

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School			
Address	St Michael's Street, St Albans, Hertfordshire, AL3 4SJ		
Date of inspection	29 January 2020	Status of school	Voluntary aided primary
Diocese	St Albans	URN	117451

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

School context

St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary is a primary school with 154 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Few 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 slightly above national averages. The school has recently undergone expansion to become a one form entry school and operates on a split site.

The school's Christian vision

To provide a nurturing learning environment and a curriculum that develops character (CD1), teaches lifelong learning skills (CD2), fosters creativity (CD3) and provides opportunities for exploration (CD4) so that all pupils can experience 'Life in all its fullness' (John 10:10).
(CD = curriculum driver)

Key findings

- The inspirational headteacher, governors and clergy have been unwavering in their commitment to meet the needs of the local community by successfully expanding the school's intake. As a result, more pupils are able to flourish in a strong culture of Christian values.
- The school's vision is truly owned and lived out by all members of the school community, driving every aspect of its work so that all are enabled to enjoy 'life in all its fullness'.
- Exceptionally harmonious relationships exist across the school community as a result of a culture of forgiveness and reconciliation which underpins approaches to behaviour.
- The very strong partnership with the parish church is mutually beneficial to both the school and the wider community. This impacts very positively on collective worship experiences for the whole school. However, global partnerships are still at an early stage of development.
- Religious education (RE) holds high status in the life of the school as a core subject, although pupils' knowledge of a range of religious beliefs and worldviews is not yet fully embedded.

Areas for development

- Continue to grow strong mutual partnerships beyond the school community through global connections.
- Develop pupils' understanding of the relevance of the Eucharist in Christian worship and belief.
- Continue to improve teaching and learning in RE using innovative approaches so that pupils can improve their knowledge of religions and worldviews.

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 entering the building. School leaders use this vision to make bold decisions for the future of the school, placing it firmly at the centre of the community it serves. One clear example of this is the ambitious work undertaken to expand the school in size; this was driven by the vicar and headteacher in a strong and highly effective partnership. As a result, more local children are able to flourish in the school's strong Christian ethos.

During this period of change to expand the school, leaders have rightfully focussed their attention on establishing and deeply embedding the school's vision at both a strategic and operational level. Led by a committed and passionate headteacher, this has been highly successful and provides strong roots for the school's future. A few developments in collective worship and religious education remain to bring these areas in line with leaders' exacting standards.

The expansion project necessitated all areas of the curriculum being redesigned. The vision is at the core of this work, ensuring it links fully with key 'curriculum drivers'. The resulting vibrant curriculum and enrichment programme are due to school leaders' commitment that all pupils should enjoy the 'fullness of life'. Academic standards are high because staff are deeply committed to ensuring that all pupils, including those considered to be vulnerable, have their individual needs met. Driven by the school's vision, staff are actively encouraged to develop professionally and feel trusted to try new things. Middle leadership roles are developing very well; subject leaders are driving their curriculum areas forward through training, monitoring and peer support.

Leaders and governors regularly attend diocesan training which ensures the vision infuses the daily life of the school. The 'vision tree' in the school's main entrance clearly illustrates how 'life in all its fullness' is interwoven through all areas of the school's provision. Pupils can explain the vision with clarity, referring to the tree and how it impacts their lives: 'It means living a full life and reminds us to be a good and kind person. But it also teaches us not to only think of others, we have to think of ourselves too.' All members of the school's community were involved in establishing the vision tree, and as a result, they embrace it wholeheartedly. As one member of staff summarized 'The tree is how we live our lives here. It's who we are. It's in the muscle.'

The mental health and wellbeing of staff and pupils is a high priority shaped around the 'Five Steps to Wellbeing'. The headteacher is highly regarded for her compassion and care of staff, pupils and families. Because of the school's emphasis on Christian values, relationships are highly positive and pupils' behaviour is excellent. The school's Christian values drive strategies as well as policy when reconciliation is needed through a 'reflect and repair' approach. Pupils describe how forgiveness is important when mistakes are made so that 'we can move on'.

Pupils actively contribute to shaping and living out the school's vision through a range of school councils and other responsibilities. They are keen to help others through charity support such as the NSPCC, the Bishop's Harvest Appeal and their weekly collection in church for the overseas charity Embrace. Through this they are able to recognize and actively challenge global injustice. Plans for a school link overseas are at an early stage.

Pupils are skilled in expressing spiritual ideas because right from a young age they have regular opportunities for reflection, prayer and considering life's big questions. One example of this was seen in the RE lesson with Early Years children where, considering the needs of a plant to make it grow, they discussed 'Why should we look after the world that God made?' Children gave impressive responses for their age, making links to Islam as well as Christianity. Pupils readily utilize the school prayer corner where they can write personal prayers which are taken to church weekly. They recognize prayer as a time to talk to God and one child explained how 'I got angry with my sister once, but I said a prayer to ask God to forgive me and I felt better.'

Collective worship is important in the daily life of the school. The school has effectively overcome the significant challenge of being on a split site to provide whole school worship during the week to which parents are

welcomed. As a result, pupils are able to experience fully inclusive worship as a united school community. The school's Christian vision is expressed through worship which encompasses the life and teachings of Jesus. Pupils have a good knowledge of key Bible stories which they can link to the school's Christian values. They enjoy helping during worship and this provides them with a good understanding of Anglican practice and traditions. However there are refinements needed to ensure pupils know and understand the relevance of Eucharistic worship in the lives of Christians. Pupils show very respectful behaviour in worship, listening attentively and being keen to contribute.

Previously an area for development, much has been achieved since the previous inspection to lift the profile of RE so that it is now an academic subject in its own right. Teachers have fully embraced these changes and are well supported by the subject leader who provides professional development opportunities for all teaching staff. As a result, teachers are confident to teach RE to a very good standard. The RE subject leader has made good connections with other local schools which enables effective sharing of ideas.

The curriculum covers Christianity and broad range of worldviews. Pupils enthuse about creative enrichment activities such as meeting visitors from faith groups and trips to places of worship. However, this new syllabus has not been in place long enough for pupils to have a deep knowledge of different faiths and practices.

Following the recent expansion and the considerable work undertaken to establish and promote the school's new Christian vision, St Michael's is at the start of a very exciting new chapter in its history. 'Life in all its fullness' indisputably lies at the heart of the school. As one member of staff described, 'It's safe here; it feels like you are sitting in the hands of something'.



The effectiveness of RE is Good.

Standards of teaching and learning in RE are consistently good as evidenced by the school's regular monitoring. Effective assessment shows that pupils achieve in line with the age related expectations of the school's RE syllabus and make good progress over time. The new curriculum has raised the profile of RE as an academic, core subject and teachers are now working to ensure those pupils considered to be achieving above age related expectations are effectively challenged in their learning.

Headteacher	Alison Rafferty
Inspector's name and number	Rachel Peddie 934