

St. Michael's School: Annual report to St. Michael's Church APCM – April 2024

Once again this has been a busy year for St. Michael's School, and indeed schools across the whole country, in coping with a wide range of issues, impacting the whole school community in many ways. St. Michael's is very fortunate in being steered through these challenges by a skilled, experienced and dedicated team of people who strive to create a positive and purposeful environment where children can thrive during these important and informative years of their lives.

We recently conducted a survey of parents' views. This fully endorsed the governors' opinion that our staff do a fantastic job. The school is nurturing and caring as well as providing a wonderful education. Some quotes are:

"Brilliant school. Staff more than accommodating and go above and beyond. All are very much appreciated."

"My child has been challenged this year to achieve his best and it has been great to see what a difference this is making."

These are a couple of longer quotes along with many like "We are so happy with St Michael's"

The last year has seen a calm and settled period with regards to teaching and leadership staff and the importance of wellbeing for both teachers and the leadership team has been correctly prioritised with Val Ashwood assuming responsibilities as Wellbeing Governor. The national press coverage of the stresses facing the education sector and teachers accurately reflects issues which are very relevant and pertinent to our school. This situation continues to create a huge amount of extra work for the senior leadership team (SLT) and class teachers, in particular with regards to the SEND (Special Educational needs and disabilities) sector. The school is very fortunate to have a very effective Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo), Lucy Standen, who works closely with parents to try and ensure that children can access the limited resources available at the current time. In November 2023 the centralised Hertfordshire special needs service was judged by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission to be suffering from systemic and widespread failings. The consequence for our school is that there is virtually no outside support for the increasing number of children with identified needs. As a result, the school team works hard to ensure these needs are met in the most effective way without negatively impacting the rest of the school community.

The office team has been joined by Carley Brooks who is focusing on the Business Manager role, succeeding Joanne Mottram who has kindly agreed to continue working for one day a week to ensure a smooth transition.

Our Chair of Governors is Mark Johnson assisted by Brett Welch and Val Ashwood as vice chairs. The governing body has also grown with new colleagues in various roles and in doing so has gained a wide range of useful skills and experience. Welcome to Keir Mann, Hilary Fletcher, Mireille Baulcomb and Shell Langston. The governing board would like to thank to two talented, experienced and hard-working governors in Claire Satchell and Emily Bulman who left last July having served for many years. We would also like to thank Jonny Hays for his long service as staff governor, he is now lending his many talents to the school's very important PTA.

Apart from staff workload, other key pressures on schools across the country include pupil funding levels, staffing availability and buildings maintenance. Some schools had to close at the start of the school year due to the presence of dangerous RAAC concrete in their roof structures. St Michael's was built during the affected period and the Governors funded an

extensive survey. We were relieved to discover it was not an issue and that whilst the sixty-year-old building does need some important repairs, they can be completed without closing the school. Funding for these will need to be met from the limited budget allocated by central government. We still have a vacancy for an associate governor with premises expertise on our Resources committee.

As mentioned in last year's report, there continues to be pressure on all schools in the area to fill places at the lower end of the school, particularly the Foundation years, Nursery and Reception. The number of younger children in the area is not growing and the opening of two new primary schools on the new estates, along with government funding for childcare places in private nurseries. This means that as strict guidelines apply about the pupil to staff ratio St Michael's needs to fund fully staffing these classes without receiving pupil funding for the full number of children. One way in which the school is seeking to boost pupil numbers, as well as helping to ensure effective communication with current pupils and parents, is a major relaunch of the school website to ensure that it allows the school to fully connect with an increasingly 'tech savvy' society. This is a work in progress and will hopefully be ready to launch at the start of the new school year.

The school has continued to thrive and the year has seen many successful school activities take place including visits, competitions, special days and performances. These activities enhance the curriculum and are often create the most special memories for the children. Considerable work has been done by the whole staff team on ensuring that the curriculum is broad, balanced and builds on children's learning, as well as making links across the wide range of subjects which are studied. The children consistently report that they enjoy their learning and this is recognised by external visitors to the school.

A key success has been the establishment a very popular childcare operation and this has proved financially profitable as well as offering a much-needed service to parents and carers. The Sunrisers and Sunsetters clubs utilise the dining area and are run before and after school by qualified school staff, offering fun activities for children alongside healthy meals which are prepared on site by an experienced school cook.

On Saturday 15th June the school will once more be proudly joining the Town Carnival as it celebrates the 'Best of British' and it would be lovely to see members of the Church community cheering us on in our 206th year of educational service to the people of Bishop's Stortford.

We continue to encourage Church-School links partly through a Governor sub-committee. The committee focuses on the requirements of the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) where we are currently "Excellent" in all areas as well as Church links. Events like the annual Christingle Service bring the two communities together. We would welcome more associate governors to join this committee from the Church community.

Please keep the school and its community in your thoughts and prayers as they strive to do their best at this challenging time for the field of education.

Clare Tozer PCC Governor April 2024