



Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
Apton Road, Bishop's Stortford CM23 3SN

Diocese of St Albans

LA:	Hertfordshire
SIAS Inspection:	Monday 30 March 2009
Previous S48 Inspection:	16 March 2006
URN:	117426
Headteacher:	Martin Willis
SIAS Inspector Name:	Bob Hopcraft
SIAS Inspector No:	484

School Context

St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided School is an average sized primary school, set in pleasant grounds in the heart of Bishop's Stortford. Pupils come from several local parishes and the town as a whole with a third gaining entry through church links criteria. Pupils are mostly of White British heritage; however, the proportion of pupils from other cultural backgrounds is steadily increasing. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is below the national average. Parents say that the recent change in deputy headteacher has been smooth and seamless.

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

This is because of the very real impact of Christian values on pupils' everyday lives and development. As a result, pupils are encouraged to do and be the best they can in an environment which is warm and vibrant. The outstanding leadership of the headteacher and key staff continues to lie at the heart of the school's development. There has been significant improvement in provision for religious education (RE) since the last inspection.

Established strengths

- The outstanding leadership of the headteacher, senior leaders and governors;
- The excellent impact of Christian values on pupils' overall development;
- The outstanding relationships at all levels and the excellent relationship with the church and local clergy;
- The improved provision for RE which supports and nourishes the school's Christian foundation.

Focus for development

- Develop the monitoring and assessment of RE, to ensure that the current outstanding provision continues to develop and challenge all groups of pupils;
- Continue to develop pupils' understanding of other cultures and belief systems within Britain and the wider world.

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

This is because Christian values have a pervasive effect on all those who live and work in this outstanding church school. Christian values lie at the heart of all that the school does and both parents and pupils are enthusiastic about the real impact that these have on their lives. This often extends beyond the school. As one pupil said: *"A value that changed me was 'responsibility'. I now do a lot more on my own and don't keep asking again and again for my mum's help."* As a result, pupils grow in confidence and independence and enjoy opportunities to take a lead within the school, for example when entertaining pensioners at the annual harvest lunch. Parents are also clear about the effect that the values taught have on their children's lives, moving one parent to write: *"The school provides great values for my children, which helps tremendously with home, school and social life"*. The strong emphasis on values supports social, moral, spiritual and cultural development well. As a result, pupils have a good understanding of those from other cultural backgrounds and those who hold different beliefs. The school recognises this as an area for ongoing development. Relationships within the school are outstanding at all levels. Pupils work together in a spirit of friendliness and co-operation and staff provide excellent role models for pupils by 'living out' the Christian values they promote. The recent focus on *Love Life Live Lent* is helping to develop these further, encouraging pupils to think about practical ways in which they can improve their own lives and those of others around them. The school's strong Christian ethos is reflected in the bright and well-cared for learning environment, which supports learning, and provides many opportunities for quiet reflection, for example the new Global Garden.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

This is because pupils respond very positively to well-planned acts of worship, which provide many opportunities for active involvement and reflection. Pupils talk animatedly about acts of worship in which they have been involved and are regularly consulted, through the school's own pupil questionnaires and the school council, about the quality and impact of the worship in which they engage. The school's values programme provides a strong basis for worship and reinforces their importance in their everyday lives. There is a good balance of modern and traditional songs used in worship. The recent *Pop Connections* event, which resulted in the pupils' performance in church being recorded on a CD, is typical of the exciting and interesting activities used to support worship. One parent remarked: *"We now sing along regularly to the CD in the car!"* The school receives excellent support from local clergy and services are held regularly in the church. The school also takes part in some Sunday services during the year, which further strengthens the links with the local parish. Plans to introduce a Eucharist service in the summer term are well in hand.

The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding

Significant progress has been made in RE since the last inspection. Assessment has improved and the developing portfolio of levelled work is an effective tool for ensuring that both pupils and staff are clear about levels of achievement and what needs to be done next in order to improve. As a result, pupils make very good progress in RE and standards are high. Pupils are enthusiastic about RE and many are able to reflect on what they learn and relate it to their everyday lives. There is now an excellent balance of opportunities to learn about religion as well as to learn from it and more able pupils are challenged effectively to use their knowledge and apply this to their own thoughts and beliefs. Teaching supports learning very well and staff use a good range of activities to ensure that all pupils can engage effectively in RE. This often supports spiritual development, as was seen in a year 2 lesson about the Last Supper, when the teacher uncovered the bread and wine, eliciting a gasp of surprise and fascination from the children. Excellent use has been made of continuing professional development opportunities: as a result, staff are well informed and confident to deliver the subject well. This is supported by parents, one of who commented on the *"... good, informative RE lessons that are well taught and interesting"*. The subject is well led by an enthusiastic co-ordinator, who is clear about strengths and areas for future development. She recognises the need to develop her monitoring of RE further, to ensure that the current outstanding provision continues to develop and to challenge all pupils.

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

The outstanding leadership of the headteacher continues to be central to the school's effective development as a church school. In this he is very ably supported by governors, clergy and staff. All stakeholders are very positive about the school's Christian ethos and are fully in tune with it. A key development has been the establishment of the *Church School Review and Action Group*, which comprises a range of stakeholders and which meets regularly to review and monitor the school's development as a Church school. As a result, the school's self evaluation in this area is excellent and there is a very clear strategic view for its future development as a church school. Relationships with the church and local community are outstanding and clergy play a significant role in keeping its church school status high on the agenda. Ecumenical links with other denominations are strong and the school is developing global links with an Anglican school in Uganda. Pupils have many opportunities to engage in charitable giving and to organise charitable events.