

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Michael's Church of England Primary School

The Grove, Flixton, Manchester M41 6JB	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Manchester
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Trafford
Date of inspection	26 January 2018
Date of last inspection	March 2013
Type of school and unique reference number	Voluntary Aided 106350
Headteacher	Alison Drayton
Inspector's name and number	Nigel Castledine 652

School context

This average-sized school is located in a suburb of the Greater Manchester conurbation. The school serves a community of low economic disadvantage, comprising mainly White British families. There is a small but increasing number of minority ethnic pupils. Almost all pupils speak English as their first language.

A well below average but increasing proportion of disadvantaged pupils are eligible for Pupil Premium. The proportion of pupils with additional needs is also well below national average.

Since the last inspection, the school has appointed the substantive headteacher, who was previously acting headteacher. A deputy head has also been appointed.

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

- The school's pervasive Christian vision is underpinned by the Christian belief in the God-given value of every child. Accordingly each pupil's needs are nurtured by stimulating teaching and compassionate care.
- Gospel values are at the heart of school life. They drive the school's mission statement which focuses on giving all pupils the opportunity to fulfil their potential within a compassionate Christian educational context.
- Pupils are encouraged to develop the resilience to strive for academic success, overcoming potential learning blocks by harnessing the Christian value of perseverance, as they investigate the best ways forward.
- Christian belief powerfully motivates the staff team to work co-operatively and supportively together, so providing a positive role model of thoughtful, compassionate relationships for pupils to emulate.

Areas to improve

- Extend pupils' opportunities to be fully involved in the planning and leadership of worship with increasing independence, whilst also contributing to its evaluation alongside a wider range of other stakeholders.
- Embed the school's new assessment for religious education (RE) to ensure that pupils' learning continues to be inspired by use of the diocesan 'Questful RE' and 'Understanding Christianity' learning approaches.
- Widen school development planning and evaluation processes to ensure that they analyse, record and deepen the impact of the school's Christian distinctiveness on pupils' progress, achievement and nurture.

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

A strong sense of Christian purpose pervades all of school life. The St Michael's mission statement summarises this in its chosen biblical text: 'I have come that everyone may have life and have it to the full.' This inspires the school to ensure all pupils experience personal learning success within a happy, caring Christian environment. Accordingly the school team strives to ensure that any potential blocks to pupils' learning are removed. As a parent explained, 'Gospel teaching comes alive in this school.' Supportive relationships between staff and pupils encourage pupils' enthusiastic 'can-do' learning attitudes, which accelerate their academic progress. Because pupils are engaged in exciting learning opportunities, they enjoy their school life and attend regularly. Data shows that pupil attendance meets national expectations whilst appropriate support addresses the few instances of persistent pupil absence.

A comprehensive range of Christian values are at the heart of school life. Their biblical context, stemming from Jesus' teachings, is regularly referred to in collective worship and RE. They are regularly referenced by all members of the school community because all activities and learning are encompassed within the broad spectrum of Christian teaching and belief. These approaches ensure that the gospel values are well understood by pupils. Their strengths are drawn on to inspire the school's emphasis on pupils developing their personal resilience to strive for academic success. A pupil explained, 'When learning gets tricky, we try to use the value of perseverance that says you keep trying different ways until you find how to do it. It works!' Pupils also willingly give their time to be of Christian service to others, enthusiastically volunteering to take on responsibility for a wide range of tasks in school.

Within a school climate of mutual support and respect for all, pupils' behaviour is overwhelmingly friendly and courteous. This considerate behaviour also promotes inclusive respect and acceptance for all, and is strongly influenced by the school's golden rules. These rules are based on Christian values, particularly forgiveness and love. Any rare instances of bullying or discriminatory behaviour are speedily and compassionately resolved by senior staff using the Christian principles of restorative justice. The Christian value of compassion nurtures pupils' Christian stewardship, resulting in their generous, enthusiastic support for local and global charitable giving.

The school's Christian values also underpin the school's inclusive respect for diverse communities. Although the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is very low, the school ensures positive, supportive relationships are established with such families. These relationships are enhanced by the thought given to their religious needs, which are met in inclusive and appropriate ways. A parent commented, 'This school considers us all to be brothers and sisters in faith.' The school has also developed links with Christian schools in Lahore, via the Manchester diocesan links with Pakistan and has made links via a local church with Christians in Uganda. This networking has widened and enriched pupils' perceptions of Christianity as a global, multi-cultural living faith.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Great value is placed on collective worship as an inclusive and spiritual occasion for all those present, in which those of faith can connect with the Divine. Worship uses inclusive liturgy that motivates all present to appreciate the value of finding time for spiritual reflection and prayer. Themes for worship are predominantly Christian, emphasising gospel values with regular biblical teaching. Worship themes also help pupils to follow the Anglican liturgical year through the emphasis on Christian festivals and religious seasons. Worship also includes due mention of other world faiths and on occasion uses some of their sacred scriptures. This ensures that the contrasting beliefs of other religions are given respectful mention. Local and global concerns and charitable needs are also considered in worship, supporting pupils' consideration of how Christian values might influence their personal responses.

