

St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Maple Avenue
Braintree
Essex
CM7 2 NS

Diocese: Chelmsford

Local authority: Essex

Dates of inspection: 13th June 2012

Date of last inspection: 12th October 2009

School's unique reference number: 115157

Headteacher: Mrs Mandy Short

Inspector's name and number: Mrs Rosemary Privett 321

School context

St Michaels is a larger than average primary school. It is popular and oversubscribed. A third of the places in Early Years Foundation Stage are reserved for those who regularly attend a local church. Since September 2010, the school has had a new headteacher, assistant headteacher and three teachers, including two newly qualified teachers. The recent addition of a larger hall has enhanced the school's provision considerably.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Michaels as a Church of England school are outstanding

St Michael's is an outstanding Church of England school because the very strong Christian ethos is evident in all aspects of school life and Christian values are embedded and understood by all members of the school community. All members of the school community are valued, and relationships are based on mutual trust and respect. This culture enables pupils to develop academically and spiritually.

Established strengths

- The core Christian values which strongly underpin all aspects of school life and have an outstanding impact on attitudes and behaviour within the school.
- The very strong and supportive links between the school and St Michael's church which enable pupils to experience faith in action and be nurtured spiritually.
- The strong shared vision of all members of the school community.

Focus for development

- Develop assessment for learning in religious education (RE), by ensuring that there is focused time for pupils to discuss the next steps in their learning with staff.

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

This is a highly inclusive school, where the core Christian values of 'love, integrity, resilience and creativity' are central to the day to day life of the school and are very well embedded across the curriculum. They have an outstanding impact on the behaviour of pupils, which is exemplary. They also have a very positive impact on relationships between all members of the school community, which are mutually supportive and built on trust and respect. Pupils have a very clear understanding of these values. 'When we do something wrong we have to show integrity and tell the truth.' 'Our values fit into Jesus' story and our life.' Parents say that they value the way in which all staff in the school live out the schools values in their dealings with their children. Pupils say that school is fun. They really enjoy the academic challenges that are set for all, whatever their ability. They also appreciate the lively learning environment with its bright and prominent displays. 'It makes you feel as if you want to come to school every day!' This environment appropriately reflects the Christian character of the school and effectively supports the spiritual development of pupils. In one classroom a prayer wall is used very effectively to encourage pupils to develop the language of prayer and offer individual prayer requests. The schools Christian clubs, 'Spotlight' and 'Ask' are led by

volunteers and youth workers from the parish. These clubs enable pupils to ask questions and learn about the bible in a caring and supportive environment. The effective school council is proud of its support for charities such as the 'Stand By Me' project. Through this work, pupils experience the Christian values of love, service and gratitude.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

The daily act of worship is seen by all as central to the life of this school . It is educational in purpose and has a very strong Christian focus. The attitude of pupils to collective worship is excellent because the quality of worship offered to them involves them and greatly supports their spiritual and moral development. The great variety of visitors who lead worship is confirmation of the very close links with the church and local community and greatly adds to its quality and depth. Through these visitors and services in St Michael's church, pupils develop an understanding of a variety of styles of Christian worship and Anglican traditions . Pupils particularly enjoy worship when it is interactive. They also enjoy the times when they plan and lead worship .They say that worship leaders, 'teach you about God and Jesus and make it fun too.' Since the last inspection, very positive changes have been made to the planning of worship which means it now has an outstanding impact on the day to day life of the school. The core values and also themes from the RE syllabus are woven throughout each termly programme and staff regularly refer back to assembly themes in lessons. Prayer and quiet reflection is encouraged and is an important feature of the school day. Pupils value these times and describe the impact they have on their lives and relationships.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

RE makes a very positive contribution to the spiritual and moral development of all pupils .It is highly valued as a subject by all members of school staff who teach the subject with conviction. Results show that pupils make good progress as they move through the school and by Year 6, standards are in line with the other core subjects. The strong leadership of the co ordinator has resulted in many positive developments in this area since the last inspection. The standard of teaching and learning is now good overall with some outstanding aspects . Pupils are engaged in lessons, because lively and interactive teaching approaches are used. A particular strength of the teaching is the way creative resources and very effective questioning techniques are used to explore links between the themes of lessons and children's everyday life experiences. In Early Years Foundation Stage, well planned lessons enable pupils to explore their response to religious stories through discussion and practical activities. All adults in this class move learning on through effective and focused questioning. In both Key Stage 1 and 2 pupils have a growing understanding of the Christian faith. This was seen in lessons on baptism and the fruits of the spirit where they were keen to share their knowledge, making links between themes and their own life experiences. Assessment in RE has improved since the last inspection. The school now has an effective and manageable approach to tracking the progress of groups of pupils across the school. Through the subject leader's focused discussions with these groups of pupils, strengths and areas for development are pinpointed and appropriate training is provided for staff. This has led to an improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. Although much of the marking is supportive and helps pupils know what they need to do to improve, the school has identified the need to provide pupils with quality time to discuss their next steps with the teacher.

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

The headteacher has a very clear personal vision for the school which is shared by staff, governors, clergy and youth workers. Exemplary relationships across the school show the key role that the schools Christian values play in its day to day life. The strong and prayerful partnership between the church and school greatly enhances its Christian character .The holiday clubs it provides for pupils are a very tangible demonstration of its mission to the community. The senior leadership team and RE and worship leader, keep the schools distinctive character under constant review and for them it is always 'a live issue.' Examples of this focus are the way in which they are currently considering the schools response to the Bishop of Chelmsford's 'Transforming Presence' document, and their discussions on how they might develop the new school hall to further enhance worship. The staff is fully involved in this continuing drive for improvement, through regular staff meetings. Because of this sharply focused approach, the school has continued to move forward since the last inspection. The Governors have a robust monitoring programme in place. This means they know the school very well and can offer appropriate support and challenge.

