



## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Report

### St Michael's Voluntary Aided Junior School

Astley Road  
Norwich  
NR5 9LA

**Previous SIAMS grade:** Outstanding

**Current inspection grade:** Outstanding

**Diocese:** Norwich

Local authority: Norfolk

Dates of inspection: 9 February 2016

Date of last inspection: 10 & 11 June 2008

School's unique reference number: 121146

Headteacher: Helen Newell

Inspector's name and number: Christopher J Allen 847

#### School context

St Michael's VA Junior School is a larger than average school in a socially challenging area of Norwich. The school community has a significant minority from Muslim family backgrounds. Children receiving free school meals are much higher than national average as are the number of children with English as an additional language. The school was built as part of an ecumenical project and is close to the parish church and is growing rapidly. The school has Religious Education Quality Mark (REQM) Gold and leads the local National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE) group. St Michael's is in a federation with Clover Hill VA Infant and Nursery School and shares an Executive Head Teacher.

#### The distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Michael's VA Junior School as a Church of England school are outstanding

- Every child and family is cared for in the fullness of the Christian values of the school, supported pastorally, inspired academically and given the gift of aspiration.
- The impact of Religious Education makes every child feel valued and significantly changes their lives allowing every child to 'trust in God and he will work miracles for me'.
- The school is a welcoming, inclusive and supporting Christian community which serves all children and their families whilst being sensitive to their diversity of culture and other faiths.
- The Christian vision and dedication of the leadership and management of the school, including governors, ensures that outcomes for children have systematically improved over time.

#### Areas to improve

- Develop the frequency and range of monitoring pupils undertake in relation to collective worship.
- Governors to develop further how they monitor, report and evaluate outcomes of Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural provision for every child.

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

St Michael's strong Christian character is explicit and deeply embedded in every aspect of school life. This school sustains an exemplary and inspirational learning environment. This gives perspective and meaning to all learning and enables all pupils to flourish. St Michael's has improved rapidly in its Key Stage 2 results over the last four years, consequently attainment and progress are above national expectations. This is because the five core Christian values of respect, friendship, courage, creativity, and peace underpin all school life and practice. Such values are readily articulated by the whole school community and are linked to Bible verses. Relationships are excellent and attitudes to learning are very positive. Behaviour is exemplary because Christian values are lived out and no forms of bullying are acceptable, this is supported through the use of restorative practices underpinned by the value of forgiveness. Dedicated staff give their time and patience to serve the children and their families. Very good examples include the pastoral team who work closely with families as well as outside agencies. This takes place within a supportive and compassionate environment where Christian values of love, friendship and trust are positively encouraged. This is especially true for families from ethnic minorities who truly value the ethos and respect of the school. Outcomes for every pupil show an extremely positive picture for an area of high deprivation. The school attributes this to the unique status and difference which a church school makes. This is because the high expectations for all are a reflection of God's love for everyone as individuals. Pupils experience their Christian value of service through their charity fundraising and show empathy for different cultures and communities, the children carefully consider which charities they will support each year. Pupils also serve their school community as part of the school council, digital leaders, eco council leaders and peer mentors. Pupils enjoy learning about different religions and cultures through their worship and RE and from one another. RE therefore makes a significant contribution to whole school ethos and its values and helps determine its rich Christian character.

