

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Controlled School

Address	Chapel Square, Stewkley, Leighton Buzzard LU7 0HA		
Date of inspection	7 October 2019	Status of school	VC combined
Diocese	Oxford	URN	110414

Overall Judgement	Grade	Good
How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?		
Additional Judgement		
The impact of collective worship	Grade	Requires improvement

School context

St Michael's is a combined school with 201 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are considered to be disadvantaged is below national averages. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below national averages. There has been a change in leadership since the last inspection. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2018, and two Key Stage leadership posts were introduced in September 2019.

The school's Christian vision

#together

"Two are better than one...If either of them falls down, one can help the other up"

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Key findings

- The insightful and compassionate leadership of the headteacher, ably assisted by the dedicated staff team, is re-energising the school as a Church school.
- The vision, built on established Christian values and ethos, is having a positive impact on the whole school community. There is scope for this to be developed further with parents and carers.
- Governors support the school and know it well, although their monitoring of the school's Christian character is not yet sufficiently robust.
- Collective worship limits pupils' understanding of Christian beliefs and traditions.
- A significant strength of the school is the partnership with local churches, families and community.

Areas for development

- Governors to monitor the effectiveness of the vision to drive improvement of the school as a church school.
- Ensure there is sufficient focus on the Bible and the life and teachings of Jesus in daily acts of worship, in order to increase understanding of Christianity.
- Review provision for RE so that all pupils make good progress from their starting points.

How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?

Inspection findings

The new headteacher's energy and enthusiasm are impacting positively on re-energising St Michael's as a Church school. A vision has been built around existing values of love, hope, respect and forgiveness. It is inclusive, grounded in a clear Christian narrative, developed with staff, pupils, parents, governors and clergy. Although recently implemented, and therefore not yet fully embedded, it is shaping planning and practice to enable all to flourish. Leadership posts ensure greater accountability for standards. Robust assessments identify areas for development more accurately, and additional academic and pastoral support is in place for the most vulnerable. Due to open, honest and frank discussions, governors have a clear picture of areas for development regarding progress. Consequently, they are now better able to fulfil their role of challenge as well as support. However, monitoring the effectiveness of the vision on the school's Christian distinctiveness is not yet sufficiently robust.

Strong partnerships enable all to flourish. There are good links with the local Diocese, church and chapel. The vicar and Methodist minister plan and lead school worship. The vicar has been involved with a group of pupils asking, 'What makes you think it's a church school?' Parents and pupils speak positively about attending church and chapel to celebrate Harvest, Christmas and Easter. Occasionally, the vicar and minister are involved with classes by, for example, giving talks on baptism or making Christingles, thus helping to develop spirituality and an understanding of Christian traditions. Partnerships are mutually beneficial, as may be seen when the school choir sings at church services. Staff say the Diocese makes them feel 'cared for'.

The Christian vision is the driver of much work that is being done to '...help the other up'. All pupils are equally valued. Strategies and interventions such as before-school booster sessions, nurture provision, staff training and specialist support staff are having a positive impact on the progress and behaviour of vulnerable pupils. A success of 'the ark' provision is that pupils go on to become positive role models for their peers. '#together' is exemplified in the school's revised curriculum, where respect for each other and helping 'the other up' are actively promoted. Learning through play has received a higher profile in the early years, promoting language, exploration and socialisation skills as firm foundations for future learning. Parents speak highly of the school's caring ethos, which they attribute to its vision and values. They articulate 'togetherness' and 'two are better than one', although they are not as clear on the theological roots of the vision. Staff are approachable. One parent commented, 'I like the "well done" as well as being told when there's a problem.' Parents say the vision encourages children to think of others, such as when older pupils 'buddy' younger ones. They say it also helps children appreciate others' talents and achievements. Staff are happy and feel valued.

Mental health and wellbeing are important for all as may be seen in the provision of staff access to wellbeing services, the introduction of parent support provision and specialist nurture support. Physical fitness is recognised as an important factor for wellbeing, resulting in an outside environment that provides quality equipment and activities. Home-school partnerships are strong. In the 'Achieving Together' initiative, parents, pupils and staff work together to overcome barriers. A really positive outcome of this is that parents are now more confident in themselves approaching the school for support.

The school's Christian vision and values are fundamental in raising pupils' aspirations, challenging stereotypical thinking and strengthening resilience, self-belief and hope for the future. 'Aspiration Days', celebration of World Mental Health Day, learning and nurturing interventions demonstrate this. The buddy system and ringing the 'together bell' exemplify commitment to ensuring pupils are active members of a caring, nurturing family. Character development is strengthened through pupil leadership opportunities and extra-curricular activities such as residential visits. Pupils feel safe and say that there is no bullying, 'Coming here has changed my life because I was bullied before.'

Vision being put into practice may be seen in various local, national and international links and charity projects. Pupils take the lead in raising money. For example, they have planned, promoted and run a successful bring-and-buy sale for Children in Need. They take an active interest in ethical issues. 'We've got to do something about that', they say in response to the raised profile of climate change highlighted by Greta Thunberg. They are mounting their own campaign against the use of plastic in the environment.

Collective worship is inclusive. All are invited to reflect on personal, local, national and global events. It impacts positively on living well together. Staff say they, too, welcome the opportunity to reflect. Pupils set up the worship table. A candle is lit and appropriately coloured cloths are displayed. Pupils' singing is lively and they enjoy acting out stories. Older pupils prepare and lead weekly 'celebration of achievements' assemblies, where they nominate younger children for awards that demonstrate values in action. There are limited opportunities for pupils to evaluate collective worship, although a group has recently done so with the deputy headteacher. Pupils do not independently plan and lead collective worship, although they say that they would like to. Governors do not monitor it. Moral and ethical issues are addressed well. However, because many collective worships are secular, and not directly rooted in a clear Christian narrative, there are limited opportunities for spiritual growth through learning about the Trinity, the Bible and links to everyday life. Therefore, collective worship is not yet good.

The school and Diocese are working well together in order to accelerate progress in RE. The RE lead is enthusiastic and attends training to improve knowledge and share good practice. Pupils enjoy RE. They are aware of Christianity being a living world faith. Other major world faiths are studied. The school has links with a school in India. Visitors of different faiths are invited into school. Pupils visit different places of worship such as a mosque, gurdwara and synagogue. In a school with little cultural diversity, these experiences give pupils an excellent opportunity to learn first-hand about other major worldwide faiths and develop respect for differences. Commenting on one visit a pupil said, '...we are respectful so ... wore scarves'. Using a young person's version of Matthew's gospel is an example of developing pupils' knowledge of the Bible and the ability to critically engage with text. 'Big' questions, such as what makes someone a saint, are used to engage pupils in philosophical thinking.

St Michael's is a caring school where both pupils and adults live by the Christian vision and associated values. Two really are 'better than one' and people really do 'help the other up'.

Headteacher	David Morley
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