

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

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

Maple Avenue, Braintree, Essex CM7 2NS

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Diocese	Chelmsford
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Local authority	Essex
Date of inspection	3 July 2017
Date of last inspection	June 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary 115157
Headteacher	Mandy Short
Inspector's name and number	Virginia Corbyn 86

School context

St Michael's primary school is popular and oversubscribed. It has two forms of entry. Pupils are mainly White British. The percentage for whom the school receives extra funding due to social disadvantage is lower than the national average. The percentage for whom there is an Education Health and Care Plan to address special education needs is above the national average. About a third of the pupils regularly attend a church outside of their involvement through the school. There is currently a vacancy for an incumbent at St Michael's church.

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

- A set of embedded and effective core Christian values effectively drive achievement, personal development and wellbeing across the school.
- High quality relationships at all levels enable pupils and staff to flourish and fulfil their full potential.
- Collective worship and religious education (RE) underpin the vision and values of the school and support pupils and staff in living them out day by day very well.
- Leaders know their school very well which means that they regularly review and improve their practice for the benefit of all members of their school community.

Areas to improve

- Ensure that pupil leadership and monitoring of collective worship become the key drivers for improvement for this aspect of the life of the school.
- Embed consistency of expectations for recorded work and for marking in order to ensure that all pupils gain the best possible outcomes from the newly introduced RE curriculum.

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

St Michael's primary school is a Christian community which encourages a deep love of learning and of excellence. Its four core values of love, integrity, creativity and resilience are 'rooted in the Christian tradition'. By effectively applying these values in their learning, all pupils make good progress. This learning is also underpinned by teachers knowing their pupils extremely well, and addressing their individual needs in order that they can flourish personally and achieve well. For the pupils, their values are based on the fact that 'Jesus loves us equally and gives us a second chance'. In relation to particular values, pupils know that integrity is important because 'Jesus always did the right thing', for example. Parents do not so readily articulate the school's Christian values. However, they are confident that it is the four values that underpin the excellent behaviour and attitudes that they see in their children. School staff and leaders are rightly confident that, in their particular context, 'we live and breathe the values', in deeply implicit ways. This living out of values has also resulted in very good attendance. Families have confidence in the safety, warmth and security that surrounds their children. Parents are also appreciative of the openness that they meet whenever they have a concern or a question. This means that they want their children to be in school every day and also that their children want to be there.

Very high quality relationships result in a strong staff and governor team which is confident in its articulation of the school's values. There is an expectation, which is met, that all staff will nurture the pupils during the school day and beyond. This means that the pupils' experiences and, therefore, their flourishing is well supported through extra-curricular activities. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of pupils is strong. Collective prayer is offered regularly during the course of the day. There are some opportunities for personal prayer, for example through prayer boxes and a prayer tree. Pupils can talk about particular times when prayer was important to them, for example when a sibling had a serious illness. Pupils' excellent behaviour is underpinned well by strong moral and social understanding. RE enables pupils to explore the major world faiths. This results in a strong sense in the pupils that they must understand why they are different to one another. Also, they understand that this will help them to live better in their world. In turn, this means that pupils support a range of charities to show their responsibility for others locally, nationally and globally. This includes supporting the diocesan link with Kenya.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

Collective worship, which is universally referred to across the school as assembly, provides a very effective way of communicating the school's Christian values. Pupils can confidently articulate messages explored in assembly as it is rooted in their own experiences. They are inspired by their sung praise. They talk about daily worship as an important time which 'helps us to be thoughtful. One pupil said that worship 'helps us to get closer to God and has important messages for us to learn'. Stories centred on the person of Jesus show pupils how their core values are linked to his teaching and example. Pupils are able to apply Jesus' teaching to their own experiences and to the daily life of their school community. Through worship, pupils are developing an increasing knowledge and understanding of the Christian concept of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is also well supported and extended by learning from RE lessons. Periods of silent reflection are used very well in worship on a daily basis. For example, minutes of silence following some recent national tragedies have helped pupils and staff to respond to these events meaningfully. Prayers in worship are regularly led by pupils. Prayers written for prayer books and trees are sometimes offered in assembly also. Pupils, staff and governors can speak movingly about how praying for particular situations has helped them to feel the love and support of the school community at difficult times. Pupils participate very well and in a number of different ways in assembly but they do not have regular leadership opportunities. This means that they feel that worship tends to be predominantly adult led. They would rightly like more roles and responsibilities as worship leaders even though they do prepare creative services for occasions when parents are invited to church. Members of the local church have continued to lead worship well on a weekly basis, despite there being a clergy vacancy at St Michael's church. Celebration of the major Christian festivals and a leavers' service in the church means that parents feel welcomed as a part of their local church family, whether or not they are regular worshippers.

