



CHURCH OF ENGLAND
ARCHBISHOPS' COUNCIL
EDUCATION DIVISION



The **Methodist Church** 

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Apton Road
Bishop's Stortford
CM23 3SN

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority: Hertfordshire

Dates of inspection: 24th February 2014

Date of last inspection: 30th March 2009

School's unique reference number: 117426

Headteacher: Mr Martin Willis

Inspector's name and number: Mrs Judith Ruff 528

School context

St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided School is an average sized primary school of 240 pupils. Pupils come from across the town, with between 40 -50% choosing the school for its church school foundation. Of these, 20 -25% are from families with regular church worshipping backgrounds. The parish church of St Michael's is close by. The majority of pupils are from White British heritage. The percentage of pupils supported by School Action Plus or with a statement of special educational needs is in line with national averages. The percentage of free school meal pupils is below the national average.

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

- The outstanding Christian ethos and values of the school in which all pupils are nurtured, valued highly and thus achieve exceptionally well
- Excellent links with St Michael's Church, which has developed strongly pupils' understanding of Anglican traditions and liturgy
- Outstanding international links, which have inspired pupils to fundraise and develop their understanding of contrasting cultural localities
- High quality acts of collective worship, contributing significantly to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Areas to improve

- Implement an effective and rigorous monitoring system for religious education (RE) across the school
- Develop a tracking system to monitor pupils' progress in RE across the school
- Ensure that teachers' marking identifies next steps in RE development, with reference to the level descriptors

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

At St Michael's 'every child is special, we have all been given a gift and can use these' said a parent who was explaining why her child is thriving within the Christian ethos of the school. All members of the school community share this sense of pride and thankfulness that being associated with such an outstanding church school brings. Christian values are lived out within the school, where pupils are encouraged to become confident learners. This in turn helps them to achieve exceptionally well and attain high standards. Importantly, parents identified the raised confidence levels of pupils to speak about their faith and to tackle difficult questions without being daunted by these. This attribute flourished within the secondary setting, particularly in RE lessons. Last term's work on the value of 'peace' stands out through high quality displays, prayers and poems around the theme and the opportunity to be voted as the class 'peacemaker' has a significant impact on pupils. It raises the importance of educating and nourishing the whole child and this is what St Michael's school community does outstandingly well. The school's Christian character is celebrated on the website, through high quality newsletters to parents and within general documentation in everyday use. This is a school where pupils' spiritual development is exceptionally good, where pupils pray with confidence, value the many opportunities to reflect and have a deep empathy for the well-being of others. As one pupil said 'Giving is like second nature. If you see a need, you rise to that need'. Cultural development has improved significantly from the previous inspection and is now a strength of the school. The school has gained the 'International Award' for its work with a school in Uganda and another in South Africa. The work covered within the gaining of this Award has successfully built respect and appreciation of diversity. The contrasting nature of the two chosen schools has avoided the stereo-typing of Africa as an under-developed continent. Visitors to the school from the Ugandan community have further enhanced pupils' awareness of cultural diversity. Pupils' responses to the fundraising project for the new school building in Uganda have been truly magnificent, enabling them to develop their entrepreneurial skills to raise £9000 over time for the project. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. They show respect and consideration of each other. Social development opportunities are excellent. For example, Year 6 pupils use the 'Godly Play' approach to teach Bible stories to those in Year 2. RE makes a highly significant contribution to the school's ethos by teaching pupils the importance of faith. This understanding is further drawn out through other areas of the curriculum where pupils are encouraged to celebrate difference.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

'Collective worship allows us to worship, pray and reflect together and provides a focal point for communicating our shared vision, values and the Christian ethos of the school. It is impossible to think of school life without it!' This is the statement from the school's self-evaluation document. Evaluation of worship is seen as every one's responsibility. Pupils' evaluations, both written and verbal are used, as well as those from governors and staff. The inspection findings concur that high quality worship is at the heart of this school, encouraging, sustaining and inspiring all present to take the received messages out into the school community through the Christian examples of living in harmony and loving each other. Through careful planning and excellence of leadership, pupils are able to understand more deeply Bible passages and stories, know Anglican responses and relate these to the school's core values and their own lives. Pupils appreciate the many opportunities they are given for participating in collective worship. They write poems and prayers and play instruments to enhance worship. Year 6 pupils fully planned and led a 'Fair Play' values worship. This involved writing dramatic scripts, dancing and composing a song. They are confident in planning and leading worship and through doing so have deepened their understanding of what constitutes high quality and meaningful provision. Collective Worship is very well supported and led by the clergy at St Michael's church, usually three times each month. These acts of worship are memorable to the children as are the termly visits by the Salvation Army officer. Pupils are also offered an opportunity to be admitted to communion. This is a twelve week course at the end of the school day. It is highly valued by both parents and their children. Services in the church are very well supported by parents. The recent Christingle Service had a packed church with the collection being given to the Children's Society. A number of staff either worship at St Michael's or at surrounding churches, which again has a very positive impact on pupils' perception of worship. A good monitoring and evaluation system is in place for collective worship. This has led to discussions and changes being introduced, such as

