Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) Report

St Michael's Church of England Junior School, Maidstone	
Address	Douglas Road, Maidstone, ME16 8ER
How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?	
Overall grade	Good
The impact of collective worship	Good

School's vision

St Michael's is a family motivated by one another through our Christian ethos. Our inspirational children flourish and are nurtured in their curiosity and creativity to be the best they can be. Following God's guidance, children become independent, resilient and unique individuals, fully prepared for the challenges of life ahead.

Key findings

- The vision and values of the school are articulated clearly by school leaders. They are lived out day by day in the loving actions of all members of the school community. The theologically based Christian vision is not fully developed and embedded.
- A curriculum which fosters curiosity and creativity means that all pupils thrive and know that their contribution to their own learning and that of their peers is valued. A shared understanding of spirituality makes a significant contribution to the flourishing of all.
- Strong mental health and wellbeing result in a resilient school community that feels safe and cared for. Pupils with a range of specific needs are extremely well supported and flourish because the school lives out its vision for nurturing unique individuals.
- Collective worship is inclusive and provides a calm space where pupils can reflect and find inspiration for their everyday lives. Pupils' practical roles do not extend to planning and leading whole acts of worship.
- Religious Education (RE) enables pupils to explore searching questions in a safe space through an engaging curriculum. Written feedback is not consistent in enabling individual pupils to develop deeper thinking in RE.

Areas for development

- Develop and establish the theology behind the Christian vision, in order that the actions of the school reflect the vision alongside the already deeply rooted associated values.
- Extend the role of the pupil collective worship leaders (Leading Lights) to the planning and leading of whole acts of worship to further enrich the life of the school.
- Embed a consistent approach to written feedback in RE, encouraging all pupils to respond personally, in order to demonstrate their own deeper thinking.

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Inspection findings

The biblical story of Noah, an exemplification of the school's Christian vision and values, is known and articulated by all members of the school community. The values of the school which are perseverance, respect, friendship and happiness, are drawn from the story. Pupils know how Noah was inspired by these values and that they are able live them out in their own daily lives. These values underpin learning, relationships and personal wellbeing, resulting in flourishing for staff, pupils and wider families. A clear theology rooted in a Christian narrative is less readily expressed. Such a theological understanding is not used in explicit ways to talk about what drives and shapes the school. Pupils, parents/carers and staff experience St Michael's as their family, as a place of nurture, safety and belonging. Relationships at all levels are characterised by trust and loving support. This means that everyone is given a voice, with that of the pupils being the most important. School leaders regularly monitor and review their school in line with the current understanding of the vision and values of the school. New governors feel welcomed and supported and they get to know the school quickly.

In shaping their school curriculum, the needs and interests of all have been carefully considered. A focus on curiosity and creativity means that pupils are engaged in their learning and speak confidently of the questions that they have asked and discussed. It was summarised by a pupil in this way, 'listening to other people's opinions can change your opinions'. Pupils are encouraged to learn from their mistakes to build their perseverance and resilience. Adults model a positive attitude to trying again alongside pupils. This ensures that flourishing includes the development of independence, resilience and uniqueness as outlined in the school's vision.

A strong, shared understanding of spiritual development means that pupils are given time to explore their own interests which connect them to each other and help them to belong. This adds an extra depth to relationships as spiritual discoveries are celebrated together by adults and pupils. School support for the World Wildlife Fund, for example, demonstrates their keen sense of justice for the wider world. This is explored in RE, collective worship and the within the wider curriculum. They are developing the skills of courageous advocacy through their discussions, their curiosity and their developing spirituality. International Day celebrates the customs and beliefs of everyone in the school community. It is a joyful recognition of the breadth and colour within the diverse cultural make-up of the school. The school value of respect is lived out daily in ways which afford dignity to all. This is seen in the way that pupils speak about and to each other. It is demonstrated in the nurture of the adults, especially in practical and emotional support for pupils and families as soon as needs arise.

Identification of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is swift and effective. Language support for those who have English as an additional language (EAL) has been adapted to facilitate access to the curriculum for pupils quickly and with confidence. Adults' continuing professional development is shaped by their own interests and passions. The school's priority for supporting good mental health is reflected in leaders' day to day actions and in documentation. Pupils feel very safe in school because their views are heeded, and action is taken. Parents/carers can speak to leaders and other staff at the beginning and end of every day. The voices heard throughout the inspection agreed that the school is a family because it is close knit, connected and loving, reflecting the school's vision.

Collective worship is well led and managed. It is inclusive of and invitational for those of all faiths and of none. They look forward to sharing ideas with each other and with the rest of the school. The timing of worship at the end of each day helps the community to look back at their learning and interactions. It also means that the inspiration to live well naturally

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continues into life at home and in the community. Sung worship is enjoyable and enthusiastic. Year 6 pupil leaders (Leading Lights) assist with practical aspects of collective worship, and with leading liturgy and readings. However, their role is underdeveloped in the wider planning and leadership of worship. A good partnership with St Michael's Church is being sustained as much as is possible whilst there is no priest in post. Other local church leaders and Christian organisations provide welcome and effective support. The church building is used for marking special occasions, times which parents/carers regard as precious.

The RE leader sets high expectations for the subject and keeps up to date with changes and with good practice. RE forms a part of the school's Freedom Friday initiative. This means that it is given more that 5% of curriculum time and is linked imaginatively with other Friday morning curriculum areas including art, music and personal, social and health education (PSHE). Pupils are able listen to others with respect, no matter what they believe. They therefore understand that RE enhances their understanding of diversity and helps them to better navigate the wider world. Pupils engage well with the wide-ranging discussions and opportunities provided for creative expression. A lack of consistency in written feedback for RE is currently limiting pupils' ability to demonstrate their deeper personal thinking.

Information			
School	St Michael's Church of England Junior School, Maidstone	Inspection date	8 February 2023
URN	118625	VC/VA/ Academy	Voluntary controlled
Diocese/District	Canterbury	Pupils on roll	178
Executive Headteacher	Lisa Dicker		
Chair of Governors	Jo Cox		
Inspector	Virginia Corbyn	No.	86

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