



## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

### St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

St Michael's Street, St Albans AL3 4SJ

**Previous SIAMS grade: Good**

**Current inspection grade: Outstanding**

**Diocese: St Albans**

Local authority: Hertfordshire

Dates of inspection: 27 April 2015

Date of last inspection: 21 April 2010

School's unique reference number: 117451

Interim Headteacher: Andrew Emeny

Acting Headteacher: Alison Rafferty

Inspector's name and number: Lindsay Fraser 107

#### School context

St Michael's is a smaller than average primary school where most pupils are of white British heritage. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is below average, as is the proportion of pupils with special needs or disabilities. During the past year there has been a significant turn-over of staff including the headteacher and deputy headteacher. The newly appointed headteacher is currently employed on a part-time basis as acting headteacher until she becomes the permanent headteacher in September 2015. An interim headteacher is currently employed for the major part of the week.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Michael's Primary School as a Church of England school are outstanding.

- The new leadership has established policies firmly rooted in the Christian gospels, which are reflected in the excellent behaviour of pupils and attitudes to learning.
- The outstanding nurturing of pupils reflects the distinct Christian commitment of all staff.
- The weekly church service has a substantial impact on pupils' spiritual development.
- Standards in religious education (RE) are high because the curriculum is exciting and dynamic.

#### Areas to improve

- Organise visits to places of worship of non-Christian faiths to enhance pupils' understanding of similarities and differences within and between those faiths included within the RE curriculum.
- Ensure that parents and carers are well informed of the school's approach to the development of Christian values so that they can be reinforced within the home.

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

The school's Christian ethos underpins all aspects of its provision for teaching and learning, the pupils' well-being and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC). Standards of achievement are high and, under new leadership, the school is now taking swift and effective action to address the needs of the few pupils whose progress is not yet good. These pupils are now making better progress. Relationships are excellent at all levels. The staff demonstrate a genuine passion for the well-being and success of the pupils and have been keen to take on new roles to ensure the best possible outcomes for all pupils. Pupils' behaviour is excellent because they are immersed in an ethos which puts Christian love at the heart of the school. Pupils and parents like the changes to the new behaviour policy because of the emphasis on forgiveness. Twelve values which are rooted in Christian faith are developed through the curriculum and collective worship over a two year cycle. Pupils show that they can discuss these values in relation to a range of Biblical stories, which help them understand the importance and significance of Christian values to their own lives. Parents would welcome more information regarding the development of values so that these can be further reinforced at home. A group of pupils is currently working with staff to develop a spiritual garden. Already used to a certain extent, the garden will add significantly to opportunities for quiet reflection. Termly self-esteem questionnaires enable staff to identify pupils' feelings about their learning so that appropriate help is given. The importance of this school as a church school is reflected in the presentation of Bibles for all pupils in Y2 and Good News Bibles to Y6 pupils, signifying the importance of the school's care and aspiration for each child for their on-going spiritual journey. Pupils are encouraged to think about, and understand, the needs of others, and charities are well supported. Pupils bring in pocket money for the collection in the weekly church service which supports the education of a child in Palestine. Parents state that through Christian values pupils develop an understanding and respect for the diversity of our society. RE is taught in such a way that the school values are linked to strategies for teaching and learning. For example, in a Key Stage 1 class, pupils learning about faith leaders were organised in teams, each with a team leader who was able to then describe how it felt to be a leader. Teaching RE in this manner is a richly effective way of demonstrating the school's Christian character in action.

