



St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School	London Road Woolmer Green Knebworth SG3 6JP
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	St Albans
Previous SIAMS inspection grade:	Outstanding
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Name of multi-academy trust/ federation	N/A
Date/s of inspection	6 October 2016
Date of last inspection	December 2011
School's unique reference number	117461
Headteacher	Brendan Mallon
Inspector's name and number	Mel Adams NS58

School context

Since the previous inspection, there has been an increase in pupil numbers, leading to the school becoming an oversubscribed one form of entry school, with 201 pupils on role. It serves the village of Woolmer Green. The majority of pupils are White British. The percentage of free school meals is well below national average, and the percentage of those with special educational needs and/or disabilities is in line. The deputy head has been recently appointed and is in her first term at the school. The parish church of St Michael is nearby and the school visits regularly for worship.

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

- The governing body, under the strong leadership of the chair of governors, in partnership with the headteacher, demonstrate a clear commitment to supporting the development of the Christian distinctiveness.
- The development in the use of explicit Christian values over the past two years, by actively engaging pupils and those who work in the school, and by enriching their daily lives, has further developed the Christian ethos of the school.
- Pupils' understanding of the importance of using Christian values in their daily lives in school creates in them a confidence to identify ways in which they can be actively involved in developing them further for the benefit of themselves and their peers in their day-to-day relationships.
- The strong partnership with the local church, through the regular leadership of worship by the clergy, supports the development of understanding of the Christian faith.
- The vision, to provide support and care for all those in the school community, including those with a range of needs, and those who are vulnerable, steers the inclusive practice of the school.

Areas to improve

- Ensure that school policies such as spiritual and moral, and collective worship support theological understanding based on a shared understanding of spirituality as a church school,
- Enable pupils' understanding of the diversity of Christian traditions, by widening the range of Christian leaders of collective worship, and by teaching that it is also a worldwide and multi-cultural faith.
- Deepen the experience of collective worship by developing understanding of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.
- Ensure that recorded tasks in religious education [RE] consistently enable pupils to express fully their understanding of religious concepts.

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

'We specifically chose St Michael's due to the school's obvious strong Christian values and teaching. and during the years our children have been educated there, we haven't felt these values to have been diluted'. This comment from a parent is indicative of the vision of the school that 'children will develop intellectually, spiritually and culturally through the promotion of Christian values'. This is demonstrated in the daily lives of those who work and learn there. The Christian values, made more explicit over the past two years, are becoming an intrinsic element in the life of the school. This is giving staff and pupils, as described by one member of staff, 'a vocabulary from the Bible to explore and express facts and feelings about situations'. Pupils also recognise that some of the Bible stories they hear speak of values which helps them, 'see how you can put it towards everyday life'. Pupils name a number of values, and say that they would like to be taught more of them. They understand how a value such as forgiveness helps them to bring disagreements to closure. The effect of the values extends beyond the school. One parent described how her young child had spoken of needing 'to persevere and not get angry', putting on their shoe.

Behaviour throughout the school is good and governors, staff and parents attribute this to the active application of the school's values. As a result, relationships between those who work and learn in the school are good, supporting a calm ethos for learning. One member of staff described how, 'adults live the ethos and model what a relationship with God is like'. Some pupils appreciate this and speak of staff who are 'caring and fair'.

Experiences for spiritual development are provided, including times of prayer and quietness for reflection in worship. In some RE lessons a reflective ambience is created by lighting a candle or playing music, creating opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural [SMSC] development. However, there is not a clear, shared Christian understanding of spirituality as a church school, as illustrated by the spiritual and moral policy. Pupils have a good understanding of the Christian faith, but do not have an understanding of different Christian traditions, or that Christianity is a multi-cultural world faith.

RE supports the Christian character of the school through good SMSC development, providing an understanding of the Christian faith and a number of other world faiths. Pupils say this helps them to understand and appreciate others, and 'prepares us for when we grow up and meet lots of other people'. They speak about how this also helps them to look beyond themselves and show, for example, 'how we show we care for others through fair trade'.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

All members of the school community attend daily worship. One pupil describes how 'you listen to the stories in the Bible and see how you can put it towards everyday life'. Worship is steered by a Bible reading at the start of the week, and along with a value of the month, follows the Diocesan programme. Pupils are able to use values in other contexts, for example, developing understanding of the lives, feelings and motivation of others observed in some RE lessons. Staff appreciate time during the day to stop and have space to think and reflect.

Pupils say they enjoy times of prayer, especially for the needs of those less fortunate, which they have been doing particularly during harvest time. With a growing understanding of the value of prayer, pupils appreciate other times to pray during the day with their peers, such as before lunch. Some, including those from different faiths, also say they pray at other times themselves. Parents attend some acts of worship. They appreciate the importance of Christian values in the school community and happily embrace them as relevant to everyone, whether of different faiths or none.

