

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Carlisle Road, Dalston, Carlisle, CA5 7LN

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Carlisle
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Cumbria
Date of inspection	7 December 2017
Date of last inspection	October 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	VC Primary 112246
Headteacher	Christopher Marsh
Inspector's name and number	Ann Aspden 858

School context

St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Controlled primary school is an average sized primary school situated in the semi-rural village of Dalston. There are 219 pupils on roll, most of whom are of white British heritage. They are taught in 7 single age classes and come from a mixture of socio and economic backgrounds. The percentage of pupils who have special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) and those eligible for the pupil premium is in line with the national average. Since the last inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed. The deputy headteacher will become acting headteacher in January 2018 when the current headteacher leaves to take up a new post.

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

- The school operates as a Christian family. This gives rise to relationships which ensure that all feel loved and valued.
- All members of the school community place a great value on collective worship. Its impact is wide-ranging and inspirational.
- The pupils' good behaviour and their care for each other reflect their understanding of Christian forgiveness, kindness and respect.
- The commitment of all parties ensures that links between the church, parish and wider community are mutually beneficial.

Areas to improve

- Develop the approach to monitoring and evaluation of the school's distinctiveness and effectiveness as a church school in order that this becomes a key part of the development planning process.
- Involve the whole school community in a review of the school's mission statement so as to encapsulate the importance of the Christian ethos.
- Extend the pupils' understanding of the value and purpose of personal and spontaneous prayer and reflection so that they seek out experiences more readily and grow in their confidence and sensitivity.

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

From their first day in school, every child is welcomed as a valued member of this special Christian family. The school is rightly proud of its caring ethos and the pastoral support offered to all pupils and their families. As a result, parents make a conscious decision to choose the school and other families are eager to join. They say, 'The school shows them how important Jesus is in their daily lives.' The school has at its heart the Christian values of kindness, respect, perseverance, forgiveness and challenge which form the foundations on which all school life is built. Pupils' have a distinctive Christian understanding of the school's values. Older pupils speak confidently about the way in which the values are used in school. One Key Stage 2 child explained, 'They are what everyone in our school shows all the time. Our values help us to make the right decision and make you a better person.' This has a very positive impact on behaviour and attitude to learning. Pupils have a keen sense of right and wrong. They talk about how Jesus, as the light of the world, shows them the right way to live. One child from Key Stage 1 said, 'Jesus is actually God, you know.'

The school curriculum provides a breadth of experiences and is planned in a way that ensures that spiritual, social, moral and cultural development runs through its core. The creative curriculum is broad, balanced and underpinned by Christian values. The Mission Club which is linked to biblical themes and is run by members of St Michael's church, supports and reinforces the school's Christian ethos. As a result, pupils leave for high school confident and equipped with essential life skills. Pupil voice is important at St Michael's, as demonstrated through the Bright Star project which pupils in Key Stage 2 are very proud of. Through pupil-led projects such as these, school councillors and members of the pupils' collective worship group live out the school's Christian ethos and make a difference to the lives of others.

Religious education (RE) makes a valuable contribution to the Christian character of the school. Its impact can be seen throughout the school environment. Classroom displays reflect pupils' good understanding of Christianity as a multi-cultural world faith. Pupils are able to explain about the ways in which Christians celebrate Christmas in other countries. Their knowledge of other faiths has been developed both through RE teaching and educational visits to places of worship such as the Hindu temple in Newcastle and Samye Ling Buddhist temple. Pupils have some understanding of different religious festivals. They were proud of their Diwali lamps, gave a detailed description of the festival of Hanukkah and were eager to explain how the theme of light is relevant both to Christians and to other faiths. However, the pupils' overall understanding of difference and diversity both nationally and globally is limited.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship is a much valued and extremely vital part of the daily life of the school. Themes which are firmly based on gospel teaching, Christian values and festivals always focus on a key question. Bible references become familiar because they are used and displayed across the school. As a result, pupils have a deep knowledge and understanding of the life and teaching of Jesus. Worship is clearly linked to the church's year and Anglican practice and is varied and lively. As a result, pupils participate willingly and take away ideas and thoughts which impact on their daily lives. For example, a Year 1 pupil reflected, 'Jesus' miracles show that he was special and powerful.' Children enjoy the variety of experiences and the different leaders of worship including members of the local church. Prayer and reflection areas are set up in each classroom and children often write their own prayers. However, there are not sufficient opportunities for children to experience prayer and reflection both in worship and during the school day. The extent to which pupils are involved in regularly planning, delivering and evaluating worship has developed significantly since the previous denominational inspection. The pupils' collective worship group are very confident in the role that they play in developing the spirituality of others. For example, a group of pupils successfully led worship which they had planned for the youngest pupils with the theme of Christmas around the world. They made it highly relevant and interactive so that pupils were eager to engage. All pupils help to deliver class-led worship held in school and in church at festival times. Parents enjoy attending these and believe this supports the school's sense of community extremely well. They say that pupils often talk about worship themes at home and, as a result, feel that it has a significant influence on their family lives. Parents value their good relationships with the school but say they would like to share in their children's work and worship more frequently.

Collective worship is extremely well-led and managed by an experienced and passionate leader who has ensured that issues for development from the previous denominational inspection have been fully addressed. Meticulous planning supports teachers as they lead worship. Robust monitoring and evaluation which involves the collective worship leader, the vicar and pupils ensures that feedback from pupils, staff and governors informs future planning and assesses the impact of worship on pupils' attitudes and beliefs. As a result, the impact of collective worship continues to evolve and inspire.

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

The headteacher, the vicar, governors and staff promote and exemplify a distinctive Christian vision of the school. Their commitment to the Christian ethos is demonstrated through the way in which they ensure that Christian values are woven carefully through the entire school curriculum. As a result, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well supported. The partnership between the school and the vicar and the very effective work done by the collective worship leader, are seen as crucial in the improvements since the last inspection. One of the keys to the improvements made is the fresh emphasis on Christian values as the basis for all decisions and the motivation for the high standards of behaviour and attitudes.

Governors and leaders ensure that the needs of all pupils are paramount. To this end the school's Christian distinctiveness is continually developed. This has a positive impact on attainment and progress of many pupils. Issues for development at the last denominational inspection have been successfully addressed and the impact of changes continues to be closely monitored. Governors have secured very effective leadership for collective worship and Religious Education. They support and resource both effectively. Arrangements for religious education and collective worship meet statutory requirements. Governors are equally committed to ensuring that strong leadership of the school is in place. They are firmly committed to successfully completing the process of appointing a new headteacher in 2018. Monitoring and evaluation systems are in place for collective worship. However, the approach to monitoring and evaluation of the school's distinctive character is not sufficiently rigorous to bring about future improvements.

Partnership with the diocese supports church school improvement and leadership effectively. This in turn supports succession planning, ensuring that future church school leadership is secure. Church links support the spiritual growth of the school. For example, the annual Easter Experience allows school and church to come together and to share the joy of Christ's resurrection.

There are positive and clear links between the school, the parish and the local community which are actively promoted by the leadership team and supported by all members of the school community. Global links are not well developed and as a result this has been identified by leaders as an area for development in the future. Parents feel welcomed both in school and in church and would appreciate opportunities to increase their involvement further. One parent commented that, 'We feel comfortable in our school and in the church. It seems very natural. All aspects of our children's lives are celebrated by the school and whatever they achieve is linked to the school's Christian ethos.' Parents speak highly of the compassion with which they and their children are treated. One parent summed up the thoughts of many by saying, 'In our school we see Christian values in action.'

SIAMS report December 2017 St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School CA5 7LN