

St Michael's Catholic College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100858
Local Authority	Southwark
Inspection number	354906
Inspection dates	14–15 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Anne Wellham HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	689
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs M Bannister
Headteacher	Mrs G Grabowski
Date of previous school inspection	9 October 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Twenty-four parts of lessons were observed, taught by 22 teachers. Meetings were held with students, staff, parents and seven members of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation as well as 359 questionnaires completed by parents and carers, 100 questionnaires completed by students and 31 completed by staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The accuracy of the school's evaluation of the quality of learning.
- How well senior and middle leaders have developed their skills since the last inspection and whether they have made a significant impact on the overall effectiveness of the school.
- Whether students' behaviour, and care, guidance and support make an outstanding contribution to learning.
- The effectiveness of the curriculum in engaging all groups of students and in raising achievement.

Information about the school

St Michael's is an oversubscribed comprehensive school for students who come from a wide range of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. There are fewer girls than boys and two-thirds of students are from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is well above average, although very few are at the early stages of acquisition. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is slightly above that found nationally. The school has been a business and enterprise college since 2003 and was awarded a second specialism in modern foreign languages in 2007. It was awarded Enhanced Healthy School Status in 2010. The school has recently moved into new buildings and will introduce sixth form provision in September 2011.

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: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

St Michael's provides an outstanding education underpinned by a strong spiritual ethos. The staff are committed to maintaining an inclusive, welcoming environment which allows students to become passionate about learning and aspire to achieve their best. The school is rightly proud of its excellent care, guidance and support and the outstanding curriculum which nurture students' exceptional spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Relationships between students from different ethnic and social groups are harmonious and mutually supportive and students report that they feel exceptionally safe. Instances of bullying and racism are very rare. Attendance is high compared to the national average and there are very few persistent absentees.

There has been a very strong trend of improvement since the previous inspection. Rigorous and precise action has been taken to improve learning and progress. The school has developed detailed tracking data on attainment to make sure that all students have realistic and challenging targets. Students' progress towards these targets is monitored closely and there is a clear view of students' achievement across the school, shared by staff, students and parents. Leaders and managers take very effective action to reduce gaps in attainment between different groups of students including those with special educational needs and or/disabilities, those who speak English as an additional language, gifted and talented pupils and those who are potentially vulnerable or disaffected. There is some variation in the progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities in relation to their peers but this is reducing rapidly. Achievement is outstanding because most students attain standards that are above the national average and make excellent progress from their starting points by the time they leave the school. There has been a strong focus on improving behaviour to support learning and it is now exemplary in lessons and around the school.

Although teaching has improved considerably since the last inspection it is good rather than outstanding. Information about students' capabilities and their prior learning and understanding is not used consistently well to plan lessons that challenge all students, particularly the higher attainers. Strong supportive relationships with teachers, together with their excellent behaviour in lessons, are key factors in students' outstanding progress. In addition any student that falls behind is provided with high quality support and intervention targeted specifically to their needs.

The headteacher provides the school with very strong leadership. She promotes a clear ethos of maintaining high academic standards while securing students' achievement in its broadest sense. The reorganisation of roles and responsibilities at leadership level and a collaborative approach to school improvement planning have led to a sharper focus on learning, a secure grasp of how to set targets for student progress and a culture of openness and accountability. Promotion of equality underpins the school's work. Data on

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the performance and experience of different groups of students are thoroughly analysed and decisive action taken to tackle any unevenness. There is a shared vision for improvement, and staff at all levels are clear about whole school priorities. Very effective self-evaluation combined with the school's track record for sustained improvement underpins its outstanding capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Sustain improvements in the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - ensuring that teachers and other adults use information about students' capabilities and their prior learning and understanding to plan lessons that consistently challenge all learners, particularly the higher attainers.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

The quality of learning is outstanding because students have very positive attitudes and are exceptionally keen to learn. Their excellent behaviour and concentration in lessons make a strong contribution to their learning. In the majority of lessons observed, the quality of learning was at least good but there is variation within the key stages and across subjects because teaching is not consistently good or outstanding. ♦ Students respond well and make outstanding progress in lessons that offer the correct level of challenge and provide opportunities for them to become actively involved in their learning. Most students participate in the extensive range of opportunities to extend their learning including school study clubs, Saturday schools and extra-curricular activities. There are no significant differences between the achievement of boys and girls, those who are learning to speak English as an additional language or those who are potentially vulnerable. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive personalised intervention and guidance, which makes an important contribution to their quality of learning and allows them to make good and sometimes outstanding progress.

