

## Hope Community School, Sidcup

### Section 48 inspection report

This inspection was carried out under section 48 (s48) of the Education Act 2005. Inspectors have been approved by the Department for Education (DfE) and appointed by the New Generation Schools Trust (NGST) to undertake this inspection with respect to the school's designation as a school of religious character.

<b>DfE number:</b>	303/2041
<b>Dates of inspection:</b>	1st - 2nd April 2025
<b>Lead Inspector:</b>	Mr Phill Moon
<b>Team Inspector:</b>	Mrs Jane Prothero Ms Jo Owlett
<b>Age range of pupils:</b>	4-11 years
<b>Number on roll:</b>	111
<b>School type:</b>	Free school
<b>Religious character:</b>	Christian
<b>Chair of NGST:</b>	Mr Paul Weston
<b>Chair of Governing Body:</b>	Mr Andy McGee
<b>Principal:</b>	Mrs Sara Donnelly
<b>Date of previous s48 inspection:</b>	December 2019
<b>Address:</b>	Hope Community School 167 Rectory Lane Sidcup Kent DA15 5BU
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## **Inspection Activities**

As part of this s48 inspection, inspectors undertook the following activities:

- Religious Education (RE) lesson observations in all of the seven year groups, some of which are taught in joint year groups. Lessons were jointly observed with the principal and/or other members of the School Leadership Team (SLT) or governing body
- An initial meeting with the principal and RE lead on the first morning, Tuesday 1st April 2025. Further short meetings occurred throughout both days of the inspection.
- An initial meeting with staff at the beginning of the inspection on Tuesday, 1st April, as well as a further meeting at the end of the school day on Tuesday, 1st April 2025.
- Observations of two Collective Worship events.
- An observation of two specific events to celebrate Easter, namely an Easter Collective and a Stations of the Cross event conducted on the school campus.
- An RE pupil book scrutiny and a learning walk focusing on displays and prayer spaces.
- Discussions with pupils, parents, staff, leaders, the New Generation Schools Trust (NGST) church leader and the school chaplain were also held.
- Folders of evidence of each area were helpfully provided to inform judgements
- Additionally, the school's Self-Evaluation Form (SEF), RE Action Plan and Collective Worship Policy were analysed.

## **Contextual Remarks**

The school was founded in September 2013 in a close relationship with the New Generation Church (NGC). A second school was opened by the Trust in Southampton in 2017. There is an ongoing close working relationship between the school and the NGST. The school's current principal has been in post since September 2022. The school has recently witnessed a decline in pupil numbers. As a result, Years 1 and 2 are taught together as one cohort and Years 4 and 5 are taught in another. There is some indication that this trend is reversing, with a healthy level of applications for September 2025 in Reception. Both the governing body and the principal have initiated conversations with the local education authority to address this issue with an agreement of cooperation.

## **KEY FINDINGS:**

### **Vision and Leadership**

The quality of vision and leadership is outstanding because:

- The school's theologically rooted Christian vision is clear, compelling and deeply embedded in all aspects of school life.
- This vision drives the overall ethos of the school, impacting relationships and curriculum.
- This vision enables pupils and adults to flourish.
- The core values of adventure, creativity, excellence and openness are embodied by all leaders, staff and pupils who can articulate them well.
- Parents, staff and pupils trust the leadership of the school.

### **Impact on Pupils and Adults:**

- The school's Christian vision positively impacts the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural (SMSC) development of pupils and adults.
- There is a high value placed on pupil autonomy, and a culture of modelling this well. This leads to confident and responsible pupils who lead and support each other.
- The school fosters a caring and inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and respected.
- The school supports the well-being of its whole community.
- The school celebrates the achievements and uniqueness of its pupils.
- Pupils show appreciation and respect for their school community and are given the opportunity to contribute to its well-being.
- Strong leadership and management effectively promote the school's Christian vision.
- Leaders ensure that the school's Christian character is reflected in its policies and practices relating to this s48 inspection.
- The leadership is committed to including the whole staff team in the vision.
- Members of the leadership combine their strengths to lead the school community.
- Leadership identifies strengths in the staff team and encourages others to lead well.
- Students, staff and parents all affirm and appreciate the strength of the leadership.

## **Collective Worship**

The quality of Collective Worship is outstanding because:

- Effective Collective Worship is central to the school's spiritual life and the development of pupils and adults.
- High-quality, pupil-led collective worship positively impacts the school community.
- Pupils exhibit a sense of pride in the responsibility of sharing leadership of the Collective programme. They receive input from staff and the school chaplain to support them.
- Prayer is valued and central to school life. Each class has a well-used prayer space, and a whole room is a designated space for prayer.

