

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Michael's Church of England Primary School

High Street, Figheldean, Salisbury SP4 8JT	
Current SIAMS inspection grade	Satisfactory
Diocese	Salisbury
Previous SIAS inspection grade	Good
Date of academy conversion	1 July 2016
Name of multi academy trust	Salisbury Plain Multi Academy Trust
Date of inspection	21 March 2017
Date of last inspection	26 March 2012
Type of school and unique reference number	Primary143006
Principal	Nicky Phillips
Inspector's name and number	Andrew Rickett 201

School context

St Michael's is smaller than the average size primary school with 78 children in roll. They are arranged into four class groups. It is situated in a rural setting. The majority of children are of White British heritage and come from mixed socio-economic backgrounds. There are a high proportion of children from military families. The number of children with additional learning needs and/or disabilities is in line with the national average as is the number entitled to receive the pupil premium is average. Attendance is broadly in line with the national average. The school converted to academy status in July 2016 when it became part of the Salisbury Plain multi-academy trust. The Principal was appointed in January 2017 following a period of staff instability particularly in the high turnover of previous headteachers.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Michael's CE Primary School as a Church of England school are satisfactory

- The new Principal is rapidly developing the school's distinctive Christian ethos so that it has more meaning and purpose for all members of the school community.
- Acts of worship are more directly related to Bible stories and this is helping children acquire a greater knowledge and understanding of Christian teaching and its relevance in their own lives.
- Opportunities for developing an understanding of spirituality are becoming more integral to the children's learning.

Areas to improve

- Ensure that an explicit set of Christian values make an impact on the children's personal development and outcomes in their learning.
- Develop the children's ability to respond to questions of meaning and purpose by equipping them with the skills and language to explore challenging concepts in greater depth.
- Enhance the children's understanding of the place of prayer in a person's life so that it helps them appreciate how reflection can support them.

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

The school has experienced a long period of instability during which numerous revisions of its core values were begun. The current Principal appreciates that this has given uncertainty across the whole community as to what values actually underpin the school's Christian ethos. However, this is not to say that values are not apparent in the life of the school. Relationships are built on care and kindness and a keen regard for the happiness of others. Children look after each other with older children showing particular concern for the wellbeing of younger children in school. Children talk about values such as forgiveness with some understanding that it is not always a simple choice of right and wrong and that many aspects of life involve moral dilemmas. Children are able to explain values to a certain extent but when they are challenged to explore them in depth, they find it more difficult to use a breadth of vocabulary to help them explain their thoughts and ideas. They are enthusiastic when challenged and respond well to questions that make them think. Religious education (RE) lessons and collective worship provide opportunities for this to happen but the level of challenge varies across the school. At its best, skilled questioning from teachers guides children as they explore a concept in increasing depth. This is not yet being consistently used across the school in subjects other than RE. This is particularly the case when questions linked to the school's growing use of 'window, door and mirror' are not yet identified across the curriculum as a way to explore the children's spirituality. Children have good attitudes towards their learning and are engaged and attentive in lessons. They do well academically and achieve outcomes that are at least in line with national expectations for the majority of children. The number of children who do better is lower than expected. Religious education makes a good contribution to the children's knowledge of Bible stories and an understanding of Christian festivals such as Easter and Christmas and those of other faiths. Work from RE in key stage 2 is recorded in individual learning journals but these do not capture the full range of the work studied or show the progress children make when studying a complete unit of work. Class journals in key stage 1 more successfully show a breadth of coverage which reflects the quality of the children's thinking. Children appreciate the need to show respect to others regardless of their background and to listen to the views of others. In particular, they have a good understanding that the Christian character of the school is not an exclusive ethos but something that is accepted by everyone because 'everyone should be treated with love and compassion whoever they are'.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Acts of worship have improved considerably since January 2017 when the new Principal raised the profile of worship among the school community and placed it more centrally at the heart of the school day. Members of the school community explain how acts of worship are more 'peaceful' and 'calm' and that children listen more intently to stories. A new programme of themes for worship has been created, with the contribution from the lay preacher, which explicitly sets out a series of themes that explore values and challenging concepts such as sacrifice over a number of weeks. These are explored in greater depth in class based worship later in the week which means that they can be delivered at a more age appropriate level. They also give children more opportunity to participate by responding to questions and taking part in drama. This pattern of worship is developing as teachers become more confident to experiment with their format in class. The creation of a worship council by the Principal is giving children a greater role in planning and leading worship and in its evaluation. They have met twice and involve children from all year groups. Children in this group are keen to contribute to the worship life of the school and develop their responsibilities. Children have positive attitudes towards worship and respond well when asked questions or invited to participate through acting out stories. Collective worship includes elements that make them special times in the school day. Children, for example, are growing in their understanding of the use of a candle as a way to help them focus when reflecting. Some children recognise that the lighting of the candle represents Jesus as the light of the world although they find it more difficult to explain what this means. Bible stories are a strong feature of worship and children have a good knowledge of a range of stories that help them to interpret values that have meaning to them. Opportunities for prayer are a regular aspect of worship as well as at other times in the school day. Children understand that prayer is a time to talk with God or Jesus to say thank you for food, the world and family. They are developing an appreciation of a range of prayers, such as those that ask for help, but children find it more difficult to explain how prayers can help a person and therefore have a deeper meaning that they can use to support them in their own lives. Older children are aware of the concept of the Trinity and talk of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and are confident to share their understanding. Some monitoring of worship has taken place by governors and the Principal has interviewed members of the worship council which has given a good baseline upon which to build further improvements to the quality and impact of worship.

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

The new Principal is rapidly making a positive impact on the school's distinctive Christian character and has in a very short time made improvements to the quality of collective worship and in strengthening the place of spirituality in the life of the school. This follows eighteen months of instability in which there was little development of the Christian ethos. The Principal has a very clear grasp of the school's strengths and areas for improvement as a church school and the need to establish robust procedures to gather evidence that is used to evaluate the impact of the Christian ethos on the children's personal development and their learning. It is too early to evaluate the impact of the latest improvements but they have been very well received by children and parents who recognise, for example, that collective worship has greater emphasis on Christian teaching and prayer. The Academy Advisory Board (AAB) and trustees fully support the work that the Principal is doing to create an ethos that more explicitly places values at the heart of children's learning and makes a difference to their lives. They, and staff in school, are committed to the promotion of the Christian ethos. Members of the AAB have a good knowledge of the school and have been involved in some useful observations of collective worship. Leaders and managers have a good capacity to continue the work that has begun. The school has been well supported by the lay preacher during the vacancy at the parish waiting for the appointment of a new vicar. The recent establishment of a 'Jesus and me' club by volunteers from the church is an excellent example of their commitment to the life of the school. This has ensured that links to the parish church have been maintained and that children recognise the importance of the church to the life of the school. Major Christian festivals are regularly celebrated in the church which are valued times for parents and children as it gives them opportunities to remember the 'real' message of times such as Christmas and Easter. The giving of Bibles to children who leave at the end of year 6 is a considerable commitment from the church community and a reflection of their strong support for the school. Parents say that the school feels more stable following a period of change; is 'settling down' and that they can see the caring nature of their children towards each other within a 'family atmosphere' which recognises each child as unique. The school meets the statutory requirements for RE and collective worship.

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