

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

London Road
Woolmer Green
Hertfordshire
SG3 6JP

Diocese: St Albans

Local authority: Hertfordshire
Date of inspection: 2 December 2011
Date of last inspection: 7 June 2007
School's unique reference number: 117461
Headteacher [Acting]: Mr Brendan Mallon
Inspector's name and number: Mrs Lizzie McWhirter MA 244

School context

St Michael's Woolmer Green is a rural school on the outskirts of Welwyn, serving the village and its surrounding villages. Currently there are 129 pupils who are mainly from a White British background. The school is the recipient of many national awards. The acting headteacher has been in post for three years.

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

Here is a place where everyone is welcomed and encouraged to achieve. St Michael's is an excellent church school because its relationships are founded on Christian values, ensuring all are included and belong. The school lives out its motto of 'the small school that thinks big'.

Established strengths

- The strong sense of family which exists, based on Christian values
- The excellent links with the church
- The opportunities given to pupils in collective worship and religious education[RE], nurturing their spiritual development
- The pupils' love of learning and life

Focus for development

- Establish a gifted and talented register for RE
- Embed the evaluation of collective worship involving both pupils and governors

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

St Michael's provides an excellent learning environment where pupils are proud to belong, feel valued and achieve highly. Here is a place where exemplary relationships are nurtured and everyone values the care and respect which underpins all school life. Within this cohesive family, there is a very strong sense of what it means to be living in a Christian community in which church and school links are extremely important. Indeed, 'the input that the church has in school life is extraordinarily high'. Parents praise the 'one big community where pupils are much respected'. As one parent said, 'it works'. An excellent example of this is the buddy system and 'the care that Year 6 take of the very young children' with pupils valuing 'bonding with each other'. Pupils say they value their teachers and their friends, enjoying their lessons and their learning. The full range of extra curricular activities ensure no one wants to leave school at the end of the day. In this way the school is seen to value the widest range of achievement and pupils feel able to make a positive contribution. They enjoy giving to charity through which they experience the Christian values of service and gratitude. Their sense of global awareness is supported through links with a school and church in Kenya. Such links initiated by the church are still in their infancy. Bright, prominent displays and reflection areas in classrooms greatly enhance pupils' spiritual development. Pupils welcome the opportunity to develop spaces for reflection outside in the school grounds.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Prayerful and meaningful worship is clearly at the heart of this school, permeating all school life and practice. The attitude of pupils to collective worship is excellent because the quality of worship offered to them involves them and greatly supports their spiritual development. Pupils clearly enjoy worshipping together in a setting which enables them to encounter Jesus. They regard worship as 'a chance to pray and reflect together and share the Christian values that Jesus taught us'. They value the variety of visitors who lead worship, especially the clergy who are welcome and regular visitors, as it gives them an opportunity to learn. As a result, spiritual growth and affirmation is very good. Pupils value prayer in worship, writing and saying their own prayers. Pupils value space in class to be quiet and speak of the times when they can 'take a fircone and have a moment of reflection'. They speak highly of The Bishop of Hertford's visit to bless their new building and value 'being blessed by a bishop and we feel special in that building now'. Key festivals in the church year such as Candlemas take place in 'God's house', the parish church of St Michael's. In these ways, pupils are helped in their worshipping life to reflect on what it means to be part of the wider Anglican communion. Pupils welcome writing down their thoughts on collective worship as they feel this would 'make our school a lot better for governors to know what we like the most so things are balanced'. They also say that they value being included in 'how to make collective worship better and be more involved with God and Jesus'. In these ways, worship is improving in integrity and quality.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

RE enjoys a high profile in this school and is well led and supported. As a result, excellence and enjoyment is seen in RE. The school has worked very hard since the last inspection, to ensure that learning from religion is embedded into the units of work studied. An effective system of tracking and monitoring is in place, which informs planning and demonstrates achievement in RE. Next steps include enabling staff to become more confident in levelling pupils' work. Staff are enthused and pupils are aware of their targets, knowing 'the next steps to improve your work'. Consequently, excellent achievement is evident and standards throughout the school are consistently high. Pupils say they enjoy RE and 'like learning about God, different religions, places of worship and different lifestyles'. Pupils' attitudes are a strength in this subject which greatly supports their spiritual development. They find RE to be 'interesting, fascinating and amazing that so many people believe similar things', saying it is 'taught well' and have 'loved learning about the different beliefs'. They speak about the different ways in which Christians and Muslims pray. They value Christianity and can explain the symbolism of the Advent wreath. Pupil knowledge is deepened and supported by visits to the parish church as well as the mandir and mosque. Pupils demonstrate a high level of theological literacy, exploring the big questions of life from a very young age, readily expressing their ideas about God and articulating what concepts such as temptation means to them. Lessons are consistently of high quality and standard, showing the excellent relationships which exist as pupils collaborate well, think independently and show respect to teachers and each other. Plans to take forward a gifted and talented register in RE ensures potential for such pupils to be realised, enhancing standards in this key subject.

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

The distinctive Christian vision is clearly evident and effectively promoted by the headteacher, staff, clergy and governors so that the school's Anglican foundation is celebrated amongst the whole school community. Everyone models the school vision to ensure the development of the whole child to their fullest potential, equipping them with skills for life. Exemplary relationships show the key role that Christian values play in the life of the school. Pupils say that 'being a church school makes our small school great'. Parents find staff approachable and praise the dedication of the headteacher. Parents speak of how these values are carried into the community, such as the taking of harvest gifts to the elderly. Foundation governors are open to new ways of taking the school forward, especially in their systematic monitoring and evaluative role. They appoint effective teachers, providing them with leadership opportunities. The school values support from the diocese so everyone is involved in upholding the school's Church of England foundation. St Michael's is truly inclusive, modelling and contributing to community cohesion.