### **The impact of collective worship on the school community is outstanding**

Collective worship is a special time of day for the school community because it is engaging, uplifting and offers something for children and adults alike to think deeply about. It is also a time when the community comes together in peace, one child said 'It's a really good time as I can be calm, think about God and talk to him'. Prayer is an important aspect of the school day, with a well-used prayer space that is regularly accessed by pupils and adults. These prayers are personal and recorded in words or pictures in special books that are then taken to be looked after in their local parish church. The Lord's Prayer and opportunities for children to write their own prayers are an integral part of worship, every child is invited to pray or reflect ensuring children from the Islamic faith are fully included, one child said 'In collective worship we are supported to make the right choice and we are respected for what we believe'. Worship makes a real difference to the lives of children and adults because they are challenged to reflect on Christian values, linked to Gospel and Bible accounts to support their actions and behaviour. For example one child spoke of the value of generosity and how she had planned an event to raise funds for a cancer charity by cutting off her own hair. Themes are well planned with excellent quality resources and activities. The experience is further enhanced by beautiful music, lighting of candles and pictures. Visitors are a frequent part of the rota and include the local incumbent Rev Mark and his puppet dog. Children learn about the festivals in Christianity and important beliefs such as the Trinity, through visits to church at festival times such as Christmas and Easter. The children's understanding of the Trinity is developing and they are becoming more confident at articulating what this means. Worship is very well led by the Collective Worship Co-ordinator and a variety of monitoring and evaluation takes place by all stakeholders to ensure there is constant improvement- a development point from the last inspection. A detailed research project with the University of East Anglia informed leaders of the children's perceptions of collective worship. As a result leaders have identified the need to further develop pupil involvement in monitoring and evaluating collective worship.

### **The effectiveness of the religious education is outstanding**

RE at St Michael's is given a high profile and enjoys the same status as other core subject areas of the curriculum. The RE curriculum is rich, varied and creative. It makes a significant contribution to the school's Christian character, strongly linked to its core values and to pupils' SMSC development. This is because there is a very strong emphasis on creativity and originality as well as focussing on using pupils within the school of different faith backgrounds to lead the learning. Furthermore, RE is exceptionally well led. The co-ordinator teaches RE in most year groups and as a result gathers evidence through her daily work. Standards of achievement in RE show children make rapid progress from low starting points and thus not only narrow the gaps in learning but leave the school at least in line with national expectations if not a significant proportion higher than this. Lesson observations are carried out by senior leaders and governors, with a particular focus on big questions and children's enquiry skills. Teaching is consistently good, and often outstanding as a direct impact of high quality training accessed by the school. Thorough planning and high quality lessons inspire pupils to engage in their learning. Pupils say they 'enjoy RE because without it we would not make sense of the world around them'. They also recognised that 'in RE we don't just do Christianity but we also learn about other religions in our school, so we understand them better'. They enjoy learning about different religions, such as Judaism and Islam. Pupils have a very good level of understanding key religious ideas and concepts. They can relate the Christian beliefs to other religions, for example recognising significant people in the bible as prophets in Islam. Pupils enjoy asking important reflective questions in lessons, such as 'Is it ever right to sin?'. A programme of visits and visitors to RE lessons is in place and enriches the well planned curriculum, additional theme days tackle some of the more complex and theological aspects of RE such as Holy Trinity Day.

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

The head teacher, staff, clergy and governors continually uphold Christian values and articulate the importance of the Christian ethos which lies at the heart of this school, resulting in a significant impact on children's spiritual, moral social and cultural development. Through their federation with the feeder infant school and excellent transition with other feeder schools the children and parents are strongly supported on entry into Year 3. Excellent transition fosters an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect. New staff, through induction, are introduced to the Christian values, ethos and distinctiveness of the school. Self-evaluation of the school as a church school is shared by senior leaders and governing body that have a systematic strategy to plan and monitor school improvement - a development point from the last inspection. The team offer accurate and insightful judgements, identifying strengths and aspects for further improvement. Worship, RE and pastoral care have a high profile within the school; this is recognised and applauded by the local community, one parent said 'The staff and parents are part of one big family and we are all included - we are always listened to and school is where we come if we have any problems'. Assessment data for RE is tracked and can be used to identify the next steps for pupil learning. The RE coordinator draws on a wealth of experience and enthusiasm leading the local NATRE group and working with foundation governors to achieve REQM Gold. The school has excellent relationships with Bowthorpe Church, an ecumenical centre for worship. The local incumbent is considered a friend in the school and cites how the school and church are strongly connected and work ever increasingly closer together for the benefit of the Bowthorpe community. He celebrates the vibrancy of the children and how they take the message at the Christian heart of the school out into their community. Older children also benefit from life coaching by a local pastor and draw on his life experience to guide them in making their own choices. The school readily participates in diocesan activities and training and is highly regarded for the work it does.