



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 Controlled Infant School

Park Road
Aldershot
Hampshire GU11 3PU

Previous SIAS grade: Good

Current SIAMS grade: Good

Diocese: Guildford

Local authority: Hampshire

Dates of inspection: 25 March 2015

Date of last inspection: 16 March 2010

School's unique reference number: 116332

Headteacher: Liz Mathias

Inspector's name and number: Andrew Rickett 201

School context

St Michael's is a larger than average three-form entry infant school with 265 pupils on roll. It is situated in an urban setting. Most pupils come from a white British heritage and there is a higher than average number from minority ethnic groups. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average. The number eligible for the pupil premium is below the national average. Attendance is above national expectations.

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

- Pupils talk with confidence about matters of faith and belief in a learning environment that encourages reflection and openness.
- Acts of worship make an important contribution to pupils' understanding of explicit Christian values.
- The headteacher ensures that the Christian ethos has meaning and purpose for the whole school community.

Areas to improve

- Children to lead a review of the current seventeen Christian values to identify a core set that more closely reflect the school's distinctive Christian ethos and character.
- Leaders and teachers to deepen the children's understanding of their own spiritual awareness by equipping them with the language to be able to express their thoughts and ideas in greater depth across all areas of the curriculum.
- Develop a more rigorous and meaningful system whereby leaders and governors robustly monitor and evaluate the impact of the school's Christian ethos on the children's learning and personal development.

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

The identification of seventeen core values, each linked to Christian teaching through the collective worship programme, has given the school a clear framework on which to promote a more explicit Christian distinctiveness. Children are confident to talk about these values and explain how they make a difference to their lives. For example, children refer to forgiveness by Jesus dying on the cross and then relate it to their own experiences when dealing with their friendships.

These Christian values make a significant contribution to the high quality of relationships between all members of the school community, which is characterised by respect and kindness to one another. This quality of respect and care helps to establish the calm and purposeful learning environment in which most pupils attain standards that are well above national expectations. However, the large number of values being considered means that pupils can become confused and find it difficult to focus on a smaller core set that more closely reflects the school's ethos.

Pupils have an excellent attitude towards their learning and engage with excitement in lessons when sharing ideas and talking about matters of faith and belief. Religious education (RE) makes an important contribution to this exploration of ideas and concepts, although on occasions, lessons do not completely respond to the potential to explore difficult concepts in depth, meaning that the development of spiritual awareness is not fully explored. In turn, these opportunities do not always refer explicitly to the Christian values that underpin the ethos.

The school provides very well for the development of pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural (SMSC) education. Pupils have an excellent understanding of the difference between right and wrong and of the importance of making correct moral choices. They are developing a sense of social justice through the various charities that they support and the work they cover in personal and social education. A particular strength of the school is the pupils' ability to respond to challenges that explore abstract questions of meaning and purpose and pupils rise to these challenges with great enthusiasm by engaging in high quality discussion. However, this is an aspect of the pupils' learning that requires greater consistency in the quality of delivery across all areas of the curriculum.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Acts of worship are explicitly based on Christian teaching that encourages children to explore and understand how Christian values can help them to live their lives. The impact of these values and the messages that collective worship delivers, has become stronger since the previous inspection. A two year worship programme includes a broad range of themes that cover Christian values and events in the church year. Themes have strong links to the children's personal development through topics that closely relate to social, moral, spiritual and cultural (SMSC) development.

Pupils and their parents recognise that acts of worship are an important part of being a church school and regard the links with the local church as an integral aspect of the life of the school. Indeed, pupils refer to the church as 'ours'. Acts of worship are firmly centred on Biblical teaching and pupils have a good grasp of the way in which lessons from Bible stories help them to understand how to respond to events in their daily lives.

Pupils are developing their understanding of the nature of the Trinity and discuss with confidence God as Father and Jesus as Son. They openly share their thoughts on the relationship between the two, but are less sure about the Holy Spirit and 'what it actually does', whilst being willing to offer their own views on what the Holy Spirit means to them. They have a very clear understanding of prayer and are able to describe a range of different purposes for prayer. In particular, pupils articulate how saying thank you to God is a reflection of the respect that they have for Him. They are less sure however about a broader range of prayers that can support them in their daily lives.

Pupils respond with enthusiasm when asked to participate in acts of worship and there are

good opportunities for children to be involved but more limited times when they actually plan and lead worship on a regular basis. Acts of worship are a central part of the life of the school and are seen by pupils as a main expression of the Christian ethos. Worship makes an important contribution to the strong sense of fellowship and community, which is one of the major strengths of the school.

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

The headteacher has a good understanding of the significance of being a church school and articulates a clear vision based on explicit Christian values. She has an accurate grasp of self-evaluation as a church school and ensures that new initiatives to further develop the Christian ethos have the best interests of children at heart. The full support of senior staff and teachers for the continual promotion of the distinctive Christian character, means that the school is well placed to continue to improve and has an excellent capacity to do so.

Governors have a good understanding of the distinctive Christian ethos that underpins the school's vision and appreciate the contribution this makes to pupils' personal development and the creation of a positive learning environment. Rigorous systems that regularly use evidence from children to monitor and evaluate the impact of the school's values and collective worship, have not been sufficiently robust to accurately identify future improvement as a church school. However, the school has effectively addressed this area for development from the previous report and has made good progress in developing its distinctive Christian ethos.

The development of the new RE manager's role is a reflection of the priority given to promoting the church school ethos. She has a good understanding of the contribution that RE makes to the encouragement of pupils to explore matters of faith and belief and is well placed to make a significant contribution to the ongoing development of the school as a church school. The school has excellent links with parents and the local community and parents feel strongly that its Christian ethos allows their children to explore faith and belief in a non-judgemental way that equips them with the knowledge and understanding to make up their own minds. Links with the local church are strong and local clergy are well known in the school, making a valuable contribution to collective worship and the celebration of major Christian festivals in the church. The school meets the statutory requirements for RE and collective worship.

SIAMS report March 2015 St Michael's CE VC Infant School Aldershot GUI I 3PU