increasing the use of Anglican liturgy. Pupils understand about the Trinitarian nature of God and this belief is reinforced through prayers and responses. Staff new to the school are very well supported in leading collective worship through the joint planning opportunities for church services and the opportunity provided for modelling by more experienced staff of classroom worship.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

RE is well led. The current leader has worked conscientiously to address the issue of assessment in RE highlighted in the previous SIAS Inspection. She has put into place a manageable system, which is supporting judgements around the level descriptors and building a portfolio of assessed work. This informs staff with future planning. She has built confidence levels across the school in RE teaching. Planning is detailed and of good quality. The school has good information on standards attained in Year 6 and has set ambitious targets to increase the number of pupils achieving Level 5 in the summer this year to 30%. At present this level of information is not available in the same level of detail for other year groups. The tracking of pupils' progress in RE is not yet established. Pupils are very enthusiastic and knowledgeable about RE. They remember the lesson content well, prompted by photographs and written outcomes. Year 6 pupils proudly showed off their Sukkahs made as part of the Judaism topic. Year 5 pupils spoke excitedly about waiting for responses from their questions about Islam posed to pupils at the Muslim school in South Africa. These questions demonstrated a level of understanding and learning about religion which was in excess of national expectations. Work in books is well presented and shows a creative, cross curricular approach to RE. The quality of teaching is good. This was evidenced not only through observations on the Inspection day, but also through good quality pupil outcomes in RE workbooks, which clearly showed good levels of progress from earlier starting points. Higher ability pupils are suitably challenged. Marking of pupils' work does not currently identify next steps in RE development, based on the level descriptors. Pupils have a secure understanding of the key aspects of Christianity with Year 6 pupils proud to use their Bibles in their RE work. Importantly pupils are able not only to recall Bible stories, but can relate them to their own lives and behaviours. This pupil acceptance of the value of RE has grown through well planned opportunities to develop skills such as first- hand enquiry, analysis and reflection. Pupils demonstrate a strong sense of appreciation of the impact of religion on believers. The RE Subject Leader has liaised well with the RE Link Governor, particularly at the end of the year, when there is an opportunity to evaluate progress of objectives set in the Action Plan. She has also presented on RE issues to the Curriculum Sub Committee. As yet there has been no rigorous monitoring system for RE teaching across the school.

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

The Christian leadership of the long serving headteacher is inspirational and outstanding. His confidence and consistency in articulating the values of a Christian community are very highly regarded by staff, governors, parents and pupils. Parents spoke glowingly of his obvious passion for the school, where the warmth of welcome and stability of values has remained constant over the years. The Church School Action Group is a fluid and vibrant group of staff, parents and governors, meeting termly to discuss how the church school character can be further improved. This group has impacted positively on areas of practice within the school. For example, the classroom reflective areas have been further developed and improved. The Parents' Prayer Group also came from discussions amongst group members. The school's self- evaluation is accurate and detailed. Stakeholders are regularly surveyed and their views taken seriously, such as the recent discussions around levels of RE homework. Governors are very proud of the church school heritage. They have utilised diocesan training opportunities, not only to up-skill newly appointed foundation governors, but also to cascade information gained to other governors. Pupils' achievement levels are very high and attendance levels are good. There is a culture of celebration within the school. Pupils know that they are valued and supported to always do their best. The leadership of worship and RE is given a high priority and this has led to highly effective practice being established in collective worship. The positive developments in the monitoring of learners' progress in RE are not yet fully embedded. Links with the Diocese are very strong and regular visits to St Alban's Cathedral also deepen pupils' awareness of being part of a diocesan family.