

St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Junior School

Newton Road
Twerton
Bath
BA2 1RW

Diocese: Bath and Wells

Local authority: Bath and North East Somerset

Date of inspection: June 28th 2011

Date of last inspection: February 14th 2008

School's unique reference number: 109155

Headteacher: Mr David Goucher

Inspector's name and number: Mr Andrew Rickett 201

School context

St Michael's is a smaller than average junior school. There are 167 children on roll. Children come from a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds. The majority of students are from a white British heritage. The number eligible for free school meals is significantly higher than the national average. The number of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities is also significantly higher than the national average. The school has a base for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

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

The Christian ethos of St Michael's makes a significant contribution to the way that the school transforms the lives of its children in their approach to learning and through the experiences it offers them to grow personally. In achieving this, the school has made very good progress since the previous inspection.

Established strengths

- The outstanding nurture given to each individual child
- An environment in which children feel safe and are cared for deeply
- The commitment of the staff and governors to ensure that the school's Christian ethos makes a difference to the lives of the children

Focus for development

- Develop the children's ability to explore and express their spirituality with greater confidence through their emotions and thoughts
- Develop the use of key questions in collective worship to bring greater consistency to worship themes
- Review the school's approach to self-evaluation so that it is a more useful tool for driving the development of the school's distinct Christian character

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

The Christian ethos of St Michael's makes a vital contribution to the lives of the children. It transforms their experiences by celebrating success in the present and by creating aspirations for the future. Children at St Michael's are given the opportunity to have hope. The school is outstanding in achieving this because the quality of care is exceptional. There is a great emphasis on providing children with real experiences in their learning that makes it come alive for them. This was seen throughout the day of the inspection in the way that teaching and learning carefully matched the children's needs. For example, half the school went to a local Indian restaurant to experience an Indian meal, which for many of the children was a new experience. Children were very excited about tasting something new and entered

into the experience with enthusiasm. This is a reflection of the way that the school is a very accepting community; children are open to new experiences. This acceptance is evident in the way that children acknowledge the school's expectations for the way that they behave towards each other. For many children the step towards acceptable behaviour is a crucial part of their ability to engage in learning. Relationships in the school are excellent. All children, no matter what their individual needs, are treated with great respect and courtesy by adults and other children. This makes for a very positive environment in which children say that they enjoy coming to school. Children have good opportunities to be still and reflect during the school day. For example, at the end of the day, a Year 6 class were encouraged to think about the positive things that they have achieved in school that day and something that they wanted to say thank you for. A lot of the children spoke about their success in a religious education lesson or achieving something new in swimming. Children are encouraged by their teachers to explore their feelings and emotions. Children are comfortable in expressing their thoughts. The school understands the need to develop this further so that children are equipped with an increased ability to express their feelings at a greater depth. The children make a good contribution to the life of the local community and their understanding of the diversity of faiths and cultures in Britain is developing. The underlying principle, which enables the impact of the Christian ethos to be successful, is the promotion of the school as a family. To many of the children in the school this is something that provides great security and comfort.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Acts of worship at St Michael's very effectively relate to the needs of the children and are integral to helping children build their confidence and aspirations. They also have a good impact on the personal lives of the children as they recognise how the messages they learn have relevance to their own lives. For example, the theme of the worship observed encouraged children to think about how learning can change your life. Children responded very well to this and offered some clear and thoughtful comments when asked for their views. For example, when asked about what we can learn from God, one child replied that 'God likes learning about us too'. Worship themes are based on social and emotional aspects of learning and delivered with an explicit Christian emphasis. In this way they connect with personal and social education and reflect the emphasis on building children's aspirations and levels of hope. The school is keen to explore how the impact of this can be strengthened by identifying weekly themes that give collective worship a clearer focus. Acts of worship are periodically monitored and the school is aware that by giving worship a clearer weekly focus, this will create opportunities for children to be involved in its evaluation. Acts of worship are special and distinct times in the school day. Children understand this when they say that they are an important way through which they express their church school character. There are many opportunities for children to pray and reflect both in worship and in the school day. Children have a good understanding of prayer. Older children for example, explain that prayer can make a difference; 'It can change you' and you 'might feel that in your heart'. The commitment of the vicar to the Christian life of the school is evident in his weekly leadership of an act of worship. He has a good relationship with the children who regard him as a member of the school community. The children regard the celebration of major Christian festivals in the local church as important times in the school year and these help to give children a good understanding of their significance for Christians.

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

The school has made very good progress since the last inspection by placing its Christian ethos far more at the heart of everything the school does. This was summed up by a governor who said that the school has moved from 'being a place where the Christian ethos was a separate compartment' to one where it 'seems more linked'. The growing connection between the Christian character and the life of the school, whether through collective worship or the approach to behaviour, is giving the church foundation greater relevance to both children and adults. The driving force behind these developments is the inspirational leadership of the headteacher who is fully supported by his staff, sharing a very good understanding of the purpose of being a church school. He ensures that the vision is lived out by the adults in school. The governors share in this commitment to make the Christian distinctiveness relevant to the children. The chair of governors, who is the vicar, plays an

important part in the life of the school and is well known and liked by children and their parents. They regard him as an essential part of what it means to be a church school. Governors are involved in the self-evaluation process as a church school and are keen to look at ways that the current good systems can be used more effectively to drive future development and both reflect and capture the essence of the school's distinct ethos. Links with the local church community are close and mutually beneficial. They have grown since the last inspection. This is evident in the way that the church now uses the school to hold monthly Sunday services that are attracting some of the school community. The leader for religious education (RE) has a very good understanding of how RE contributes to the school's sense of family. She is clear about the connection between RE as a subject and the work of RE in the children's personal development. She has a good grasp of how to continue to develop RE, including developing its contribution within the creative curriculum. Parents strongly agree that the school is a family in which their children are looked after by adults and other children. They particularly appreciate the school's approach to inclusiveness and the fact that 'no matter what the difference – all children are accepted for who they are'. Moreover, parents feel that their children are happy in a school where their 'hearts together build the community'.

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