

Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St. Michael's Church of England Primary School

Nantmel Grove, Bartley Green, Birmingham, B32 3JS

Current SIAMS inspection grade	Good
Diocese	Birmingham
Previous SIAMS inspection grade	Outstanding
Date of academy conversion	January 2013
Name of multi-academy trust	Barchelai Multi-Academy Trust
Date/s of inspection	16 March 2017
Date of last inspection	22 November 2011
Type of school and unique reference number	139174
Executive Headteacher / Head of School	Samantha Cosgrove/Paul Marnell
Inspector's name and number	Jane Martin 646

School context

St. Michael's is a larger than average primary school. It became an academy in 2013, joining the Barchelai Multi-Academy Trust in January 2016. The population is mainly White British with a third of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. A small proportion speaks English as an additional language. Almost half of pupils are supported by the pupil premium grant. The proportion of children with special educational needs or disabilities is greater than nationally. There have been significant personnel changes including a new incumbent and leaders for religious education and collective worship. Eight teachers are at an early career stage.

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

- School leaders use resources to create an inspirational environment that strongly proclaims the school's Christian distinctiveness and commitment to Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development (SMSC).
- The curriculum and culture of the school focus on the value and uniqueness of each individual enabling them to grow and flourish.
- School leaders are passionate about achievement for all. They are taking a tenacious approach to raising standards of achievement for children entitled to pupil premium funding and those with additional needs.
- Religious education contributes well to pupils' understanding of Christianity and other faiths and creates many opportunities for SMSC.
- Following significant structural and staff changes the school needs to more sharply define and share the theological and biblical basis for its distinctive character.

Areas to improve

- Bring the school's Christian vision and aims into sharper focus so that everyone, including pupils and parents, understands them in the context of biblical teaching.
- Strengthen the planning of collective worship so that it explicitly and systematically develops a biblical and theological understanding of the school's Christian values and of the Trinity.
- Develop summative assessment for religious education so that the school fully understands achievement in RE across the school.

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

The tangible Christian character of the school is recognised and appreciated by everyone and contributes to all feeling welcome and valued. As school leaders have a deep understanding of the school community and its needs and a passion for enriching lives, they use resources very effectively to ensure that pupils learn and behave well. Many aspects of the learning environment are spiritually inspiring. These include beautiful pieces of art and sculpture created by pupils with artists in residence and a wonderfully imaginative outdoor area for the youngest pupils. This investment demonstrates the strong commitment to SMSC for all children. This is developed too in the religious education curriculum which encourages thought and questioning and gives meaningful context to life in our multi-cultural, multi-faith world. Pupils reflect daily and are taught how to do this from a young age. Year 1 pupils for example wonder at how very tiny mini-beasts are compared to them. Pupils are treasured, feeling safe and loved in school. Therefore they do the best they can and get along well with each other.

Recent performance data shows achievement that is broadly in line with the national picture. However, some groups of pupils have not progressed as well as similar pupils nationally. It is clear that school leaders know the pupils very well and work to actively realise their Christian vision for a 'whole-child, every child' approach to education. They prioritise the needs of individual pupils over the school's data headlines. Whilst valuing education that is rich and broad, the school is taking a focussed and tenacious approach to securing improvement. Resources including additional teachers and specialists are being effectively targeted and progress closely monitored.

The community is cohesive and inclusive. Pupils from a range of backgrounds play and learn harmoniously together. They mostly feel well supported when they encounter difficulties. The school values its diversity and celebrates this particularly in inter-faith week when children encounter a range of places of worship and develop deep understanding of faith traditions. Parents appreciate that the Christian distinctiveness of the school is 'in everything' but subtle enough for people of all faiths and no faith to be embraced by it. This is demonstrated by the school being the 'school of choice' with all pupils being admitted from the local community.

The school's approaches to behaviour management including exclusion are compassionate and, as a parent explains, 'non-judgemental'. Exclusion is rare and a last resort as a result of positive behaviour strategies which focus on providing opportunity for all pupils to succeed. Children describe conflict resolution being rooted in forgiveness and 'every day a restart with yesterday forgotten.' The use of 'zone boards' motivates children to make the right choices. Working relationships are extremely enabling as evidenced by staff who have stayed for a long time and more recently qualified teachers speaking of the support they are given to grow and develop as optimistic and 'never condemning'. Whilst a wide range of Christian values and qualities are taught, lived out and encountered, they are not deeply understood by parents, pupils and staff in the context of biblical teaching and this is a next step for the school in strengthening its distinctiveness.

The impact of collective worship on the school community is good

Significant staff changes mean that some of the developments in collective worship are still embedding and therefore their impact is not fully evident. For example, introducing a resource which links several Christian values, within a biblical and theological context, to the liturgical year, is enabling the school community to begin to understand their basis. The impact of this initiative can be developed by a strategic consideration and selection of those values which are particularly pertinent to the school community, and by providing further experiences to deepen and broaden members' biblical understanding for this choice.

