

## De Aston School, Inspection of Religious Character July 2017

The Head, staff, pupils and governors of De Aston School can be very proud of their school. There is a real undercurrent that every pupil matters at this school and that every pupil can achieve. Positivity runs throughout the school and is evident in the work and displays all around the school. The school is clean and tidy with students smartly and appropriately dressed. The students were polite, helpful and eager to engage in conversation. There was a genuine respect and rapport between staff and pupils and I found a happy student body overall, with a dedicated and enthusiastic teaching staff ably supported by the assistant staff. All of this percolates down from the Head, his senior staff and the governing body. The school is rightly proud of its heritage, which gives it a firm and strong ethos from which to work. The school holds in tension, very well, its Christian founding principles whilst being open and inclusive.

All the lessons I observed were creatively and thoughtfully planned and delivered with a good use of technology. The pupils were challenged to think outside of themselves with a view to how others may feel and to value differences of opinions and life styles. There was a good engagement between teacher and pupils with all students encouraged to take part in the discussion. Particularly good were the lessons observed in sociology and ethics which looked at social groupings and autism respectively. RS studies also takes pupils beyond their cultural norms. The drama lesson imaginatively challenged pupils with video and role play. I was very impressed with the art work displayed around the school and with the display boards in each classroom which reflected the hard work and progress made by the students and staff.

The two assemblies I witnessed were thoughtfully planned and held the pupils interest. One gave a positive reflection for the day and the end of year 7 assembly celebrated everyone's success at making it through their first year. The awards given focused, not only academic achievement, but good attendance and progress. It was a real celebration of everyone's ability and uniqueness with everyone applauding loudly another's success.

What is impressive in this school, is the care and time given to those students who find school difficult for whatever reason. There is a very good breakfast club which enables students to start the day effectively but which also gives a less robust space for those who need it. The staff there were very sensitive to individual student temperaments as were the staff in the Pupil Development Centre, which is an excellent unit managed by a very capable team. In fact I was impressed by all who were employed in the school, their dedication, professionalism and enthusiasm is a quality to be valued.

A unique feature of the school, is that it is a comprehensive with a boarding element. This adds greatly to the cultural diversity of the school, which is important in an area somewhat limited in cultural integration. The boarding house is run with real care and love with the boarding head seeking to provide a home from home environment for those who stay. Boarders fit seamlessly into school life with the more mature students playing an active part in nurturing younger students and in charity initiatives. They relate well with the outside community.

The charities supported was also impressive with the sixth form and staff taking a lead part. The use of tutor groups, prefect system, buddy groups, mentoring and the school council all adds to pupil wellbeing and value. I found De Aston to be a good school, managed effectively, caring, friendly with a dedicated staff and happy pupils, where each individual is valued and encouraged to think beyond what they perhaps imagine.

Areas to be examined	Current position	Focuses for Development	Insufficient Evidence to comment
1. Impact of 'thought for the day' as an act of collective worship	Freedom was the theme for the week and the assembly I observed was imaginatively presented with good visuals. The pupils were challenged to think broadly and their attention was held and engaged well.	Use of a microphone would aid presentation as the voice was quiet and monotone. More interaction with pupils and pupil involvement, via questions or use of pupils own experience\thoughts. Could drama as means to communicate a theme/point be explored.	n/a
2. Some opportunities for 'enriched' collective worship, where students have the chance to encounter and explore aspects of Christianity	The school meets at the end of the year and for the main Christian festivals. It has developed tentative links with the local town vicar and the vice chair of the governors is an ordained minister. There are some links with the cathedral staff.	Continue to deepen links with the local town clergy particularly invite clergy of other denominations to be involved in school life.	n/a
3. Respect shown to those of different faiths and of no faith	The RS syllabus is comprehensive and covers an appreciation of other faiths. It is taught in a way as to enhance this respect. Other subjects observed support this. The international boarders come from a variety of faiths and have been warmly integrated.	Children were respectful and understanding of other faiths and beliefs. Continue with Y7 remembrance service and minutes silence when appropriate. Perhaps invite Muslim and Jewish religious leaders into school.	n/a
4. Evidence of work with a number of Christian denominations to support the development of our students	The boarders continue to interact positively with the local churches of the area and some have various roles within their chosen church, such as bell ringing. A positive feature of the school is the way staff and students enthusiastically support a number of chosen charities.	Tie in with a local town or church charity project.	n/a
5. Opportunities for spiritual, moral and social and cultural reflection offered by many curriculum areas	All the lessons I observed underpinned this extremely well. It is a key feature of the school ethos.	This is a real strength of the school and should be promoted through lessons and assemblies.	n/a
6. Opportunities to examine the role of spirituality in the development of values, principles and beliefs	This was imaginatively and sensitively explored in many of the lessons I observed particularly in the Drama, Ethics, Sociology and RS lessons.	Continue to make a high priority. Maybe explore through music more or a school drama production.	n/a
7. Evidence of a core set of common values to which most members of the school community can subscribe	This was evident throughout the school, through displays, awards and encouragement from the staff and senior management team. It is supported by the Governor's policies also.	I think the school team have worked hard on this and it shows in the behaviour and development of the pupils. Keep on with the good work and look for new and imaginative ways to promote.	n/a

