

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Margaret's Church of England VA Primary School, Bowers Gifford	
Address	London Road, Bowers Gifford, Basildon, SS13 2DU
How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?	
Overall grade	Excellent
The impact of collective worship	Excellent
The effectiveness of religious education (RE)	Good

School's vision
<p>Celebrating the uniqueness of every child of God, helping them to flourish and shine</p> <p>'God's word is a lamp to guide our feet and a light for our path'</p> <p>Inspired by Psalm 119:105</p>
Key findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St Margaret's vision that all pupils should flourish and shine is the driving force for the strategic direction of the academy. Church school leadership at all levels is inspirational, guiding decision making and ensuring that policy is lived out in practice. • The rich and inviting curriculum captures pupils' imagination so that all are engaged and included. Big questions are woven throughout the curriculum, supporting pupils' social and cultural development and their spiritual flourishing. • Support for pupils to develop their character and moral judgement is a strength of this harmonious community, where behaviour is excellent. • Collective worship reflecting the teachings and practices of the Anglican tradition is celebratory, inclusive and often inspirational. Active pupil involvement in worship and invitational reflection areas leads to rich spiritual flourishing. • Through a creative RE curriculum, pupils gain a clear knowledge and understanding of world faiths including Christianity. The depth of pupils' appreciation of the global nature of Christianity and world issues of injustice are less developed.
Areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend the global dimension of Christianity within the RE curriculum. This is so pupils gain a deeper appreciation of Christianity as a living world faith. • Further extend the depth of pupils' understanding about injustice. This is to enhance their opportunities to be advocates for change in the wider world.

Inspection findings

St Margaret's deeply embedded Christian vision flows throughout this excellent academy, where Christian leadership is outstanding. Governors want children to 'understand the vision and make it their own'. The inspirational executive headteacher's skill and passion powerfully motivates staff and leaders at all levels. Consultation on what it means for pupils to 'flourish and shine' has focused attention on impact. Partnership with The Diocese of Chelmsford Vine Schools Trust (DCVST) has strengthened this impact further. Rigorous, highly effective monitoring and evaluation accurately inform policy developments and spending decisions that strongly align with the vision. This is further enhanced by school improvement, subject networks and training by the DCVST and diocesan education teams. Future Church school leaders are developed through excellent training and opportunities to gain qualifications. This embodiment of the vision leads directly to the flourishing of pupils, families and staff.

Driven by its Christian vision, the academy is highly inclusive and cares deeply about all of its families. The significant number of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils are valued and respected members of the community. Close links are maintained with pupils and families at all times as demonstrated throughout the pandemic. Teachers meeting their classes online daily helped ensure that pupils continued to flourish. Staff support for families in need through regular phone calls or care packages continues, now including home visits. Adults talk of the compassionate care they receive.

Reflecting the school's Christian vision, exceptionally caring relationships are nurtured from the start through a buddy system. Nursery children are supported by Year 5 pupils. On joining the reception class, their Year 6 buddy sends a welcome letter and photo. Older buddies assist reception children with lunch and in worship, staying in touch throughout the year. Parents say that their children are 'emotionally bedded in' through this supportive process. Such close connections create a culture of love and respect for all, and a rejection of prejudicial behaviour. Pupils thrive because leaders target support to meet their educational, emotional and social needs. Bespoke support is driven by leaders' commitment to each child as the person God made them to be. Friendship and sharing support groups boost emotional development. Pupils who have experienced trauma heal through mental health support and counselling. Staff provide specific support for the minority of pupils with persistently low attendance. This tireless work with families enables pupils with wide-ranging needs to engage with learning and so flourish.


Pupils speak confidently about challenging injustice, relating this to Jesus' life and teaching. Each class has a chosen role model whose courage has brought about change, for example Nelson Mandela. Pupils recognise how commitment to local initiatives can build into social action on a bigger scale. They identify good causes in line with the academy's values, for example showing love. They plan initiatives creatively and with a high level of independence. Visits to the local care home, and collecting gifts for people in hospital demonstrate the outworking of the academy's values. Pupils are especially proud of giving thanks and gifts to the academy's refuse collectors. Pupils actively connect giving to the academy's Christian teaching, describing food donations at Harvest as 'like Jesus gave people food'.