Everyone in the school community including parents appreciates the worship, recognising it as bringing the school together to create a sense of family and community. Pupils explain that collective worship is an opportunity to reflect on the day and to learn about God and Jesus. 'We pray to God and tell God our feelings. When we need help and strength He will help us.' It can also be a time to 'turn over a new leaf and be forgiven.' Children enjoy singing an increasing range of worship songs though these do not yet always relate to the worship theme. Regular visits to church for important services such as harvest, Christmas and Easter and the fortnightly involvement of the incumbent in worship in school are important contributions to the partnership between the church and the school. They also contribute to children's good understanding of the Christian story. Pupils particularly value 'class prayers on Thursday', when it is just 'you and your class'. In this context they are most confident to contribute their own prayers and thoughts and read from the Bible. In whole school worship they are mostly attentive and willing to respond and contribute. The recently introduced 'Light the Candle' group confidently lead the invitation to and sending out from worship, including setting up the worship table. This includes Christian symbols, three candles to represent the Trinity and colours of the liturgical year such as purple for Lent. Pupils' understanding of God as creator and of the person of Jesus is good but of the Trinity is currently very tentative. The incumbent is able to help the school develop this important theological understanding.

There are many invitations to pray and reflect in the school day, including in each classroom. In Year 1 a 'prayer well',

invites children's prayers in the form of writing and drawings. Staff meetings also begin with an invitation for silent prayer or reflection giving staff space to find peace at the end of a working day. Children embrace creative opportunities for prayer in the school prayer corner such as tying a coloured ribbon to a cross and placing a glass pebble in a fabric river. A recent worship series led by the incumbent about the Lord's Prayer has enriched pupils' understanding, and they talk readily about different types of prayers.

The school has a compassionate heart and through collective worship inspires the raising of significant amounts of money for charitable causes many of which have particular poignancy for the community. A giant thermometer records their impressive contribution.

Evaluation of worship has taken place on a termly basis but is being re-shaped with a year group focus. Governors also carry out monitoring visits from time to time. Responses to evaluation have led to an increase in singing in worship and more frequent saying of the school prayer.

The effectiveness of the religious education is good

Teaching and learning in religious education (RE) is effective. The curriculum gives prominence to Christianity whilst also developing a sound understanding and respect for other faiths, particularly those represented in the school community. The dispositions of the Agreed Syllabus are used well to give meaning to Christian values through explicit links to the Christian narrative. For example pupils engage in thought provoking scenarios and questions such as considering, 'How did Jesus sacrifice himself?', and wondering whether Peter was a good friend to Jesus. Pupils are very clear that RE helps them to understand the faith and beliefs of their friends so that they can respect them even if they do not share them. Pupils readily talk about the features of the places of worship they visit and the spiritual significance of some of them for believers.

Pupils achieve well in RE. They talk knowledgably about artefacts representing events in the Christian story and religious practices in the Jewish and Islamic traditions. Their written work is often detailed and thoughtful with younger children expressing their learning in creative ways including pictures and models. Lessons include searching questions and elicit meaningful discussion between pupils such as how humility is demonstrated in newspaper reports. Since the last inspection there have been several subject leaders with the current leader recently appointed. She has already carried out a range of evaluation activities and has implemented a trial and evaluation of the Creation strand of the Understanding Christianity materials. These have deepened the thought processes of learners and teachers. RE is taught as a distinct subject each week, and always by class teachers, showing the value placed on the subject. A range of assessment strategies inform future learning but the school is still in the early stages of developing assessment for this subject which summarises achievement. Moving forward, this is an area for focus.

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

Leaders have a clear understanding of the school's Christian vision for the community to work together to secure achievement and enjoyment for all pupils. This is widely expressed through a range of values, codes and expectations. Over time the school has worked with different Christian values, all of them valid in their own way. However, the school would benefit from a considered selection of those values which are of greatest significance to the school and developing a robust biblical and theological rationale of these that everyone understands. Leaders proclaim the school's distinctiveness in the vibrant school environment and the school's generous provision, being passionate that it should be 'life enriching' for the children. The buying of kites for every pupil is one example. Further, partnership with St. Michael's church is valued by parents including the sensitive but practical support of the food bank in difficult times. Leaders thoroughly understand the school's performance which is in line with the national picture and they are taking appropriate actions to address weaknesses. The evaluation of the school's distinctiveness has not taken full account of the current evaluation framework. This accounts for the lower grading than in the previous inspection. Leaders have ensured that the distinctiveness has a convincingly positive impact on the behaviour of pupils and of relationships across the school. Following the significant period of change in the school, the governors recognise that in a now more settled period they need to secure their Christian values and vision to be theologically and biblically grounded. Arrangements for religious education and collective worship meet statutory requirements.

Staff are well supported to carry out their leadership roles for RE and worship and good links with the Church of England Birmingham, and other school partnerships secure improvements, impacting on the experience of pupils. In new staff induction the Christian character of the school is explained, enabling staff to be confident to contribute to it as well as being nurtured and supported within it, feeling 'part of a respectful and supportive team.' The formation of the multi-academy trust has created opportunities to grow and develop new leaders for church schools.