



National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

St Michael's Church of England Middle School

Colehill Lane
Colehill
Wimborne
BH21 7AB

Diocese: Salisbury

Local authority: Dorset

Dates of inspection: 2 July 2014

Date of last inspection: July 2009

School's unique reference number: 113891

Headteacher: Ron Jenkinson

Inspector's name and number: Lyn Field NS 151

School context

The school is an average sized middle school on the outskirts of Wimborne. The vast majority of pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives extra funding is below schools nationally. The experienced headteacher took up post at St Michael's in September 2013. There have been a number of changes to teaching staff and governors in the last year and a new leadership structure has been put in place for the beginning of next term. Demographic issues have led to a dip in numbers recently but places are oversubscribed for the next intake.

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

- In his first year, the headteacher has successfully refocused the school on its core Christian purpose of meeting the needs of all groups of pupils.
- Leaders live out Christian values through the depth of pastoral care for individuals.
- The importance placed on collective worship and religious education (RE) prepares pupils to make choices about faith and ethical issues as they grow up.
- Support from the Diocese has strengthened the leadership and the delivery of the curriculum for RE.

Areas to improve

- To increase the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels in RE by using assessment to set more challenging written tasks
- To incorporate the analysis of all monitoring of the school as a church school into the overall cycle of development planning
- To develop the environment for worship so that it provides more spiritual support and

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

The overwhelming view of those who work and learn in the school is that leaders constantly live out Gospel values and that everyone is treated with the utmost respect and compassion. This is understood to be the direct impact of the school's mission statement that '*Each child, uniquely made in God's image, merits the best we can give*' but which also extends to care of the adults. This means that expectations of behaviour and personal conduct are very high and apply to all aspects of teaching and learning. In the light of this, the school has sharpened its focus on the needs of disadvantaged pupils. Tracking of progress shows that the gaps are closing between their achievement and that of other pupils. Those with special educational needs do well. The school is unequivocally a Christian community and one that embraces all faith backgrounds. Relationships are therefore strong and pupils express themselves with courtesy and honesty especially on spiritual and moral issues. This adds to the quality of debate in lessons, particularly religious education (RE) where pupils develop positive attitudes to cultural diversity and any form of prejudice or stereotyping is challenged. A Year 8 lesson, for example, raised some pertinent issues about the religious beliefs of high profile figures. RE, along with collective worship, raises the profile of the school's Christian character. Although religious concepts play a part in other subjects through topics such as war poetry and the Crusades, there is not a well-defined approach to developing spiritual understanding across the curriculum. The outside environment is rich with opportunities for spiritual development. Areas such as the pupil 'allotments' and the reconstruction of an Iron Age hut are valued by the whole community but some, like the memorial garden, are underused and are currently the focus of a refreshment programme.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Collective worship is distinctively Christian and, for pupils, is the clearest expression of the school's Christian mission. The whole school meets together for worship four days in each week and as year groups on the fifth day. This is a more consistent experience for older pupils than is often found in schools. Many find that the subject matter makes them curious about Christianity especially through the links that are made with their daily lives. It frequently prompts social and charitable action such as fundraising for a school in Sudan. This particular link is led by a foundation governor and has given pupils some insight into Christianity as a world faith. Pupils have a sound knowledge of the pattern of Anglican worship. They know that the concept of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is central to this tradition although some pupils commented that a deeper understanding is still something 'everyone grapples with'. The prayer life of the school has expanded with the creation of a prayer area at the side of the hall. It is already well used and the prayers left there have prompted much spiritual reflection and comment. However, the focus on writing prayers as inspiration or as a resource for others means there is less attention to how the area might be used for private prayer. Pupils have a good understanding of the spiritual nature of worship and this emerged clearly from a recent survey of their views. The school hall has many functions and pupils feel that too little is done to create an atmosphere that supports them spiritually when they come together for worship. This has been felt more keenly in the last few months when there have been no clergy led services in the next door church of St Michael's, following the retirement of the vicar. However, some pupils have joined activities at Wimborne Minster and St John's church for celebrations of Christmas and Easter. These have made a significant impact on pupils and their parents. There is little shared planning for worship as a whole involving clergy or students but, in spite of this, a wide range of staff and visiting leaders cover a breadth of relevant topics.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

In the current academic year, attainment in RE has improved and, following a dip in results, is now on a par with the core subjects. The majority of pupils meet national expectations with significantly more pupils than last year reaching the higher levels. This is because leaders have addressed many of the inconsistencies that emerged with significant changes of staff. The new subject leader quickly identified where attention was most needed and has already established a common structure for lessons and new systems to ensure that assessment is accurate and used consistently across the school. Her evaluation shows a good understanding of what has worked well and the priorities for next year. The department has benefited enormously from the support of the Diocesan RE adviser and from being part of the local network of RE teachers. As a result of this, a more creative and investigative approach to learning has rapidly developed. There is a stronger team ethos and confidence to tackle further changes to the curriculum over the next year. The majority of teaching is now good. Pupils enjoy RE and recognise how things have improved, especially when they are challenged to think for themselves and take responsibility for their own learning. This is often where activities require pupils to move round the classroom and work in different combinations to gather information and form an opinion on a question that has been posed. On these occasions, pupils quickly absorb new ideas. However, the most challenging ideas are sometimes introduced too late in the lesson to be properly explored by the most able. By the end of Year 8, pupils have a secure understanding of Christianity. They have a genuine curiosity about how faith affects people's lives and are gaining confidence to use what they know of other faiths, particularly Sikhism. Units of work on Just War and Bonhoeffer have captured their interest. Better teaching has enabled them to make connections between these and their study of the Holocaust. This was a very successful joint project with the Upper School and left a lasting impression on pupils.

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

The school's mission statement has proved itself to be the cornerstone of the school's Christian character during recent changes. It has been completely embraced by the new headteacher to refocus the school on meeting the needs of disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs. The development of the school had slowed with changes to church and school leadership as well as significant changes of staff. These had more of an impact than they might have done because systems were not in place to maintain the level of strategic planning and too much had depended on the huge knowledge and experience of a few longstanding governors. The responsibility for monitoring and liaising with staff about inclusion, collective worship and RE fell to one governor. Fortunately, the excellent quality of this work prompted valuable discussion and has led to improvements in practice. The formal business of governors is carried out robustly and is firmly underpinned by Christian principles. It is clearly influenced by the personal faith of foundation governors. However, priorities for the Christian life of the school are dealt with by leaders internally and do not find their way into the overall development plan. Parents are very pleased with the school. They appreciate its distinctive yet inclusive Christian character and the way it prepares their children to make informed choices about spiritual and moral issues as they grow up. The support of the Diocese is valued particularly in the appointment of the headteacher and in planning the school's direction in the future. Support and training has enabled the RE leader to rapidly gain the necessary expertise for her role and to bring about improvements in the subject.