportunities that they are given. Charities are understood to be important and great effort goes into supporting them. The Christian foundation of the school is understood and the new development of the quiet room should be capitalised on fully; there is currently considerable interest in what it might be. I was deeply impressed by the excellent behaviour, the friendliness of the children, their mature observations and their motivation in work and play.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship sets the tone of the day in school as it begins. It was referred to later in the day by both children and adults, so it clearly has considerable impact. The act of worship that I observed offered space for reflection, excellent opportunity for prayer and was enriched by music and projected image. Other worship I understand to be more celebratory in tone. Visitors lead worship regularly, although the committed parish clergy are less visitors than key members of the school team. Worship is continually reviewed through face to face conversation and also written questionnaire and I am confident that the different views that are expressed are and will be acted upon. When I met with a group of children and in the written review, there is a consistent theme: 'getting pupils more involved'. Older children, especially, wish to have opportunity to shape and lead the worship themselves. All children value the way in which they are invited to participate, eg through question, drama and music. Learning, as they do in Religious Education, that it is possible for they themselves to develop sketches and presentations, and to write prayers, there is now a thirst to do this more consistently and more extensively in worship. This process is already happening; it is to be strongly encouraged. Worship at the parish church is valued by children and parents, and has enabled them to locate their school within the wider picture of faith in Ponteland. This is another area in which development is to be encouraged; so that the children can experience as full a range of worship as possible, including liturgical and potentially Eucharistic worship.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Meticulous planning, a wide range of educational techniques and pioneering work on self-assessment to partner teacher assessment, has raised the profile of Religious Education in the school. Fun, fast-paced lessons hold the children's attention and emphasize to them that this subject matters as much as other core subjects. More, as the children make connections between what and how they learn in Religious Education and in, for example, Literacy, they also see how questions of value and human dignity impact on every area of life. The dedicated Religious Education room, together with the appointment of a highly competent and very well-motivated Religious Education specialist, have been key moves in ensuring that this subject is now outstandingly effective. The school is now offering itself as a resource for partner schools in terms of Religious Education competence, and this is in turn building bridges of understanding that are strengthening the school's Christian identity and self-perception.

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

Inheriting a school that was well regarded for its ethos, the leadership of Richard Coates has reinvigorated this inheritance in a way that amounts to a transformation. Huge energy, real love, and humble service, offered by the head teacher, have inspired other staff members, governors, parents and also the children to great effort to ensure that the school is the most engaging Christian environment that it is possible to be. The rapidity of the progress means that there is still work to be done – hence the planned revision of the school aims. However, the school is fully aware of potential areas of growth, and is planning to meet them. The sheer energy that the leadership offers is both infectious and awe-inspiring to the observer. I believe it to be under-pinned by the conviction that every child is entitled to the very best possible education that they can have, and that this entitlement comes from a perception of God's creative love, amongst other sources. This inspiring vision, through a process of continual review, is now beginning to cascade through the school and out into the parish and community. As the school strengthens its Christian identity, so others need to hold and share both the vision and the energy that animates and expresses it.