

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

Edwinstree Church of England Middle School

Vision

“Live in me. Make your home in me, just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can’t bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can’t bear fruit unless you are joined with me.” — John 15:4–6 (The Message)

Our community lives and learns with God. As a Christian school we recognise the unique and wonderful in everyone. As a community we support one another to flourish, and live life in all its fullness.

Edwinstree Church of England Middle 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

- Edwinstree’s Christian vision is reflected throughout the school’s work. As a result students and adults flourish in this distinctively Christian community.
- Leaders, including governors, are deeply committed to ensuring that students (including the most vulnerable) and adults enjoy fulness of Life. This results in a caring and cohesive school community.
- The student led ‘dynamic diversity group’ (DDG) is highly influential in the life of the school. The curriculum and ethos reflect the valuable work of the group.
- Collective worship is carefully planned to make the school’s Christian values alive and relevant. This means that students and adults see the values as important pillars of their own spirituality.
- Adults and students show a profound commitment to equity that is born of the school vision. This makes the school a vibrant and caring community in which students considered vulnerable are given appropriate and comprehensive support.

Development Points

- Enhance the partnership with the local parish church, including staff and volunteers. This is to deepen the mutually beneficial relationship and support the development of the school and its vision.
- Increase the depth with which some aspects of the religious education (RE) syllabus are covered. This is to further deepen the subject’s contribution to students’ religious literacy.



Inspection Findings

Edwinstree's vision is deeply embedded. Feedback from parents and students makes this abundantly clear. The vision is an enlightened and entirely appropriate Christian response to the school's context. Edwinstree serves a semi-rural community with low ethnic diversity. The vision emphasises recognising the unique and wonderful in everybody, regardless of their background. It has a powerful positive impact on the attitudes and actions of members of the school community. This consistent focus, rooted in Scripture, makes Edwinstree a community in which students and adults support each other to flourish. The school's Christian character is the result of leaders' relentless commitment to run the school as a distinctively Christian place. Displays in classrooms and corridors, the care for the vulnerable and student rewards and sanctions all bear the mark of the school's vision. As a result, students thrive during their time at Edwinstree and are well prepared for the diversity of the world beyond school. For example, 'fullness days' introduced after COVID, broaden the curriculum and provide opportunities for students to experience joy in their learning. Teachers habitually seize opportunities to enrich students' education, such as encouraging them to roll safely downhill during an annual school visit.

Leaders work carefully with local first schools and the senior school that most students move on to. As a result curriculum time is well used and learning is supported. Students' spiritual development is prioritised across the curriculum. Subject leaders actively seek and exploit opportunities to reflect on deeper issues as they arise. Students in the DDG are rightly proud of their work on history and English schemes of work to make them more diverse. The curriculum in these subjects now actively supports the school's intention to recognise the unique and wonderful in everyone. Leaders' commitment to promoting fullness of life has led to a rich extra-curricular offer that students participate in eagerly. Sports and expressive arts clubs are supplemented by gardening, computing, a film club and a forest school. The desire to address the needs of the most vulnerable is at the forefront of leaders' decisions. Provision for students experiencing difficulties is comprehensive. For example, there is a bespoke programme for those most at risk of school avoidance. This involves horse riding, outdoor education and small group therapy. Teachers give first refusal to those considered vulnerable on any clubs and trips. Leaders insist that teachers pay particular attention to the learning progress of students considered to be the particularly vulnerable.

Students thrive through enjoying and actively participating in collective worship. Each of the school's 15 Christian values is explored in turn for a period of a half term. In both large group gatherings and form based collective worship, students are invited to explore the meaning of Bible texts that relate to the value. This questioning approach is engaging for students and adults. Once a week students have a singing collective worship to which they respond enthusiastically, demonstrating a deep sense of community. Acts of worship are uniformly invitational and students of different faiths and worldviews feel welcomed and see them as important. Adults actively promote discussions about spiritual matters and strive to offer students opportunities to develop a sense of wonder. As a result, spiritual development is a vital and natural element in students education. Collective worship is enhanced by the school's close and rich link with the local parish. Students' spiritual lives are enriched by the church services that celebrate major Christian festivals. Their spiritual development is further promoted by the open air worship that emphasises the importance of nature in abiding with God. In addition, clergy offer significant curricular and pastoral support to the school. This roots the school's life in the life of the local church. However the impact on the school is not as rich as it could be. Leaders in both the church and school recognise this.



The pervading culture at Edwinstree, rooted in its vision, is that each individual is unique and important. Students and adults actively practice putting themselves in someone else's shoes and seek to 'celebrate the wonderful in everyone'. Vulnerable students receive bespoke support programmes, depending on the needs of the individual. Staff speak gratefully of leaders' support in developing their careers, and compassion when they have experienced difficult times. Adults take active steps to support students who are experiencing difficulties. In addition to specialist therapeutic support, students thrive through the access they have to various safe spaces in the school. Good mental health is given priority. Adults and students respond positively to the school's mantra: 'It's ok not to be ok, but you need to say something.' Leaders have established a wellbeing hub to support staff, students and parents when they go through difficult times. Adults and students value and trust this facility so that it contributes importantly to their wellbeing. The 'resolve room', staffed by skilled practitioners works with students to resolve conflicts when they arise using a restorative approach. In these ways the school's culture supports the dignity and wellbeing of students and adults and promotes their flourishing.

Students share their teachers' passion for justice and value the school's commitment to treat people fairly. They have a nuanced understanding of the difference between equity and equality. The student led DDG promotes awareness of the issues facing people whose identities may make them vulnerable. This has a significant impact in creating a culture of justice based on empathetic understanding. The DDG recently led a 'fullness day' celebrating neurodiversity. Visiting speakers, an imaginative collective worship, videos and group activities ensured that the school community learned deeply about the issues facing neurodiverse people. Reflecting on this, students were clear that the day had been an important time of learning that changed their perceptions. Students are outward looking and actively support charities and causes that resonate with them. Recently, inspired by one of their peers they learned about and initiated fundraising for the air ambulance service.

Students enjoy RE lessons and see the subject as important. In particular they value the 'deep thinking points' and research opportunities. These give them the opportunity to flourish by reflecting on religious concepts and forming their own views. Teachers are skilled and well trained practitioners. The curriculum is comprehensive, building carefully on students' prior learning. Students study a range of world faiths and non-religious worldviews, with an appropriate emphasis on Christianity. Teachers bring students' learning alive by engaging teaching, visits to places of worship and speakers representing different faiths and viewpoints. The subject makes an important contribution to their spiritual and academic development. However, the time given to some RE topics limits the opportunity to explore issues in the depth their importance merits.

Information

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| Address | Edwinstree Church of England Middle School, Norfolk Road, Buntingford, Hertfordshire, SG9 9AW | | |
| Date | 18 June 2025 | URN | 117554 |
| Type of school | Voluntary Controlled | No. of pupils | 486 |
| Diocese | St Albans | | |
| Headteacher | Jo Gant | | |
| Chair of Governors | John Boulter | | |
| Inspector | Andrew Wilcock | | |