## **Religious Education**

The provision for RE is good with some outstanding features because:

- The implementation of the new RE curriculum, though in the very early stages, has nevertheless begun to positively impact the quality of RE teaching.
- Some aspects of the new curriculum have proven problematic in the introduction for pupils in key stage 1 (KS1)
- Some teachers have experienced difficulties in adapting the approaches of the new curriculum for pupils at the school.
- The research and implementation of the RE curriculum were carefully managed, and its introduction is being monitored diligently to maximise effectiveness.
- Staff are well supported in their development of the new initiative.
- RE contributes to pupils' understanding of Christianity and other faiths.
- The RE lead has a clear vision for the subject, its implementation and development.

## **Community Engagement:**

- The school's relationships with the local church and the wider community are strong, as NGC founded the school and continues to play a vitally active part.
- The school contributes to the community by working alongside the church to meet needs, for example, a food pantry, wrap-around care, a space to meet, and film nights.

## TABLE OF SUMMARY JUDGMENTS

No.	Framework	Grade	Overall grade
1	Vision and Leadership (Vision and Values)	1	1
2(a)	Collective Worship (Pupil Engagement and Understanding)	1	1
2(b)	Collective Worship (Pupil Leadership and Creativity)	1	
2(c)	Collective Worship (Impact on Personal Development and Centrality of Worship)	1	
2(d)	Collective Worship (Purpose and Planning)	1	
2(e)	Collective Worship (Quality of Leadership)	1	
3(a)	Religious Education (Engagement and Behaviour for Learning)	2	2
3(b)	Religious Education (Planning, Assessment, Subject Knowledge and Teaching Expertise)	2	
3(c)	Religious Education (Subject Status, Self-Evaluation and Leadership)	2	
	OVERALL GRADE		2

### Inspection Grades

Outstanding = 1

Good = 2

Requires Improvement = 3

Inadequate = 4

### OVERALL JUDGMENT

With respect to vision and leadership, and provision for Collective Worship and RE, Hope Community School, Sidcup is a good and improving school with several outstanding features.

Since the last inspection, vision and leadership continue to be outstanding, and Collective Worship has improved to become outstanding in all areas. Religious Education is good and improving, though in the early stages of implementing a new curriculum.

## **Suggestions for Further Development**

The school may wish to consider the following suggestions for its ongoing development:

### **Areas for Development**

- Succession Planning:
  - Develop a robust succession plan to ensure smooth leadership transitions and maintain the school's vision and continued development.
  - Invest in developing future leaders within the school.
- Strategic Planning:
  - Continuously evaluate the school's strategic plan for RE and adapt it to address evolving needs and challenges.
  - Ensure that the Kapow Curriculum is more accessible to pupils in Key Stage 1.
- Continuous Professional Development:
  - Focus on leadership development and emerging educational research.
  - Encourage teachers to explore innovative personalised teaching methods for RE and integrate them into the existing Kapow curriculum
- Curriculum Enhancement:
  - Regularly review and refine the curriculum to ensure it remains engaging, relevant, and prepares students for future challenges.
  - Ensure the RE curriculum is driven by the school's vision; Kapow may be a useful tool, but should not be the driving force.

## **MAIN REPORT**

### **1. VISION and LEADERSHIP**

The school benefits from the leadership given by the principal, who has built on the clear vision provided by the NGC, who are effectively involved in the leadership of the school.

The principal, now in the third year of her tenure, has brought rigorous practice to the school in terms of the development of Religious Education through the continued overseeing of the implementation of a new RE curriculum.

The principal has also established a much-needed sense of trust between the school and its parents. This trust was evident in observations of parents arriving at the school gate. Greetings were warm and genuine, and on a number of occasions, brief but significant conversations concerning the welfare and needs of children and

families were entered into discreetly by the Headteacher and various parents. Assemblies (referred to as 'Collectives') and celebrations were well attended. At a meeting with a representation of parents, the quality of the principal's leadership was affirmed, and this was further affirmed in meetings with staff and representatives of the governing body. The establishment of trust between all stakeholders is at the heart of the health of this thriving school. This has been achieved through the principal's intentional listening to the concerns and grievances of parents and addressing them effectively with skill and tact.