Inspirational collective worship is the heartbeat of the academy. It is greatly valued by the academy's diverse community for its inclusiveness and transformational impact. Pupils take an active role in worship, lighting candles, leading and saying the prayers. They select Bible readings to include and also hymns and worship songs. At the formal Eucharist, members of the worship team assist the vicar. Pupils relish these experiences, with Year 6 preparing to lead whole academy worship completely independently of adults. Collective worship



adheres to the Church calendar structure so pupils are well-versed in its seasons, rituals and routines. While highly respectful during worship, pupils thoroughly enjoy exchanging ideas and sing worship songs and hymns with gusto. Time for stillness provides pupils and adults with space for personal reflection. Worship is invitational and inclusive because it is pupil-centred, engaging and meaningful for all. The strong partnership with St Margaret's Church serves the local context well, providing pastoral as well as spiritual support. The youth worker leads many activities including bringing 'Messy Church' to the academy. Prayer coffee mornings are attended by the wider community as well as staff. An annual aspirations service and a termly Eucharist are well attended by families. Local support for a St George's Day service, initiated by St Margaret's Academy and Church exemplifies community flourishing.

Driven by the academy's vision, RE is a priority and is well-resourced. It is taught well using the diocesan syllabus and the 'Understanding Christianity' materials. The RE leader contributes to a trust working group, leading on changes to the syllabus, and disseminates training to staff. Each classroom has an interactive reflection area, some of which include visual reminders of Bible stories and verses. Pupils talk enthusiastically about their RE, including those with special educational needs and the most able. They flourish through a range of learning activities, including expert adaptation for the youngest and pupils with special educational needs. Pupils build strong foundations for future learning in the early years due to excellent practice. For example, children explore the menorah through stories, drawing, making and counting. Older pupils tackle big questions such as comparing some of the beliefs of Sikhs and Christians. They speak confidently about previous written work, demonstrating a firm grasp of Sikhism and Judaism as well as Christian beliefs. Pupils readily discuss customs and festivals, demonstrating an understanding of a range of worldviews, faiths and current issues. They celebrate diversity, understanding that an acceptance of difference enriches them. Written work shows the diverse topics they cover, including Bible stories and learning how faith impacts on society and culture. Pupils' knowledge of Christianity is good, though their grasp of Christianity as a global religion is not highly developed. Pupils recognise how RE contributes to their spiritual development. They are inspired by insights into big issues such as creation and their stewardship of the planet. Pupils equally enjoy 'reflection / chill spaces', capturing their invitational nature. Here they engage with questions such as 'what makes you unique?' Displays on big themes of 'our world' and 'awe and wonder', prompt thoughtful, spiritual reflection. Pupils connect their thoughts about soldiers dying in war with Biblical stories of sacrifice. They describe their views on climate change or space, relating these to God's creation. St Margaret's passionately upholds its Christian vision of celebrating the uniqueness of each child of God. This enables all to flourish and shine in this highly inclusive Church school.

	The effectiveness of RE is		Good
	<p>RE teaching and learning throughout the academy is effective in all years. The rich and engaging curriculum enables all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), to flourish. Class teachers teach RE thoughtfully, using detailed planning, so pupils make good progress in their learning. Teaching of RE is particularly effective in the early years. RE makes a vital contribution to the way this academy fulfils its vision.</p>		
Information			
School	St Margaret's Church of England VA Primary School, Bowers Gifford	Inspection date	18 May 2023
URN	143453	VC/VA/Academy	Academy
Diocese/District	Chelmsford	Pupils on roll	229
MAT/Federation	Diocese of Chelmsford Vine Schools Trust		
Executive Headteacher	Sally Finch		
Chair of Governors	Charlotte Little		
Inspector	Rachel Jones	No.	2237