**The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding.**

Planning for collective worship is very well led and co-ordinated between the church and school. There is an excellent balance of Biblical material and Christian teaching, enabling pupils to gain a deep understanding. Pupils can explain how collective worship affects how they behave and learn, and how it makes them think about big questions. A range of leaders and different types of worship provide pupils with a rich experience of worship, such as an inspirational visit from a Salvation Army captain. Although there are pupils of other faiths and of no faith no pupils are currently withdrawn from collective worship. This is because stories from other religions are used where appropriate and a survey undertaken by pupils showed that all pupils enjoyed collective worship. Pupils hold in high regard the weekly collective worship in St Michael's Church, led by the vicar or a member of the church, and well attended by parents and governors. Prior to the service the staff read and discuss the Bible story with their pupils, thus enabling them to participate with great confidence and engagement. Some pupils have requested to attend Sunday services because the weekly church service has been meaningful to them. Prayer and spirituality are strong features in the school. Pupils are confident in expressing their hopes, anxieties and remorse through prayer and through reflective writing. Pupils, especially older pupils, display an excellent understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and are able to relate this to the saying of the grace in church worship, the lighting of the candle and different prayers. Pupils see collective worship as a vital contribution to their personal development and, as such, relish all opportunities to be involved, from setting up the symbols to being responsible for the readings, leading the prayers and taking part in the music as part of the orchestra. As a result of more robust monitoring, governors, staff and pupils wish to expand the role of pupils in supporting the delivery and preparation of collective worship and promoting the Christian ethos within the school. Although a small group already

exists for these purposes the quality of collective worship is such that many more pupils have expressed their desire to be involved, but with a more varied use of their skills.

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding.**

This is because RE has a very high priority within the school. Since the previous inspection when the quality of learning in RE was highlighted as a focus for development, subject leaders have developed clear schemes of work based on the locally agreed syllabus, supplemented by diocesan units on Christianity and linked to the school's Christian values. Leaders and teachers have a passion for the subject and have a good understanding of what makes outstanding teaching and learning; professional development was put in place after the previous inspection. As a result of excellent leadership, exciting and engaging teaching and learning strategies are used. During lessons observed in the inspection it was clear from the activities in which pupils were involved that there were appropriate, but challenging expectations. Because planning for RE is linked to the school's Christian values SMSC development is a strong part of the curriculum. Excellent teaching and learning combined with well embedded assessment techniques have ensured high standards. Leaders are able to chart each pupil's progress; those whose achievement is below expectations are given supportive intervention to improve their understanding and their self-confidence. By the end of KS1 and the end of KS2 a significant number of pupils are achieving above national standards for RE. Although the curriculum includes substantial teaching about other faiths, the school has identified that pupils have had little opportunity to visit places of worship of non-Christian faiths and limited opportunity to meet visitors of other faiths.

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

Substantial changes in the leadership and staff team have taken place in the last year. However, the governors, interim headteacher and acting headteacher have worked together to establish a strong team who are united in their vision that each pupil should achieve their potential within a loving and nurturing environment, based on the school's Christian values. This vision has guided their decisions. Through a range of rigorous monitoring and evaluation leaders have an excellent understanding of each pupil's specific needs, emotional and academic. As a result of this, staffing has been restructured and additional staff employed to ensure these needs are met in a variety of ways and with the involvement of parents. Parents stated that they had been devastated at the departure of the previous headteacher, but now have great confidence in the decisions made by the governors and the interim headteacher. They also have confidence in the future because of the early impact of the acting headteacher on the ethos of the school. Through effective succession planning the acting headteacher is well prepared to take on her permanent role. Staff feel very well supported by the governing body and speak highly of the re-energised Christian vision and ethos demonstrated by the interim and acting headteachers. The acting headteacher has implemented changes to behaviour management to reflect the importance of forgiveness and pupils' understanding of using a second chance to improve their behaviour which has been welcomed by pupils, staff and parents. Governors have become more rigorous in their monitoring of the Christian ethos and religious education; this has enabled staff and governors to celebrate and share good and excellent practice and to ensure the continuity of the strong Christian character through professional development for the RE subject leaders. The strong partnership between the school and the church is of mutual benefit. The vicar is a frequent visitor to the school where he is able to support and supplement the teaching of RE which is welcomed by both staff and pupils. More pupils are now attending St Michael's Children's Church because they have been inspired by the weekly worship, whilst leaders of St Michael's Children's Church have benefited from observing the approach to worship used by the acting headteacher, an approach now used in the Children's Church.