Statutory Inspection of Anglican & Methodist Schools

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Howbridge Church of England Junior School

Vision

'Together We Shine'

At Howbridge Church of England Junior School, our whole school community of children, parents, staff and governors come together so that we can live out the words of the gospel according to Matthew, 5:16, in our everyday lives:

'Your light must shine before people so that they will see the good that you do'.

Howbridge Church of England Junior School is living up to its foundation as a Church school and is enabling pupils and adults to flourish. It has the following notable strengths.

Strengths

- The strong Christian vision drives the work of the school. It binds together a community where individuals belong and thrive.
- The rich curriculum enables pupils to shine, whatever their starting point. This is especially true for those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Strong and committed leaders, well supported by the trust, model the school's Christian vision and values. This lifts expectations and has a powerful effect on the flourishing of pupils and adults.
- Collective worship instils a sense of togetherness and belonging. Rooted in Christian beliefs and practices, it sensitively encourages the spiritual growth of pupils and adults.
- Pupils are actively encouraged to take responsibility within the school community, helping to develop a sense of belonging and a commitment to justice.

Development Points

- To provide identified opportunities within the RE curriculum for pupils to develop their understanding of Christianity as a diverse global faith.
- To recognise, monitor and evaluate the work that is being done to build an inclusive community where all are treated fairly. This is so that this culture becomes a consistent and deeply rooted expression of the school's Christian vision.

Inspection Findings

The clear Christian vision gives a strong sense of direction to this warm and welcoming school community. There is a deep understanding that the flourishing of individuals depends on mutual support. It is also understood that the coming together of different gifts and talents creates a light that shines more brightly, for the good of all. Pupils and adults value the image of a 'gaggle of geese', drawn from the previous school vision and celebrated in sculptures in the school hall. This powerfully expresses this sense of journeying together with perseverance and purpose. The positive vision brings hope to the community. The relationship with the trust strengthens the vision. It provides a wider family in which, in the words of the trust's vision, 'all grow in different directions, yet our roots remain as one'. The practical support provided by the trust has been instrumental in enabling the school to flourish and live out its vision. For example, being connected to another school through a shared school leader and a joint governing body, has brought stability and strength.

The broad and ambitious curriculum gives pupils the chance to shine. High quality input provides appropriate challenge and raises aspirations. For example, pupils are excited and engaged by a well-resourced, cross-curricular approach to studying the Stone Age, led by an external provider. Trips and activities, such as a careers fair for Year 6, allow pupils to explore new opportunities. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their learning experiences, and this helps to promote their spiritual development. Skilful and detailed planning ensures that vulnerable pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are also able to shine. This is because staff take care to understand the specific needs of pupils and adapt provision accordingly. Parents and carers feel that the school prepares pupils well for the next stages in their life, giving them confidence and a positive attitude to learning. This is evident in the way pupils in Year 6 speak about their hopes for the future. There has been extensive development of the curriculum in recent years. Governors evaluate the impact of this through precise, regular and challenging conversations with school leaders. This enables thoughtful and accurate identification of priorities for development.

Daily collective worship plays a central role in fostering a sense of togetherness. The school's understanding of spirituality as an 'ongoing, reflective journey rooted in a sense of belonging' shapes the rhythms of collective worship. Pupils and staff appreciate the positive start to each day, with the space to reflect together on the school's values. Prayer, songs and thoughtful messages invite pupils and staff to consider how the school's Christian vision and values affect their own beliefs, attitudes and behaviour. This has an impact on relationships in the school , for example through encouraging kindness to others. The strong link with the local church enhances the programme of collective worship. Pupils value the weekly assemblies led by the vicar, not least for the opportunity to act out stories from the Bible. Special services held in the church building through the year are important for the community. Parents and carers appreciate the way that the school fosters a sincere and inquisitive attitude to matters of faith. The sense of belonging through collective worship extends to the wider group of schools in the trust, with shared activities for pupils and reflections at conferences for staff.

A fundamental commitment to equality for all flows from the school's vision and values. Consequently, relationships in the school are characterised by compassion and respect. Early intervention and close partnerships with other organisations ensure that vulnerable pupils and those with SEND are given focussed and effective support. Pupils treat each other well, in class and in social times. Reflective and restorative conversations enable pupils to learn from difficult situations and incidents of poor behaviour. The use of an online rewards platform

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gives positive reinforcement to the school's expectations. Creative use of resources, such as playground equipment, enhances the wellbeing of pupils. School leaders and staff are open and approachable, ensuring that parents and carers are valued and treated as an integral part of the school community. This focus on developing a positive and inclusive culture has begun to have a strong impact, with growing evidence of the effect of more consistent and established routines. Staff support each other well. Whether it is celebrating a staff member's poetry or undertaking collective challenges, they have opportunities to shine together. The wider trust network also contributes to the flourishing of staff, for example through shared professional development and collaboration.

