

National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Maple Avenue
Braintree
Essex
CM7 2NS

Diocese: Chelmsford

Local authority: Essex

Dates of inspection: 12th October 2009

Date of last inspection: 5th July 2006

School's unique reference number: 115157

Headteacher: Mr Andrew Jones

Inspector's name and number: Mr John Baker (11)

School context

This all-age primary school is a popular church school and many pupils come from outside the surrounding locality. It currently has 417 pupils on roll and is larger than most other primary schools. The parish church of St. Michael's lies about three quarters of a mile away near the centre of the town of Braintree.

The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St. Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School as a church school are outstanding

St. Michael's core values of love, integrity, resilience and creativity are integral to the school's Christian distinctiveness as a church school and, as a consequence, the school very effectively meets the needs of all its pupils, enabling them to flourish as individuals.

Established strengths

- The school's distinctive Christian character is outstanding, pupils feel valued and special and their personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development, is promoted at a very high level.
- The school's partnership with the parish church of St. Michael's is strong and these links provide very effective support for the Christian work of the school.
- School assemblies have improved since the previous inspection and are now outstanding overall, and pupils' spiritual growth is strongly enhanced during these times of worship.
- The headteacher, supported very ably by his staff team, provides outstanding Christian leadership for the school, and parents, foundation and other governors value highly the work of the school as a church school.

Focus for development

- To strengthen the use of the Church of England self-evaluation framework by school leaders and governors in order to maintain and sustain the outstanding work of the school as an Anglican Church school.
- To ensure the school's curriculum framework and assessment arrangements in RE (religious education) are fully evaluated through systematic monitoring and reporting.

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

Pupils overwhelmingly feel they are valued at St. Michael's Primary School and as a consequence they enjoy coming to the school and love learning. The school's Christian values are promoted effectively through classroom displays and at other opportunities such as assemblies and in teaching and learning, reinforcing strongly the well-being and spiritual awareness and development of every child, including those with special needs. The school's Christian clubs, such as 'Spotlight' and ASK (after school club), are led by the Chair of Governors, who is also a member of the church, school staff and the parish children's ministry and youth worker. These groups provide very effective and enjoyable times for pupils to learn more about the Bible. In addition to considerable charitable fundraising, the school is developing its international dimension and has links, for example, with Kenya,

helping pupils to understand at a practical level how to help others, and providing outstanding opportunities for the promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school's Christian ethos pervades the work of the school and this ensures relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils themselves are outstanding. Although a simple cross is on the wall in the front entrance and pupils' prayers are displayed, classroom and corridor displays could be used more effectively to reinforce the school's Anglican traditions.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding

The school's four core values, together with the Diocesan syllabus for religious education and major festivals from the church calendar, are used very effectively as a focus for assemblies, and this aspect of provision, which includes singing and prayer and a strong focus on care for others, is central to the community life of the school and is intrinsic to its daily life. Pupils' attitudes to collective worship are exemplary. The parish church is used at least termly for special assemblies, such as the leavers' service, Education Sunday and the Christmas Carol service, to which families and the community are invited, providing excellent opportunities for the whole school and the wider community to be included and for the school's Anglican traditions to be reinforced. The Vicar of St. Michael's, members of his parish team, and other Christian groups take an active and regular part in assemblies and their involvement very significantly enhances the overall quality of provision and the worship life of the pupils. Continued and careful monitoring of key stage as well as whole-school assemblies and updating the current worship policy would strengthen further the school's collective worship provision.

The effectiveness of Religious Education is good.

Standards of attainment in RE and pupils' progress and achievement are good overall at both Key Stage 1 and 2. The quality of teaching and learning in RE is consistently good. For example, during the day of the inspection younger pupils learnt about Sukkot and carefully made small 'shelters' out of natural materials in the outside area, reinforcing their knowledge and understanding of this important Jewish festival, and older pupils wrote poems about harvest festival, focusing on the beauty of God's creation, saying sorry for spoiling God's world and being thankful. Pupils' SMSC development is promoted during RE lessons but planned opportunities for times of reflection would enhance this aspect of provision. The new scheme of work, based on the Diocesan syllabus for RE, is good and covers Early Years Foundation Stage as well as both key stages. Units from other World Religions, including Islam for Year 6 classes, are drawn from the County's Agreed Syllabus, providing a balanced and effective curriculum framework for teaching and learning. RE strongly promotes the distinctive Christian character of the school, but the new curriculum and assessments arrangements will need to be monitored and evaluated carefully in order to raise standards.

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

The headteacher, staff and foundation and other governors promote the school's Christian character and ethos very effectively through its core values and its links with the parish church of St. Michael's, which are close and very supportive. Monitoring and evaluation of the school as a church school is good, but this aspect of provision could be strengthened in order to ensure sustained growth and development. Good improvements have been made since the last inspection and these have raised standards and had a positive impact on pupils' spiritual and moral development. Staff are totally committed to and share the school's Christian character and parents value the emphasis placed on Christianity, as do parents of children of other faiths. As one parent said: *'I love the school – the teachers are caring and the children love learning'*. The school has close and effective links with the Diocese and its partnership with other Christian churches and communities in the town of Braintree, such as the United Reform Church, New Frontiers, the Elim Church and Christian Youth Outreach, are strong and contribute very significantly in the promotion of the school as a church school. The leadership provided by the headteacher is exemplary.