Worship enables all those attending to develop an understanding of God the Father and Jesus the Son. The person and work of the Holy Spirit is spoken of at Pentecost in worship and RE, but does not feature in daily worship. The headteacher and rector lead regularly, along with class teachers who lead class assemblies in which pupils participate. Year 6 lead worship monthly, supported by the headteacher. Pupils appreciate seeing other pupils lead, saying that they make it easy for them to understand. The school regularly attends church for worship, which can be led by clergy or staff. The headteacher has worked with staff who lead in church to ensure that these are acts of worship rather than purely 'show and tell'. There are currently no leaders from other Christian traditions. The headteacher has identified the need to build on current verbal evaluations, by developing more systematic and structured monitoring and evaluation, with governors, staff and pupils, in order to extend the range of experiences provided. Through celebration of festivals, such as Candlemas, pupils have a growing understanding of the church year. Spiritual and moral development is well supported, as described by one pupil, 'the worship today will have made people think about the world differently, it showed us what sharing really means'.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

The school has a strong commitment to RE and sees it as strategic in underpinning its Christian character through supporting the development of the agreed Christian values. This is evident in lessons. For example, where pupils analyse the values shown by St Michael, and draw parallels about where they can apply the values in their own lives.

RE is assessed regularly indicating that pupils make good progress from their starting points. Standards are in line with the core subjects affirmed by the assessment criteria in the Hertfordshire agreed syllabus. The school has begun to develop marking in Years 5 and 6 to improve progress, but this has not yet had an impact.

Creative approaches to teaching can enable pupils to deepen their understanding of religious concepts. This is evident in Year 5, where pupils are well supported through role-play and effective teacher questioning. This enables them to identify the relationship between the actions of the characters in the story of the prodigal son, and the extent of God's willingness to forgive.

Pupils work in RE is recorded regularly and often creatively. This is particularly successful where the task enables pupils to record with clarity, both facts and religious understanding, for example coats of arms to describe St Michael. It is less successful where worksheets limit opportunities to fully explore and express religious understanding. This can lead to lack of progression related to deepening understanding of religious concepts as pupils move through the school. The annual 'thinking day' enables pupils to spend time thinking about big questions, some of which they generate for themselves, such as, 'Who created God?' and, 'Does God live forever?' Pupils enjoy these experiences, and they say that it challenges them to 'think hard' and sometimes have to accept that they will not always find an answer. They also appreciate learning about other faiths and describe how their understanding helps them to appreciate and respect that people believe and worship in diverse ways. As a result, RE makes a good contribution to pupils' development in SMSC.

The RE leader, through discussion with pupils and staff, evaluates and plans for developments which then inform the school improvement plan. This has led to revisions to the RE curriculum which are being trialled. Recent training with the Diocese is adding to the schools evaluation and planning for further developments in the RE scheme of work.

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

School leaders and governors work together to shape the development of the distinctive Christian character of the school, evident through its regular inclusion for discussion in governing body meetings. The new deputy head has rapidly developed a good understanding of the school and its Christian character, enabling her to fully support the ethos and the planned developments. The chair of governors relates the drive for upholding the Christian ethos and standards to the strapline, 'nurturing our children through faith and learning'. This leads to a focus on the needs of each child. As a result, attendance is good and there have been no exclusions. Standards throughout the school are good, with the majority of pupils making or exceeding expected rates of progress. Achievement of disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs matches that of other pupils nationally and in the school. SMSC is well supported through the curriculum, which is well planned, and provides cross-curricular links with RE. The school meets the statutory requirement for RE and collective worship. Through providing a range of professional development for staff and governors, the school is supporting the future leadership of church schools. The school has a very good partnership with the local parish church, and is in the process of developing a strategic partnership with the five local church schools within the Welwyn parish ministries. The partnership with the parish church enables pupils to have a good understanding of Anglican faith and practice through regular visits to the church for worship.

Through attending acts of worship, and regular visits to the school, governors gain a good understanding of the effectiveness of the vision in the daily life of this school. Through this, they are able to contribute to self – evaluation, which accurately identifies strengths and a number of areas for development. The Christian ethos is a standing priority in the development plan. RE has a high status in the school with the same standing as mathematics and English. The RE and collective worship leaders work together ensuring coherence in planning and provision, reporting regularly to the governing body. As a result, explicit Christian values have grown in prominence and are becoming increasingly evident in the curriculum. They are also important in relationships throughout the school, supporting good behaviour. As a result, they are supporting SMSC development. Parents speak appreciatively of the Christian values of the school, saying that they are important for all pupils, including those of all faiths, and support good attitudes and behaviour. Pupils develop leadership skills through school council and, by the time they reach Year 6, effectively lead worship. The school enjoys a good relationship with the diocese, and staff and governors have benefited from a range of professional development opportunities. These have helped to identify areas for development of the Christian distinctiveness of the school.

