

## National Society Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools Report

### **St Michael's Church of England First School**

Howling Lane  
Alnwick  
Northumberland  
NE66 1DJ

#### **Diocese: Newcastle**

Local authority: Northumberland  
Dates of inspection: 21<sup>st</sup> June 2010  
Date of last inspection: 8<sup>th</sup> March 2007  
School's unique reference number: 122284  
Headteacher: Mrs Sally Lamb  
Inspector's name and number: Sheila Bamber 621

#### **School context**

St Michael's is a large first school, set in the market town of Alnwick. The proportion of children with special educational needs is above average. The school serves the immediate local community and families from the surrounding area who choose the school for its faith status.

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

From the moment parents arrive at the school they are drawn into the school family, where every individual is uniquely valued and loved. The leadership of the school is relentless in seeking excellence in every area of school life, motivated by a deep understanding and outworking of the love of God. Learners make excellent progress, often from a low base level, and the whole school focus on the development of oral skills is well illustrated in the confident way all members of the school community can describe the impact of Christian values on the school.

#### **Established strengths**

- The tangible care for every member of the school 'family' which extends widely into the local community.
- The exemplary reflective practice which underpins a clear focus on improving outcomes for the whole child in every area of their development.
- The integration of Christian distinctiveness into the creative curriculum.
- The mutually supportive relationship of parish and school, which places the school at the heart of the mission of the church.

#### **Focus for development**

- Ensure that the distinctive Christian character of the school is clearly evident in the work with the Local Authority and in seeking Governor mark.

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

The Christian values of the school, rooted in love for all, are immediately evident on entering the playground, where issues surrounding the whole family, and the school family, are readily shared. Parents say their children enjoy coming to school, and that they are very well cared for. Many members of the local church and parish are actively involved in the school as volunteers, and contribute significantly to the well-being of the learners by sharing their skills (music, gardening, supporting reading), and their life experience (eg of Indian life and culture). The children feel safe and understand how to take care of themselves and each other. One child observed that he didn't like 'getting wrong', but that sometimes he deserved it.

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

An outstanding act of Collective Worship on the theme of 'Being filled with God's love' engaged all members of the school community. The theme was well developed through a good choice of music, and confident singing. This was followed by a mixed-age planning group for student led worship later in the week which confidently picked up on the theme, linked it to an appropriate bible story, chose music that fitted with the overall theme, planned quiet time and prayers led by every child, and took account of the feedback from the student led worship in the previous week. Later, on a visit to church, children were readily able to discuss how God's love is shown through the crucifixion, and also in the Eucharist. The worshipping life of the school is well integrated with that of the parish, and the school was described as 'a blessing' in the way it encouraged Christian discipleship among the many volunteers and members of the wider community. Reflection 'corners' have been introduced into the foundation stage unit, and observation includes awe and wonder. One child told a teacher that it was a miracle that God had taken the new plants and made them grow since Friday.

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

RE is taught both as a 'stand alone' subject and through the constantly developing creative curriculum. A theme of 'Mexico' provided the opportunity to reflect on the significance of Christmas and compare traditions in the local church with those of the church in Mexico. In the early years unit the topic of Hinduism was explored with the help of visitors who had direct experience of life in India, and children were sensitively encouraged to widen their experience of food, music and religious customs. Assessment in RE exemplifies the outstanding practice throughout the school, using a wide range of evidence to support secure judgements. Children are able to talk naturally and confidently about matters of belief, and assessment shows that for many their ability to reflect on the impact of faith is greater than their subject knowledge, although by the end of their time in the school, their overall progress is outstanding.

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

The Head Teacher is inspirational in modelling the Christian principles which undergird every area of school life. Working with the governors, she has successfully established widely distributed leadership across the school. Staff reflect on and challenge their own practice confidently. The governing body has a clear understanding of the way in which Christian values lie at the heart of all they do, and are developing a robust and dynamic approach to self-evaluation that will embed the impact of the distinctive Christian character of the school in the SEF. New governors receive a thorough induction and the simplified committee structure helps them to establish a picture of the whole school quickly and clearly. The governors are seeking Governor mark status. A governor 'buddy' system focussed on the impact of school practice on the Every Child Matters outcomes and the school addition of 'Be Spirited' provides good challenge and is valued by staff and governors. The school leadership is also working with the Local Authority to share best practice in assessment.

SIAS report June 2010 St Michael's Church of England First School, Alnwick, NE66 1DJ