

St Michael's Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	123143
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	380605
Inspection dates	26–27 January 2012
Lead inspector	Paul Edwards

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	206
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Forty
Headteacher	Sue Grundy
Date of previous school inspection	24–25 September 2008
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Paul Edwards

Additional inspector

Heidi Boreham

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed seven teachers, visiting 14 lessons. Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, teaching staff, members of the governing body and groups of pupils. Formal meetings were not held with parents and carers although inspectors took the opportunity to talk to them before school. Inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at governing body minutes, the systems for assessing and monitoring pupils' progress, safeguarding procedures, pupils' work, and teachers' planning and marking. Inspectors took note of the questionnaires completed by 74 parents and carers and those completed by pupils and staff.

Information about the school

St Michael's is an average-size primary school. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups, who come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, is well above that seen nationally. A slightly higher-than-average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. The percentage of pupils who have special educational needs is below average and there are no pupils with a disability. The school has National Healthy Schools Status and an Activemark award. The school meets the current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Key Stage 2.

A new Early Years Foundation Stage unit has been constructed since the previous inspection and the facilities are shared with a private, pre-school facility. A pre-school club and an after-school club, privately managed, operate on the school site during term time and are subject to separate inspection.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- St Michael's is a good school, with a strong emphasis on raising pupils' awareness of values. Most parents and carers hold positive views of the school describing it as a place where 'there is a particularly strong sense of inclusiveness that helps all children to learn'.
- Pupils are provided with a good start and they achieve well and make good progress as they move through the school. By the end of Year 6, their attainment is above average in both English and mathematics. However, the good content of their writing is sometimes masked by their weak handwriting and presentation skills.
- Teaching is good and occasionally outstanding. In the best lessons, teachers' enthusiasm for learning and their well-planned activities encourage pupils to persevere in finding solutions to challenging problems. Occasionally, teachers spend too long explaining activities and do not offer enough challenge to more-able pupils. There are some missed opportunities to promote girls' confidence in mathematics.
- Pupils say they feel safe and well looked after in school, a view supported by the inspectors. Behaviour is good and pupils have positive attitudes towards school and lessons. Pupils are keen to contribute to school life and older pupils look after their younger peers at break-times.
- School leaders have been effective in raising pupils' attainment since the previous inspection, not least by ensuring teachers have higher expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving. Considerable improvement to the school's tracking of pupils' progress has enabled it to intervene sooner to enable those at risk of underachieving to make better progress.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to bring all lessons up to the level of the best by:
 - ensuring that marking always identifies pupils' next steps in their learning
 - developing a consistent approach to the teaching of handwriting and ensuring that all pupils present their work neatly
 - ensuring that teachers achieve an appropriate balance of the time they spend on explanation and that given to pupils to complete their work
 - allowing the more-able pupils to move on to more challenging activities sooner in lessons.

- Develop the confidence of girls in mathematics by encouraging them to respond to teachers' questioning more frequently in lessons.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Children enter the school with skills and abilities that are similar to those expected for their age. They make good progress throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage in all areas of learning so that their attainment is above average by the time they enter Year 1. A good emphasis on learning letter sounds (phonics) enables children's reading skills to develop well. A well-planned programme of activities enables them to make good progress in their acquisition of knowledge and understanding of the world; effective use is made of the on-site 'Forest school' to support this programme. Children's personal and social skills are promoted effectively through role-play activities, for example ordering and preparing meals at the 'Chinese restaurant'.

Most pupils continue to make good progress in their reading, the result of the effective teaching of phonics in Key Stage 1, so that by the end of Year 2, their reading skills are above average. While a small number find decoding unfamiliar words difficult, they are provided with good support, enabling almost all to master the skills required. By the end of Year 6, pupils' reading skills are well above average. Pupils' progress in writing has improved significantly since the previous inspection and is now above average, the result of increased opportunities to write at length in literacy lessons, but also in other subjects. Boys perform as well as girls in this respect. However, teachers have not been rigorous enough in promoting clear and fluent handwriting and this, together with insufficient attention to presentation, detracts from the quality of pupils' writing. Pupils' good mental arithmetic skills were apparent in lessons. The attainment of pupils overall is above average in mathematics and the school is focusing effectively on the progress made by girls who are not always as confident with mathematics as boys.

Those pupils at an early stage of learning English are given considerable help through well-planned, one-to-one tuition and in-class support, enabling them to

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make rapid progress. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds progress in line with their peers, the result of being extremely well integrated throughout the school. The early identification of need and well-constructed programmes enable pupils with special educational needs to gain confidence and progress particularly well in their speaking and reading. Most parents and carers have an accurate picture of the good progress their children are making.

Quality of teaching

Teachers have good subject knowledge, demonstrated during sessions when pupils are taught phonic skills. They demonstrate a good awareness of the importance of clear diction, sounding out letters and blends correctly. The effectiveness of these strategies is seen in the confidence younger pupils demonstrate in using strategies to aid their reading. Parents and carers acknowledge how well their children are reading and most feel positive about the teaching. Good role modelling by staff supports well the school's provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Good teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage provides children with good encouragement to choose from the range of activities on offer. Children settle well, helped by the strong links with the pre-school provision attended by most of the children. Good assessment strategies provide a clear picture of how well children are progressing and are used accurately to plan work that is challenging and stimulating. Staff plan activities that make effective use of the extensive outdoor provision. The school is rightly looking to improve the range of climbing equipment to help enhance children's physical development.

