



## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

### St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Back Lane  
Aldbourne  
Marlborough  
Wiltshire SN8 2BP

**Previous inspection grade: Good**

**Current inspection grade: Good**

**Diocese: Salisbury**

Local authority: Wiltshire

Dates of inspection: 18 May 2016

Date of last inspection: 3 May 2011

School's unique reference number: 126392

Headteacher: Judith Arkwright

Inspector's name and number: Andrew Rickett 201

#### School context

St Michael's is smaller than the average size primary school with 181 children on roll. They are arranged into seven classes. Numbers have risen considerably since the previous inspection. The large majority of children are of a white British heritage. The number of children with learning needs and/or disabilities is below the national average as is the number entitled to receive pupil premium. Five children have statements of educational needs. Overall attendance is above the national average.

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

- Christian values make an impact on the excellent relationships that run throughout the school community.
- The high quality of religious education (RE) provides opportunities for children to explore their understanding of faith and belief.
- The headteacher, supported by other leaders and managers, ensures that the school's Christian ethos continually grows in its meaning and purpose for children and adults in the school community.

#### Areas to improve

- Involve children to a greater extent in leading acts of worship so that they have more opportunities to direct how themes are explored.
- Develop the children's appreciation of how prayers support people in their lives.
- Improve the role of foundation governors in effectively monitoring and evaluating the impact of the Christian ethos so that a more informed view identifies areas for improvement.

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

In September 2015 the school reinvigorated the place that explicit Christian values have in the life of the school. Christian values have been a strength of the school for a number of years but the values day, held at the start of the school year, is helping to raise their profile and for them to play an increasingly important part in the children's understanding of what it means to part of a church school. An important aspect of this strengthening of the ethos is a more 'joined up' approach to how values link to the collective worship programme and the wider life of the school. Twelve values have been chosen by the school community and the school is in the process of delivering them in greater depth over a two year cycle. Children have a good understanding of values and articulate their meaning with clarity. For example, they explain that they need to respect other people, all creatures and the world they live in. They give examples of how they have lived out these values and know that, as a church school, respect has a Christian interpretation as a value because God created the world and all the living things in it. Older children find it more difficult to articulate the difference a Christian value such as respect makes to them personally. Relationships in the school are excellent. Children treat each other with kindness and generosity. They behave very well and have a secure moral understanding of right from wrong and the need to be fair. They are comfortable to express their views on matters of faith and belief openly in an environment in which they know that they will be listened to. Teachers are excellent role models for children and display patience and a genuine concern for the children's wellbeing. There are good opportunities for children to develop their personal spirituality. The use of reflective journals is well established and used by children to think about questions that have arisen from their 'Open the Book' acts of worship. At the moment there are fewer opportunities for children to think of their own questions and the time to explore them. Children have a growing awareness of the diversity of Christian worship around the world and that modern Britain is a culturally diverse country. Religious education makes a valuable contribution to the children's understanding of world faiths in which they take a keen interest.

## **The impact of collective worship on the school community is good**

The impact of collective worship has improved since the previous inspection because there is a clearer emphasis on exploring Christian values in greater depth. Following the values day in September 2015, worship has been planned so that one of twelve core values is explored over a six week programme. This has given greater continuity in the delivery of worship messages as the 'Open the Book' team and clergy lead worship now follow the current value. Indeed, the question that children explore in their reflective journals derives from the 'Open the Book' worship. As yet, children have not been asked regularly how they would like to explore their understanding of the messages they hear in worship. Children have a good understanding that worship in school, and in the local church, is one of the main ways through which the school expresses its church school ethos. For example, they explain that prayer, Bible teaching, songs and the use of candles and other symbols are all part of being a church school. They have a good awareness of the different elements of worship and its purpose. Worship, with all these elements, is a special time in the school day and children have positive attitudes towards collective worship. They respond well when asked a question or given time to talk with a partner. They show an appropriate reverence to prayer and are attentive. Following a recent act of worship about the nature of the Trinity, children are developing their own thoughts about what it means to them. For example, older children refer to the Holy Spirit 'looking over us' and 'giving us courage to support other people in need'. Younger children explain that the Holy Spirit gives 'us a fresh start'. They explain that if you say sorry, 'and mean it', the Holy Spirit will give you another chance. Children are developing their understanding of prayer. Younger ones explain that prayers can be used to say thank you for the good things in the world but find it more difficult to think of other types of prayers. Children have some participation in collective worship and are involved in setting out the hall and contributing to prayers. They have fewer opportunities to plan and lead worship. Some observations of worship have been undertaken by governors although they haven't involved talking with children to gather their views and ideas for how to continue to improve the worship

experience.

### **The effectiveness of religious education is outstanding**

Children achieve very well in RE and attain standards that for the majority of children are at least in line with national expectations. Overall they make good progress in their learning and meet the requirements of the RE syllabus. Religious education is at its best when it exceeds the requirements of the syllabus and provides opportunities for children to excel in their learning. This happens when teaching and learning focuses on exploration of concepts in depth and not only the acquisition of knowledge. Children have a secure knowledge of RE, but it is when they are challenged to apply this to their own experiences that teaching and learning is of a higher quality. Children, of all abilities, respond with enthusiasm to these times with a real excitement of their learning and a sense of achievement. Even so, there is still potential for children to be challenged even further and sometimes these opportunities are missed. Following a review of current assessment procedures, the school has introduced a new system to assess children's progress and attainment in RE and this is at an early stage. The RE leader has undertaken some moderation of children's work to ensure that there is a consistent understanding by teachers of standards to support the accuracy of assessments using the new assessment model. Marking of children's work is regular but does not always use subject specific comments and focuses on literacy skills. Religious education makes a very good contribution to the children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development. Children have opportunities to discuss ethical issues and moral dilemmas as an integral aspect of their RE lessons. They are often asked to reflect on what they are learning and empathise with others. For example, in a lesson with older children, they were asked to imagine what it might feel like if they weren't allowed to do something that was an important part of their lives. They talked about being 'incomplete' and 'isolated'. Younger children, exploring the concept of belonging, were encouraged to consider whether praying alone or in a group made a difference. In these types of lessons, children enjoy the challenge and therefore make good progress in their learning.

### **The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the school as a church school are good**

The headteacher has ensured that the school's Christian ethos has made good progress since the last inspection by establishing a shared vision which places greater emphasis on Christian values reflection. She has been well supported by the deputy headteacher and governing body. Together, they are developing their understanding of what it means to be a church school. Self-evaluation as a church school is mostly accurate but some of the systems to gather strong evidence of impact have not yet been fully put in place. For example, the monitoring and evaluation of collective worship does not have sufficient emphasis on its impact and there are few strategic systems to evaluate the overall Christian ethos. The headteacher is committed to the continual development of the school as a church school and has a good understanding of what needs to be done to continue in this process. She is supported by foundation governors including the vicar who make an important contribution to the life of the school. The RE leader also plays an important role in developing the Christian ethos and has a clear grasp of the development points to improve further. She is a strong lead for RE and grasps the importance of developing the children's ability to apply their understanding of what they learn from RE to their own lives. The school has close links with the nearby church. Children, and their parents, see the church as an integral part of the life of the school. The role of the vicar and the 'Open the Book' team are testament to the church's commitment to the school. The celebration of major Christian festivals in the church not only give children an understanding of their meaning, but bring the whole school community together at these special times. Parents say that the school cares for their children and teaches them to be good citizens. They say that the Christian ethos is promoted in such a way that lets their children explore faith and belief in their own way. The school meets the statutory requirements for RE and collective worship.