An example of this trust and positive community engagement is the setting up of a community pantry, which provides vital staple foods free to the community. This was met with some reticence when it was set up within the school building, but on the principal's sensitively relocating it to the school playground just inside the school gates, it is now readily used without any reluctance or sense of stigma.

Regarding the development of herself and her staff, the principal, as well as bringing expertise into the school from her previous positions in education, has also undertaken continuous professional development (CPD) for herself in neurodiversity training and emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) training. She has invited professionals into the school to lead professional development (PD) for staff and has introduced a mentoring system enabling staff to grow in responsibility as subject leads within the school.

Lately, the school roll has contracted to 111, and Years 1 and 2 are grouped together for teaching, as are Years 4 and 5. As a sign of confidence in the leadership of the school, all stakeholders expressed a desire to work towards the growth of the school population to provide for seven separate year groups in a single form entry, which is the capacity of the school. Both the governing body and the principal have taken initiatives with the local educational authority, which is working with the school to this end.

NGC set up the school and is well represented on the board, with several members of the church involved. They hold the principal accountable for the spiritual direction of the school and work regularly and closely with the school as one of their community service goals.

The school and the church continue to develop alongside each other and each informs and provokes the other to develop. The church has recently taken over the running of a local library that was due to close down. The church felt they gained the confidence to be able to do this through the experience of setting up and running the school.

The school has made positive use of wider partnerships. Groups of older teenagers and young adults from The Netherlands, Denmark and the USA have worked on the site, building and improving facilities as well as meeting for positive cultural

exchanges with pupils, widening their horizons and knowledge of the wider world. The school also raises funds for a project in India to help children in developing areas.

All these improvements and growth have been facilitated by careful consideration of the suggestions made in the last s48 report in 2019. Transitions in collectives have been addressed, work has been put into improving pupil voice through the establishment of the Lighthouse Group; a pupil-centred group which plans with a capable adult for the spiritual development of peers. Practically every child we spoke to about the school could be described as excellent ambassadors for the school. A number of pupils spontaneously offered statements like: 'I love this school,' and 'I love wild worship, which we get to lead.'

## **2. COLLECTIVE WORSHIP**

The quality of Collective Worship is outstanding because:

### **2a) Collective Worship: Pupil Engagement and Understanding**

The inspection team was able to witness a number of Collectives. The variety of expression of spiritual life is impressive as is the careful planning evident by key staff, which enables the pupils to take responsibility in the leading of many activities in the life of the school.

One collective we witnessed was 'wild worship.' Wild worship is a pupil lead collective with minimal teacher intervention. Pupils were given the opportunity to respond and reflect on four pieces of music played: three were songs with Christian content and the fourth, a secular song with positive values about commitment and friendship. Pupils respond positively and take the opportunity to be still and reflect or choose to join in with singing with actions. Pupils came in informally and were able to stand or sit where they liked. This is a deliberate choice offered by leadership and staff and reflects what pupils would be able to experience if they attended a church service. Pupils responded positively.

In a special Easter collective (we visited the school in the last week of the spring term amidst a number of special Easter celebrations) we were able to watch a video prepared by older pupils telling the Easter story 'in their own words.' This took the form of one pupil playing the role of an investigator looking to discover the truth about Easter, sifting the trappings of hot cross buns and chocolate eggs from the significance of the narrative. This item was pupil-composed, with one pupil explaining powerfully the meaning of the cross as part of the Christian belief and another pupil composing a prayer that she led the pupil body in. All this was done sensitively acknowledging pupils who do not hold a faith position to be comfortable

just reflecting on what they were hearing without a requirement to participate in songs or prayers. This one event epitomised the whole ethos of a pupil empowered community led skilfully by conscientious and skilled staff.

## **2b) Collective Worship: Pupil Leadership and Creativity**

The school has devised a number of means for pupils to be involved in the spiritual life of the school. These include an active and enthusiastic school council; an environmental group and the Lighthouse Group. At the start of the school year, those pupils who wish to be involved in the pupil-led spiritual development of the school are able to put themselves forward. Pupil representatives from each year are 'drawn from a hat' to be members of the Lighthouse Group, which plans spiritual activities under the guidance of the school chaplain. In this way, pupils in the course of their time at school have both the opportunity to lead their peers and/ or support their peers' leadership.

Care and compassion are embedded in the life of the school. Whilst talking to the Lighthouse Group, one student reminded another student of her recent anxieties at the prospect of going on a school visit outside of the school community. The pupil responded with agreement and offered the recollection of how her class had supported her and assured her that they would take care of her on the visit. This gave her the courage to attend, despite her fears.