Teachers are particularly good at questioning pupils. The introduction of a programme to develop pupils' thinking skills has encouraged teachers to help pupils utilise open questioning to determine what their peers know and understand. This was seen in an effective lesson in Key Stage 2, where pupils skilfully posed questions around such paintings as *The Scream*. Although good consideration is given to the learning needs of pupils of different abilities, occasionally more-able pupils are provided with activities that are not sufficiently challenging before they are allowed to move on to work that is better matched to their ability. Pupils are encouraged to work together, contributing to their good social development and helping them to learn from each other.

Teaching and learning support assistants are utilised effectively. Teachers ensure assistants have a clear understanding of the lesson objectives and of their role in the lesson. They provide particularly effective support for those who find learning difficult. This was seen in a typical lesson where lower-attaining pupils made good progress in their understanding of factors because the learning support assistant provided just the right balance of support and challenge. Most parents and carers responding to the questionnaire felt that the quality of teaching was good, which was confirmed by inspectors' observations.

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Behaviour and safety of pupils

During the inspection pupils behaved well in lessons and around the school at playtimes and during lunchtimes. Pupils say that this is normal, that behaviour is usually very good and that teachers do not allow lessons to be disrupted through pupil misbehaviour. A small number of parents and carers expressed concerns about bullying. Pupils felt that on the rare occasions where bullying took place, it was dealt with very well. They are very aware of different types of bullying, including cyber bullying, and know who to speak to should they have concerns. They commented that there were some issues with pupils running around in the playground and bumping into one another but that when the weather was better and they could use the field, this was less of an issue because the playground was less crowded. They say there are 'lots of teachers' outside to look after them.

Almost all pupils responding to the questionnaire felt they are well looked after and said that they feel extremely safe in school. Their parents and carers, almost without exception, agreed with this. Pupils get on very well with one another and the school is a very cohesive setting. The curriculum ensures pupils develop tolerance and a very good understanding of the many different cultures and backgrounds represented in the school. Consequently, all classes are harmonious with pupils showing respect to one another and to staff. Attendance is above average with almost all pupils being punctual, enabling lessons to start promptly.

The school is effective in encouraging pupils' moral awareness by encouraging them to take on responsibilities, for example as members of the school council, through organising and supporting a wide range of charitable activities and looking after younger pupils at playtimes.

Leadership and management

The school has improved well since it was last inspected. Pupils' attainment has risen and it is now securely above average. However, school leaders, including governors, are not complacent and they realise there is still room for improvement. Regular professional development for staff has ensured the quality of teaching has improved, helped by the good use of peer mentoring and coaching. Processes for monitoring the progress of pupils have become more reliable and the move to a computer-based system has ensured the progress of different groups of pupils can be tracked more easily. Leaders at all levels share the headteacher's vision and the introduction of activities such as extended writing sessions provides evidence of the school's commitment to improvement and its capacity to improve further.

The curriculum is good and the pupils appreciate the range of activities that are available. Pupils' involvement in planning projects and themes provides them with a sense of ownership and arouses their interest. They particularly enjoy outside visits. For example, their interest in the Victorian punishment of children was stimulated following a visit to the Oxford Courthouse! Many pupils take up the opportunity to learn to play a musical instrument, and singing with the 'Festival of Voices' and

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visiting the youth proms promote their cultural development well. Close involvement with the local community enables pupils to share experiences with pupils whose backgrounds are different to their own. The school hosts an annual event where parents and carers from all the different cultures represented in the school community bring food and meet with others. This provides a valuable opportunity to understand and celebrate their common features and differences and to support well their spiritual, moral, cultural and social development.

Pupils have the opportunity to learn French, Spanish and Italian and older pupils have the opportunity to improve their knowledge of European culture when they represent their school and country in an annual cross-country skiing event which takes place each year in France. School assemblies play a significant role in promoting pupils' self-esteem and the importance of working hard, as was seen when they were rewarded for a wide range of achievements including work on global warming.

School leaders, including governors, ensure the safety of all pupils and staff through stringent checks. Staff training ensures all are kept fully up to date with best practice in child protection procedures. Staff are vigilant in looking out for the needs of those pupils whose circumstances have made them vulnerable. Governors are rigorous in ensuring site safety and risk assessments for all activities are fully in place. Development planning is based securely on accurate data, with strengths in provision being built on and weaknesses systematically and effectively tackled. Pupils' progress is monitored closely, the outcomes forming the basis of regular meetings, resulting in well-targeted support and guidance for individual pupils. As a result, all pupils have equality of opportunity and the school does not tolerate discrimination of any kind.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



29 January 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Michael's Church of England Primary School, Oxford, OX3 0EJ

Thank you very much for welcoming us when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking to you about your lessons and how much you enjoy learning, and also watching you work and play. Here are some of the reasons we think that St Michael's is a good school.

- You make good progress in all classes and do better than average in English and mathematics.
- You work hard, behave well and attend school regularly. You get on well with one another and learn much about each other's cultures and backgrounds.
- You think hard about those less fortunate than yourselves and you enjoy the charitable activities that you take part in.
- Your teachers provide you with many interesting activities and you say you really enjoy the visits to places of interest outside the school.
- Your headteacher and her team lead the school well and work hard to provide you with a good curriculum that makes learning interesting.

To make it even better, we have asked the school to:

- improve how your written work is marked so that you get a clear understanding of what you need to do to improve
- help you to improve your handwriting and make sure your work is always well presented
- make sure that you always have sufficient time to complete your tasks and allow those of you who find work easy to move on to more challenging work sooner
- encourage girls to become more confident in mathematics by making sure there are plenty of opportunities to answer the teachers' questions.

Yours sincerely

Paul Edwards
Lead inspector

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