Through a wealth of opportunities, pupils of all ages take responsibility within the school community and develop an understanding of justice. They volunteer for a range of roles such as science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM), physical education (PE), library and 'eco' ambassadors, midday helpers, and prefects. Every pupil also takes turns to be a class ambassador. As a result, they develop the confidence to contribute to community, as well as an awareness of the impact they can have on wider issues such as climate change. Visits to a local care home bring mutual benefit and have helped to establish meaningful relationships. Wider issues of justice are explored thoughtfully through the curriculum. For example, scenarios in personal, social and health education (PSHE) challenge pupils to think about the choices they make. In Year 6, work in English, history and RE on the Holocaust comes together through the question of what it means to be human. Pupils' responses to this question reveal a growing awareness of issues of justice.

The RE curriculum is well structured. Pupils build up knowledge of several religious faiths and worldviews, including Christianity. Consequently, they make thoughtful connections across different topics. They also think deeply about the way that their study of RE affects their personal beliefs and views. This is particularly true of pupils in Years 3 and 4 who have benefitted most from changes made to the curriculum over the past two years. Effective support from the diocese and trust has been vital in developing an engaging and relevant curriculum. As a consequence of the diverse backgrounds of pupils, there are some informal opportunities for pupils to develop an understanding of Christianity as a global faith. This is not planned into the curriculum. Leadership of RE is effective. Staff are supported to deliver high quality lessons through central resources, appropriate training and the modelling of good practice. This enables RE to make a strong contribution in equipping pupils to engage with big questions and to flourish in a diverse society.

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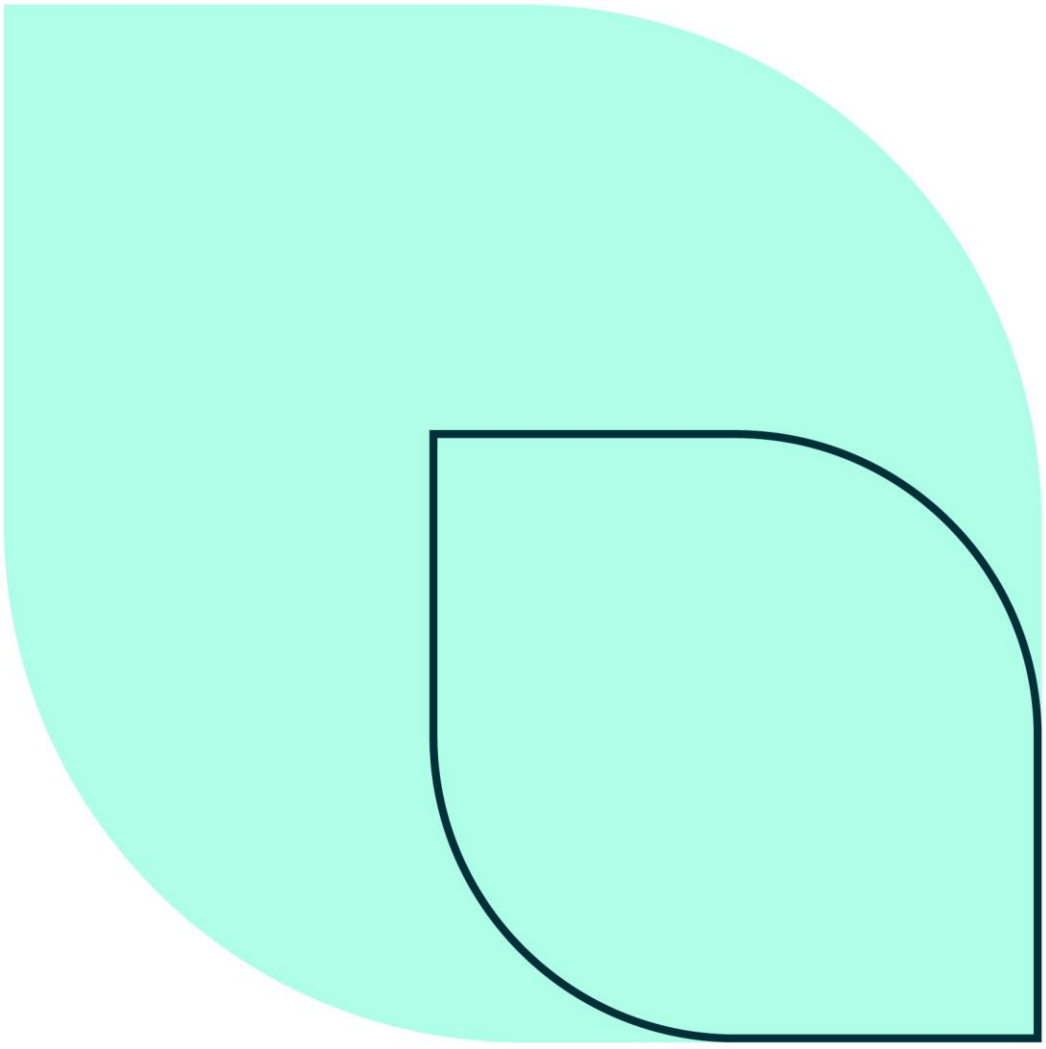
Information

Address	Howbridge Road, Witham, Essex, CM8 1BZ		
Date	21 November 2024	URN	140666
Type of school	Academy	No. of pupils	358
Diocese/District	Chelmsford		
MAT/Federation	The Diocese of Chelmsford Vine Schools Trust		
Headteacher	Rebecca More		
Chair of Governors	Mike Hope		
Inspector	Tim Wright