## **2c) Collective Worship: Impact on Personal Development and Centrality of Worship**

The appreciation of what the school provides for the development of pupils in terms of their knowledge, understanding and faith was evident from the interviews we held with pupils. The inspection team was given a tour of the school by one of the pupil leaders. One of the pupil leaders was able to talk confidently and with maturity about inclusion, democracy and autonomy. This pupil leader was also able to say how they had observed that the outside prayer spaces had fallen into some neglect and that bringing this to the attention of the Lighthouse Group had seen a pupil-led improvement in their provision. Another pupil leader showed in-depth knowledge about the school, its successes and its challenges, as we walked around the site. This pupil leader was confident in their response to a question about potential bullying in the playground, answering that they would both support someone being bullied and verbally challenge the perpetrator themselves and only then seek the assistance of a teacher.

We were able to see some personal reflective journals that pupils keep without them being looked at or marked by staff. These contained examples of pupils' best work as well as their own thoughts on what they were learning.

In our meeting with parents, we received comments from parents appreciating the evidence they had seen in their children's appetite for spiritual activities at home. One parent told of how her child had initiated prayer with her at home and a number of pupils from non-faith homes had begun to ask their parents if they could attend church.

## **2d) Collective Worship: Purpose and Planning**

Collective worship is carefully planned and led by the RE lead with the encouragement of the principal. Initiatives are clear, well embedded in the life of the school, supported by all staff and appreciated by pupils. The vision runs through the whole school and leads to many innovative and imaginative practices that help pupils transform their lives. The Collective Worship Policy is very much aligned to vision, mission and values. The RE Subject Development Plan outlines a clear way forward for RE and collective worship. Every day, there is a creative expression of worship and spiritual reflection. The variety of experiences provided is impressive, ranging from a principal-led values assembly on Mondays, wild worship, and entirely pupil-led collective on Tuesdays, a reflective worship and a 'lovely hats collective,' which celebrates the achievements and character qualities of pupils. These collectives, which occur every day, are the 'heartbeat' of the spiritual development of the school community.

Thoughtful provision is made for spiritual reflection and wellbeing. Each room has a prayer corner where pupils can go to pray or just to reflect. Each of these spaces was populated by prayers the children had written themselves or prayers they could read and reflect on. There were also prayer spaces out in the playground with messages left by pupils, either written on paper or chalked on the ground.

Each classroom or communal area had 'calm corners.' Pupils could take themselves out of their lessons for a brief period for self-regulation. These were effectively used and we observed one girl sitting at such a station to do some work, and her teacher briefly checked in with her that she was OK in terms of her self-regulation.

## **2e) Collective Worship: Quality of Leadership**

The combined provision for collective worship and the teaching of RE is the heart of the outworking of the school's Christian vision. The quality of leadership means that the vision of the school is made tangible and understood by the pupils within the school.

### 3. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Provision for RE is good and improving because:

The school's RE lead has researched, trialled, and carefully introduced a new RE curriculum. This was done in an endeavour to find a curriculum that reflected the school's mission, vision and values. The RE lead also recognises that RE is a subject that staff need support in terms of subject knowledge and approaches. Staff received CPD training in the new curriculum. Embedding is being carefully monitored by the head and RE lead. Staff are also supported through regular drop-in observations.

The school is implementing the Kapow RE curriculum. The inspection team noted that there were some difficulties being experienced by some pupils in one lesson observed. This involved ideas that were too complex for pupils, for example, being able to differentiate between religious and nonreligious worldview statements. Also within the structure of the lesson, at the same time, pupils were faced with a significant number of new vocabulary terms related to RE, for example, knowing that the holy book of Judaism was the Torah, for Islam, the Quran as well as the holy books for Hinduism and Buddhism. There was evidence in one instance that some children were struggling to recall and use relatively new vocabulary accurately. For example, knowing that the holy book of Judaism was the Torah and for Islam, the Quran.

In recommendations for the school's further development, the inspection team suggested: 'Ensure the RE curriculum is driven by school vision; Kapow may be a useful tool, but should not be the driving force.'

The RE lead agreed with our observations and will support staff to further evaluate the content of the curriculum and its presentation to pupils in some identified parts of the school. The RE lead has already recognised that staff need support in implementing the new curriculum and has begun to make provision for this. One of the ways that this can be achieved is through encouraging teachers to use their knowledge of their pupils to adapt the material. This is already beginning to happen as evidenced by the EYFS teacher using story techniques appropriate to the pupils' age and development to tell the story of the Good Samaritan. It became clear that a younger pupil had understood one of the applications of the story to 'be a friend to others' became apparent when he explained he would 'be more quiet' to those around him, especially in the playground. Another example of successful adaptation of the material was evidenced by another teacher who helped their class to understand the Buddhist idea of Karma through the skilful use of appropriate personal anecdotes.

