

Downham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Church Road
Billericay
Essex

CM11 1NU

Diocese of Chelmsford

Local authority: Essex

Date of inspection: 24th September 2012

Date of last inspection: 14th July 2008

School's unique reference number: 115119

Headteacher: Helen Craig and Sue Wilson

Inspector's name and number: David Bome 740

School context

Downham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School serves a mixed residential area - nearly all of the 266 pupils are of White British background. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average as is the number of children who have special educational needs. The headship is joint with the headteachers in post for just over two years.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of Downham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding.

Downham Primary School has a very caring and supportive Christian ethos which is underpinned by its clearly defined and explicitly expressed values. As a result, pupils feel valued and develop into independent, self-reflective and considerate young people who are confident in their beliefs and how to conduct themselves in a caring and safe environment.

Established strengths

- Christian values are at the heart of all that school does and underpin its strong Christian ethos
- The very effective Christian leadership of the school provided by both headteachers, strongly supported by the deputy headteacher and governors
- The supportive and inclusive environment within which all children feel secure

Focus for development

- To widen the children's involvement in the planning and delivery of collective worship

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

A very positive ethos exists throughout the school which supports its core values; children demonstrate a very good understanding of the influence of God and what being a Christian has on their day to day life. One child commented "we are a special school because nobody leaves anyone out, we always care about everything". A caring and friendly atmosphere pervades the whole school. A culture of respect and reward exists throughout the school which is focussed around the core values of Caring, Consideration and Courtesy (3C's) and the teachings of Jesus. These are further enhanced by the recent whole school project on the Olympic and Paralympic values. Excellent relationships exist between all staff and children. Children speak very highly of the school and the staff and of their enjoyment of being a pupil at Downham Primary School. The children are clear about what is distinctive about them attending a church school. One pupil commented, "We aren't just a primary school we are Downham Church of England Primary School, where we are all equal and we know how to behave because of what God teaches us". Displays such as the 'Feelings Wall' and the prayer tent all add to the well being and security of the children within the framework of the strong Christian ethos. One pupil commented, "I'm a Christian and I am happy that I am encouraged to be at Downham School" These views are strongly supported by the governors and parents who appreciate the spiritual depth within the school which makes it "safe to talk about God and Jesus". In many practical ways pupils are genuinely sensitive to the needs of others and society as a whole which is reflected through the school's work with various charities such as Help for Heroes, Cancer

Research and The Prince's Trust. The excellent relationships between staff and pupils have a very positive influence on the social, moral, and cultural development of the children. These are all based on strong Christian values which enable the pupils to develop into responsible young people by the time they leave school.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is a very important and central feature of the life of the school. Through it the children share Christian beliefs and Anglican conventions as a school community.

Children are engaged during assembly and talk enthusiastically about collective worship and can link what they learn to their everyday life. Children make strong links to their day to day behaviour around school and relate these to the lessons they have learnt in Assemblies. One child explained how assembly helps them to become a better person in school and at home as they think about the values they are taught.

Parents talk about the children's love of assemblies and the positive learning which takes place, opening the children's eyes to not only what is right, but why. They are proud that their children have developed such good values and how their spiritual well-being is nurtured and helps influence their lives.

These times bring pupils and staff together, enabling opportunities to join in prayer, including The Lord's Prayer, and hearing stories from the Bible. They also provide opportunities to share Christian beliefs and values as a school community. Pupils are often inspired by the acts of collective worship. "We learn about Jesus and God through Bible stories, it helps us to behave nicely to each other and gives us special messages". Parents and children alike comment on how assemblies help make church approachable and fun; this is strongly supported by the involvement in collective worship of Reverend Stephen Robertson and Pastor Simon Cox. Collective Worship is carefully planned with close links to the agreed Diocesan scheme with specific attention paid to areas that support overall school development. Governors and clergy are involved in the planning and reviewing of assemblies. Acts of Collective Worship have a positive influence on the children's involvement in the wider community; festivals such as Easter are celebrated with the wider community at Emanuel Church in Billericay as well as with Saint Margaret's local church. Collective worship strongly reinforces the school's values and Christian beliefs.

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

The leadership and management of Downham Primary School are outstanding. The vision and enthusiasm of the Headteachers and the strong partnership between all leaders ensures that there is a continuous presence and awareness of Christian values which are explicit in the mission statement and aims of the school and embedded through many aspects of school and community life. This ensures that throughout the school there is a very clear vision based on Christian values and the teachings of the Anglican church. Staff feel valued and involved in the school's development, they work well together as a team, and provide mutual support for each other which contribute greatly to the happy and supportive atmosphere which is embedded throughout the school. Similarly parents feel fully involved in sharing the school's vision through the openness, clear communication and the enthusiasm of the headteachers. Governors are actively involved in reviewing and supporting the work of the school through regular visits to school and collective worship, their participation and observations help influence future planning to develop more creative and meaningful act of worship during review weeks. They have clear and high expectations for the spiritual education of the children and are actively involved in promoting and developing this. This robust evaluation and involvement has not only helped develop the school by identifying areas to strengthen but has also helped develop mechanisms to share aspirations and success with the parents. This strong partnership with the parents is appreciated and they view school as an open and comfortable place where everyone is known by name and valued. Links with the wider parish have been strengthened enabling not only the school's effectiveness as a church school to develop but also enhance its involvement in the community and churches within the wider community.