School liturgy helps to ready the pupils for worship with the lighting of the worship candle, accompanied by appropriate liturgical responses. Christian songs and hymns, chosen to amplify the day's theme and sung enthusiastically, help to enrich the spiritual atmosphere of praise and readiness to worship.

Worship is carefully planned by the headteacher, informed by the school council's evaluations of worship's impact. The value of this evaluation is limited because it does not include the view of all groups of school stakeholders. The worship is led by the teaching staff, the local parish priest and visiting leaders from other Christian settings, regularly helped by the pupils. However, pupils have limited opportunities to plan and lead the worship independently.

Prayer and reflection are part of every act of worship, pupils clearly understanding its purpose, using reflection time for consideration of their own needs and those of others. A pupil explained, 'My prayers are really my thinking that I share with God. Sometimes they are all about me, but I like to pray for others too'. Prayer is continued in classrooms during the day with the use of lunchtime grace and end of school prayers. Pupils appreciate the inviting prayer corners provided, as a response to a development point from the last inspection, in each classroom and as an external quiet garden. This area, currently being revitalised, is used by pupils and adults for prayer and as a spiritual oasis in which to leave messages of support and hope for local and world communities in need. Regular references in worship and RE to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity support pupils to grow in understanding of its significance.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

RE makes a very significant contribution to the Christian ethos of the school because it supports and informs pupils' personal journeys of discovery about faith. Pupils' interest in RE is strong because they enjoy the varied learning styles of the recently introduced diocesan 'Questful RE' syllabus, alongside the 'Understanding Christianity' resource. This innovation is the school's successful response to an RE development point from the last inspection. These learning resources have given the subject an effective boost, with many pupils now regarding RE as a highlight of the school timetable. The quality of learning outcomes has risen accordingly. However, the school is still piloting a new assessment system for RE. Therefore it is too soon to be certain whether pupils' learning outcomes are yet at a greater depth than national expectations.

A Year 2 RE lesson demonstrated that pupils are gaining a strong theological understanding, as shown during pupils' discussions about Jesus. A child suggested, 'Jesus is God in human form. He came to Earth to make it a better place.' In Year 5, RE outcomes included a lively discussion on how Jesus communicated his teachings. A pupil commented, 'I think Jesus used parables so people remembered the story and could understand his message.'

RE is well managed by the headteacher who is strong advocate for inspirational RE learning being a cornerstone of the school's curriculum. She combines her knowledgeable subject overview with that of the RE specialist higher level teaching assistant in Key Stage 1 and a RE lead teacher in Key Stage 2. This strong RE team have worked together to support class teachers with the introduction of the new approaches to the subject. This has ensured that RE is well taught in every class, in addition to enabling pupils to be able to ponder the big questions of life and belief. The parish priest is also influential in RE, working with pupils in supporting theological discussions. Particularly strong is the inclusive way in which the new syllabus prompts pupils to consider their personal responses to Christian belief and other global religions. In doing so, pupils are able to discover more about themselves, their relationship with the world and to encounter times of spiritual awe and wonder.

The school meets bi-annually with another local CofE primary school to moderate RE outcomes. RE leaders also meet with subject colleagues at a diocesan local RE hub which provides a source of new ideas and approaches.

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

Able led by the inspirational headteacher, the school's Christian distinctiveness, enriched by worship and informed by RE, strongly motivates the leadership team. As a result, the school has sustained pupil performance at levels that meet and often exceed national expectations. All policies and procedures are designed to help fulfil the school's Christian mission statement. The school follows Jesus' teaching of the wholeness of each person, for whom heart, mind and soul need to be nurtured and supported to develop. Accordingly, teachers plan the curriculum to include moments of awe, wonder, questioning, reflection, and for some, times of personal spirituality. This ensures that pupils develop a sense of self-worth and personal identity which leads many to an awareness of God's presence.

The pervasive Christian ethos of the school strongly influences governors' and senior leaders' deliberations. This ensures their decisions, pertaining to all areas of school life, are guided by Christian values and principles. However, the influence of St Michael's Christian ethos is not recorded as an integral part of the school's formal development and evaluation procedures. Senior leaders are determined to ensure that pupils reach their potential before moving on to their next stages of learning. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation provides the leadership team with an accurate view of the school's performance. Effective evaluation is evident in governors' formal scrutiny of pupils' academic performance. It is also seen in the governing board's support and focused challenge for school leaders. The school is committed to supporting the continuing professional development of all the staff. This is delivered through mutually beneficial links with local schools and universities as well as by diocesan courses.

There are beneficial school links with other Christian communities, some through parents. These include a local fellowship group, links with Manchester Cathedral and Audacious, a charismatic Christian city church. Parents are very willing to facilitate helpful links with contrasting faith communities. Mutually-beneficial connections with St Michael's church are ongoing, the school being considered an integral part of parish life. There are well established worship links that ensure pupils worship in a traditional Anglican church setting and experience some of the liturgy used there. Led by the pupils, the church is used for worship at the major festivals of the Christian year. These services are well attended by the pupils' families, so providing regular opportunities for the church congregation to worship together with the school.

The school engages closely with all parents and offers regular guidance and support. This regular, clear and friendly communication with parents keeps them well informed about their child's progress and particular needs. A parent commented, 'The caring ethos of this school looks after whole families, not just the children'.