The effectiveness of religious education is good

Standards in RE are at least in line with national expectations, with some pupils exceeding this. Teaching is consistently at least good, and some being better. The curriculum has recently been reviewed with the result that

teaching and learning has improved. There is an appropriate balance between content in RE that focuses on Christianity and that which focuses on a range of other world faiths. The school has introduced a newly developed training and resource package called, 'Understanding Christianity'. Although in its early days of implementation, there are already clear signs of impact and improvement. The teaching observed during the denominational inspection demonstrated teachers' secure subject knowledge and pupils' good levels of engagement. Training for RE, focused on Understanding Christianity, has been given a high profile with staff and governors over the course of this academic year. This has resulted in more creative RE lessons which encourage pupils to think more deeply about big ideas and questions in RE.

The deputy headteacher leads the subject well and with enthusiasm. This includes regularly monitoring and evaluating the strengths and areas for development of the subject and refining processes in the light of this. This has contributed significantly to the recent improvements in RE. Pupils say that their RE has become more creative since the introduction of the new curriculum. They can describe how they are encouraged to present their ideas through art and in response to different sorts of starter activities. They have particularly benefitted from increasing their knowledge and understanding of Christianity using the 'Big Frieze' resource, which is art work presenting the Bible as one big story. Opportunities for relating their learning about religion to its significance for believers and for themselves is well planned for. This successfully encourages pupils to value their own opinions and those of others as well as developing the skills to help them to relate well to other people. All stakeholders talk about faith being a natural part of the conversations in school because RE is well taught. Pupils understand that RE is about their faith as well as the faith of others, both now and in the future. Expectations of recorded work and marking are not consistent across the school. This means that, in terms of the new curriculum, pupils are not able to explain where they are in their RE learning and what they need to do to improve. RE supports the SMSC development of pupils well, especially by using group work and discussion effectively and by encouraging reflection in the pupils.

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

The headteacher leads and drives the vision and values of her school. She is clearly supported by all of her school leaders, effectively leading a staff team which is committed to the best outcomes for each individual pupil who is seen as unique and special. By living out the school's values, all members of the school community ensure that pupils make good progress. It also means that pupils' personal development and wellbeing is very well supported so that pupils become confident and well-rounded young people. This is achieved through programmes of learning which meet individual needs and by 'including everyone, because each child is good at something', as one governor said. For parents, the school gives their children, 'the best possible start', one commenting that 'they continue to apply the values into secondary school'. 'Living and breathing the values' also means that high quality relationships lie at the heart of the success of the school. Pupils talk about 'the way in which everyone loves and cares' and staff members say that they feel that 'everyone is on your side'. This means that the staff team is highly committed to the school and have high expectations of themselves, other adults and pupils. This leads to staff going the extra mile in a spirit of mutual care and service.

Governors have addressed the issues raised in the previous denominational report well. They have a very good understanding of the school as a church school which steers their strategic view of school development closely. Stakeholders, included parents, have been consulted about the school as a church school, so that their views are included in planning for the future. Knowledge and understanding of the school, shared by all school leaders, means that wise and beneficial decisions are made and acted upon. RE and collective worship is well led and managed, and statutory requirements are met. The recent introduction of the new RE curriculum has been supported very well by school leaders, both by giving this initiative a high profile and by providing appropriate resources. Members of the senior leadership team are fully included in monitoring and evaluating the school as a church school. This means that planning for the future leadership of the school as a church school is being addressed well. There are a number of ways in which effective partnerships contribute to the strength of this church school, including with the Diocese and with other local schools especially church primary schools. Despite there being a vacancy at the local church, links have been maintained well with a number of church members making sure that regular activities continue to take place.

SIAMS report (July 2017) St Michael's CE primary (VA) school Braintree Essex CM7 2NS