Though the inspection team saw evidence of adapted teaching based on knowledge of their own pupils and critical analysis of the Kapow curriculum. We also saw evidence where this was not the case. However, this developmental opportunity is understood by the RE lead and strategies are already in place to develop all staff in this imperative.

### **3a) Religious Education: Engagement and Behaviour for Learning**

Generally, there are high levels of engagement and positive learning behaviour in pupils towards RE. This is amply evidenced in the structure and strategies already mentioned regarding collective worship. Developing an understanding of spiritual matters is strong within the school. Younger pupils encountering the newly introduced Kapow curriculum express less confidence and engagement with the material than older pupils who progressively demonstrate confident and impressive levels of RE literacy. One older pupil during the book audit was keen to show an essay she had written that she was particularly proud of. This essay compared different aspects of faith practices within Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. Her work was accurate, confidently using new terminology. One older class demonstrated a sophisticated knowledge of ideas in a lively debate on whether the influence of the Bible was more significant in its shaping of UK culture or its influence and shaping of the individual. This shows that older pupils encountering the new curriculum were able to assimilate new ideas and significantly large amounts of new terms successfully.

It is also evident that pupils demonstrate both in their written work and in their conversations, respect for people and ideas encountered in their exploration of other faiths. Pupils were able to articulate why they should show respect for others with different ideas about faith other than the ideas of Christianity. This positive example of tolerance is further enhanced by them visiting different places of worship and meeting members of other faiths. This was also demonstrated by the way pupils talk about fellow pupils of other faiths within their school community as well as peers professing no faith. There is an embedded attitude amongst pupils that an understanding of tolerance and respect are valuable virtues to be used to help people get on in their communities, as well as in school. One pupil described herself as a Christian said she has respect and appreciation for the Humanist ideas of caring for people and the world.

One pupil felt confident to explain that she did not have a faith and that she didn't like RE but that she knew she 'was OK at it' whilst also enjoying being at the school.

The school uses its support staff well to help keep all pupils engaged and provides fidget toys and wobble cushions for example, to help those with SEND.

Staff recounted stories of transformation in terms of levels of anxiety in some pupils, which was also borne out in interviews with pupils.

Pupils are given opportunities to contribute their views and opinions. One girl commented that she thought that Jesus having only male disciples was unfair. Her female teacher acknowledged her point sensitively, pointing out that women were also vital to the support of Jesus' ministry, with examples, to nuance her pupil's understanding.

Pupils know the levels they are working at and how to improve their knowledge and understanding. Examples of staff providing excellent verbal feedback to pupils were observed. Staff have provided a safe place for pupils to share views, even when they were not stock answers, teachers valued all contributions gently and sensitively corrected misconceptions.

### **3b) Religious Education: Planning, Assessment, Subject Knowledge and Teaching Expertise**

Teachers are well prepared and lessons are well-planned. All teachers are being supported in how they might effectively adapt the curriculum materials to meet the needs of their own pupils and their levels of understanding and how to make the Kapow material more accessible to their pupils. Some teachers are more developed in their ability to do this. The principal and RE lead are sensitive to the strengths and needs of their staff, aware that some teachers lack subject knowledge, experience and skill in teaching the subject. Provision is in place to support these needs amongst colleagues. The staff team involved in teaching RE are carefully monitoring and assessing the new curriculum and how it can be effectively refined to be implemented successfully in the school.

### **3c) Religious Education: Subject Status, Self-Evaluation and Leadership**

All involved in the leadership of the school, from the SLT to the members of the governing body recognise the centrality of RE as an instrument for delivering their vision for the school. As such, their approach to the teaching of RE has received meticulous attention to detail. The subject of RE has high status within the school community. The RE lead keeps data on achievement and progress for all pupils and this information is analysed and acted up in subject planning. The school delivers on its 5% requirement to teach the subject across the school. The subject is not only reflected on by staff but also by pupils through the Reflection Journals and the work of the school council and most noticeably the Lighthouse Group.

The new Kapow curriculum has the ability to enhance the teaching of RE and the delivery of the school's spiritual vision once the teething problems with the curriculum have been rigorously addressed and worked through. Structures and disciplines are in place for this to happen.