<b>Areas to be examined</b>	<b>Current position</b>	<b>Focuses for Development</b>	<b>Insufficient Evidence to comment</b>
8. Evidence that we encourage our students to see beyond their needs and be aware of their impact on others: that we emphasise the importance of empathy	This is evident from the large range of charities supported by the school with the sixth formers taking a prominent lead. There is a reading scheme and mentor scheme in place and a 'Cool to be Kind' initiative. The work of the school council plays a part in this.	Keep up the good work.	n/a
9. Evidence that we encourage our students to see beyond the present and to imagine other possibilities	This was evident from talking to the Head and staff and from positive signage displayed around the school. Awards scheme also reinforces this. I was impressed with the care of the emotional and behaviour unit.	Continue to place an 'every child matters' ethos and 'can achieve' at the centre of decision making. Keep up the excellent pastoral care and mentoring.	n/a
10. Evidence that we encourage young people to respect themselves and others	This was evident from the children's good behaviour and the way they interacted with one another. The interaction with staff was also exemplary. Thought for the day, assemblies and tutor groups reinforce this.	Continue through discussion groups and lesson.	n/a
11. Evidence that we offer young people opportunities to explore their own beliefs	Evidence from sixth formers demonstrates this as do many of the lessons observed, particularly RS.	Continue to encourage and explore by visit to religious establishments.	n/a
12. Evidence that we encourage young people to challenge all that would constrain the human spirit: racism and all forms of discrimination; bullying; moral indifference & greed	All the lessons seen made a point of this and handled it sensitively. Good displays all around the school and staff were aware of social media concerns. Reaction to recent terrorist attacks demonstrates this and good evidence in school documentation of a countering extremist strategy.	Staff were on top of this and the pastoral care unit were there to offer real help and support when needed.	n/a
13. Evidence that we encourage all young people to have a sense of their own worth, influence and importance	This was done through the prefect system, buddy scheme, tutor time and the school council. The work of the SEN team plays an important role in this and there are some quite spaces available.	Good work already evident. Continue particularly through reinforcement by teacher comment and opportunities to lead for those less able or shy.	n/a
14. Evidence that we encourage all our students to develop a sense of awe, wonder and mystery	Art work observed throughout the school and in the classroom demonstrated this. Whole school visited Lincoln Cathedral and students' involvement in World Challenge.	The sciences can help develop this as can poetry, music and visits to places of natural wonder. Observatory can explore this too.	n/a
15. Evidence that we offer opportunities to celebrate the diversity of religious faiths	Help and encouragement given to students in the Boarding house. I spoke to students who	Invite religious leaders of other faiths into school to	n/a

Areas to be examined	Current position	Focuses for Development	Insufficient Evidence to comment
which co-exist within our school	valued this. RS lessons teach this very effectively. The school celebrates a range of religious festivals.	speak and or help celebrate festivals.	
16. Evidence that we provide religious education which conforms to legal requirements and which offers students the chance to learn about Christian principles & scripture, together with an overview of all the major world religions	Self-evident from an excellent RS Syllabus which provides ample room for questioning and thought. Lesson observed was well planned and delivered with appropriate enthusiasm and excellent subject knowledge that engaged the pupils.	Already impressive -continue.	n/a
17. Evidence that we provide religious education, which is in line with the Lincolnshire Agreed Syllabus. We offer our students the chance to learn from Christianity and other principal world religions. Students also have the opportunity to reflect on and discuss ultimate questions and moral and social issues facing the world today.	This is evident, not only, from the syllabus presented but from the excellent work displayed in each classroom and from the lessons observed.	Also by engaging in current hot topics.	n/a
18. We try to offer a physical environment which promotes reflective learning; including objects, symbols and texts which provoke thought and questioning	I was impressed with how clean the school was with no litter seen or worn displays. Support staff and everyone involved within the school were warm, friendly and helpful. Positive messages adorn the school with photos and colourful artwork on display and successes shared and celebrated.	Very good, impressive.	n/a
19. Contribution of extracurricular activities trips and visits to our understanding of each other and the world beyond ourselves	There are House activities, theatre trips, debating teams and creative writing teams, Slam Jam, a Shakespeare group and GCSE and A level Drama performances.	This is not always easy with the constraints of timetabling and children bussed in from varying distances but continue.	n/a
20. Space is made available for reflection, quietude and prayer	This is not easy as there is a need for supervision but there is a pleasant space outside that can be observed from the Heads office. Library seemed to be used frequently and the Breakfast Club offered a well-supported refuge for those who need it. The boarding school has a quiet place to pray that is open to all students during the day.	The Behavioural and Pastoral Care teams often offer a place of escape; maybe a place within one of these are could be developed?	n/a

Areas to be examined	Current position	Focuses for Development	Insufficient Evidence to comment
21. Evidence that we have a care of each other	This is a real strength of the school and was evident from the conversations with Head and staff and reflected by the demeanour of pupils and staff alike.	Keep on with the good work.	n/a

### Evidence Base

1. Observation of two assemblies and/ or tutorial time.
2. Observation of lessons. Examples were: Music, Art, Sociology, Ethics, Drama, RE, Personal and Social Education; Citizenship.
3. Interviews with staff. Examples were with: senior staff (including the Head of Boarding); Heads of Year; students.
4. Tour of the school.