

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Michael's Church of England Primary School

Address	Apton Road, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire. CM23 3SN		
Date of inspection	27 March 2019	Status of school	Voluntary Aided primary
Diocese	St Albans	URN	117426

Overall Judgement	Grade	Excellent
How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?		
Additional Judgements		
The impact of collective worship	Grade	Excellent
The effectiveness of religious education (RE)	Grade	Excellent

School context

St Michael's is a primary school with 236 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Growing numbers of pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is below national averages. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is in line with national averages. There has been a change of headteacher since the last inspection and some changes in teaching and support staff.

The school's Christian vision

"Inspiring and empowering people"

'...and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God' Ephesians 3:19

Key findings

- The school's vision, owned and lived out by all members of the school community, drives every aspect of its work to 'inspire and empower'.
- The vision underpins a vibrant, creative curriculum, through which all pupils experience the fullness of God in all aspects of their learning. They flourish academically, socially and spiritually in a culture of being valued and loved as individuals.
- The commitment of pupils, parents and staff to social action through charity work and well-established international links is a practical expression of the school's Christian values.
- Strong, well-established links with the local church and clergy results in the pupils' excellent understanding of the Christian faith and Anglican practice through worship.
- Innovative, creative approaches to religious education (RE) allow children the opportunity to explore, experience and reflect upon Christianity and a range of worldviews but the quality of this is not reflected in their written work.

Areas for development

- Ensure the recorded tasks pupils undertake in religious education (RE) enable them to demonstrate fully their understanding of what they have learned.
- Provide opportunities for pupils to plan and lead their own independent acts of collective worship so that they may contribute fully to the development of worship in the school and demonstrate their excellent understanding of worship in a faith community.

How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?

Inspection findings

'Life in all its fullness' is genuinely lived out in the daily life of St Michael's and provides the foundation for all that the school does. The school has a strong Christian identity, which is tangible from the first moment of entering the building. School leaders, led by a committed and passionate headteacher, have established and promoted the school's vision deeply. The vibrant curriculum and wide range of learning opportunities are due to school leaders' commitment that all pupils should enjoy the fullness of life at school; children's talents and interests are nurtured in the experiences they have. As one governor summarised, 'It's what we are here for.' As a result, children and adults thrive in an atmosphere of love and compassion.

Governors know the school extremely well through regular monitoring visits. They have a very clear idea of school performance and the way in which the vision is lived out through a rigorous cycle of self-evaluation and school improvement. Through engagement with diocesan training, the Church School Committee ensures that the school's mission is interwoven throughout all of its work. As a result, religious education (RE) and collective worship are high profile and are key features of the school's excellent practice.

Staff strive to provide the best possible learning experiences for each child and have developed a vibrant curriculum to inspire pupils and empower them to achieve the best possible outcomes. Children love coming to school because learning is fun, engaging and rich in variety. Pupils achieve highly across the curriculum and have done so for a sustained period of time because staff are successful in their commitment to ensuring individual needs are met. As one child said, 'The teachers make us work hard because they want us to be the best we can be.' Driven by the school vision, leaders use finances astutely. They ensure high levels of staff are employed to provide nurture and assistance for children with additional needs and as a result, vulnerable pupils flourish.

Provision for pupils' spiritual development and emotional wellbeing is extremely well-considered. Pupil's mental health and wellbeing is deeply embedded in all approaches to teaching and learning. There is a highly positive climate for learning, tangible across the school, using growth mindset and building learning power. These approaches enable pupils to 'be ready to learn' and have the strategies to face challenges. Because of the school's emphasis on Christian values, relationships between all members of the community are highly positive and children's behaviour is exemplary. The school's Christian values drive the strategies used when reconciliation is needed through 'connection not correction'. Pupils describe how they feel listened to and that 'the grown-ups help us to make things better again' and 'so we can learn to do things better next time'.

All staff benefit from a wide range of professional development, including middle leadership and preparing future church school leaders. The school has participated in the Diocesan 'Aspirant Leaders' programme which uses the school as a model of exemplar practice. The school has established a number of networking opportunities, cluster groups and partnerships, including leading professional development in RE with other local schools. As a result, teachers are able to share their best practice beyond St Michael's and recognise themselves as lifelong learners. Staff feel valued and widely acknowledge how the school's Christian identity has supported them at difficult times. 'The school kept me going after a bereavement; I don't know where I would have been without it' sums up the sense of family and togetherness that exudes at St Michael's.

A key feature of life at St Michael's is the deep-rooted and long-standing commitment to overseas connections. The long-standing partnership with a school in Uganda allows children and families to practically demonstrate the school's values through considerable fundraising to provide school buildings and resources. As one child explained, 'We raised money to build them a hall because we are a church school, churches help people, and that's because Jesus wants us to help people.' As a result, pupils have a very strong sense of social injustice, both locally and internationally, and regularly demonstrate their call to action through charity projects. Pupils speak openly about how to tackle unfairness, 'You speak up, because that's the right thing to do.'

An excellent feature of worship at St Michael's is the exceptionally strong connection with the local clergy who are deeply committed to the school. This results in children having a strong understanding of the purpose of worship in a faith community, knowledge of key times in the Christian calendar and a range of Anglican traditions, including Eucharist. Whilst pupils are keen to actively participate in and contribute to worship, they have not yet begun to plan and lead regular acts of worship independently.

Pupils have a particularly strong understanding of the role of prayer and reflection beyond formal worship and have wide and varied opportunities to do this throughout the school day. Prayer is a significant element of the life of the school as seen through the interactive 'cardboard home' prayer station in the school's main entrance; pupils, staff, parents and visitors share their thoughts and reflections on the theme of homelessness and poverty. The pupils' contributions show a significant depth of understanding for their age.

Pupils enhance the lives of the church congregation through their regular participation in church life. After a recent break-in where a stained glass window was broken, children designed and made their own stained glass windows to decorate the wooden boarding, as the vicar described, 'to bring some love into that place'.

High quality, effective RE provides pupils with a wide range of learning experiences to debate, challenge and reflect upon Christianity and other worldviews. Teachers demonstrate strong subject knowledge and are adept at questioning pupils, helping them to articulate their thinking exceptionally well. There are innovative approaches to RE such as the Prayer Trail, weaving the similarities of different faiths together and 'Buddhism Day' which gave pupils the opportunity to explore the faith in depth. RE is enhanced with trips and visitors, including families from the school community. The quality of work seen in children's RE books does not yet fully reflect the high standard of children's knowledge and experiences in RE. Considerable work has been undertaken to develop RE since the last inspection and the subject leader is well placed to drive continual improvements. This is strengthened by engagement in local subject cluster groups. Pupils are inspired by RE, especially the enrichment activities and explain that 'RE is important because we should understand and respect everyone's beliefs in the world'.



The effectiveness of RE is Excellent

Religious education has a high profile in the school as a core subject. The quality of teaching and learning in religious education is consistently good with a significant proportion of innovative, excellent practice. Pupils make strong progress in RE and standards of attainment are similar to, and often above that seen in other core subjects. Robust monitoring and evaluation of the standards of RE shows that many pupils exceed the age-related expectations of the school's RE syllabus, which has been effectively tailored to meet the needs of all children at the school. The creative curriculum and an extensive range of enrichment opportunities in RE allows all pupils, including those with additional needs, to flourish academically.

Headteacher	Lisa Dale
Inspector's name and number	Rachel Peddie 934