The school is exceptionally effective in promoting the values of respect and tolerance. Students have a good understanding of the risks that have an impact on their physical and mental health and emotional well-being and recognise the benefits of a healthy diet and regular exercise. They enjoy being part of the school community and willingly take on posts of responsibility. Their understanding of the need to actively contribute to the school as well as the local, national and international communities is a strong feature of the school and further deepens and extends their learning. Students realise their own capacity for their future economic well-being through their high attendance and excellent punctuality. They develop enterprise skills and personal qualities well through the excellent learning opportunities set up through business and enterprise and modern foreign languages.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

The wide variation in the quality of teaching reported at the last inspection has been successfully eradicated and the proportion of good and outstanding lessons is increasing. In the few lessons where teaching is less effective the pace of learning slows as the work is not sufficiently challenging. The most effective teachers take account of students' prior learning to inform planning and use a wide range of ways to assess students' understanding. They are confident enough to take risks to challenge students to think for themselves and amend tasks accordingly. In good or better lessons technology is used imaginatively and well, and there are planned opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy skills. In addition, students receive precise meaningful feedback on how to improve their work.

The outstanding quality of learning is promoted through the excellent curriculum which is relevant to the experiences and interests of students and uses the knowledge and expertise of staff to best effect. The school is extremely effective in developing innovative opportunities to extend and enrich the curriculum in school and the wider community. Specialist status is used very well to develop personal learning and thinking skills. The extensive range of extra-curricular activities, trips and links with external partners provide meaningful opportunities for students from different backgrounds and of different ages to interact and work together.

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Exceptionally high levels of support and care are carefully targeted to improve the confidence, self-esteem and achievement of all students. Intervention strategies are carefully planned and students who are falling behind receive individual support. The school knows and understands the needs of students and families extremely well and ensures that students' diverse needs are well met.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders and managers at all levels have a shared and explicit vision for sustaining improvement. Morale is very high and there is a strong belief in the school's capacity to improve further. Rigorous systems to monitor students' learning and the quality of teaching and learning are used consistently to evaluate where positive learning is leading to better outcomes.

Governance is securely good. Since the previous inspection the governing body has played a major part in shaping the future of the school and vigorously challenges performance. Members are building constructive relationships with staff and becoming more strategically involved in improvement planning.

A strong commitment to ensuring the safety of students and to promoting equality of opportunity is well established throughout the school community. The school meets the statutory requirements for safeguarding well and works with a range of external agencies such as health and social services to promote the safety, health and welfare of all students.

The school engages very well with parents and is very successful in involving parents in supporting their children's learning and behaviour. The school invites and receives a high level of informal and formal feedback through the 'Parents Forum', the 'Headteacher's Round Table' and 'drop in' clinics and takes appropriate action as a result.

Community cohesion is one of the principles underpinning the school's successful ethos. It values the diversity of the school community, works closely and effectively with local partners and the broader national and international communities. ♦ A recent exciting and innovative project, 'Asian Dialogues' has established beneficial links with communities in Asia.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

A very large majority of parents who responded were happy with all aspects of the school's performance. They were particularly happy with their children's learning and progress and how the school keeps their child safe. The aspects that received slightly lower scores were focused on three issues: the promotion of healthy lifestyles, meeting students' particular needs and taking account of parents' suggestions. Inspection evidence supports the view of parents that the school is providing an outstanding quality of education in nearly all aspects of school life.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Michael's RC College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team inspector received 359 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 689 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	112	31	214	60	22	6	7	2
The school keeps my child safe	143	40	196	55	11	3	5	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	161	45	172	48	20	6	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	117	33	220	61	14	4	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	129	36	205	57	16	4	2	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	106	30	216	60	27	8	3	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	69	19	233	65	42	12	6	2
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	115	32	208	58	19	5	1	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	102	28	206	57	32	9	4	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	154	43	170	47	23	6	5	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	79	22	211	59	40	11	10	3
The school is led and managed effectively	133	37	193	54	19	5	6	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	161	45	179	50	9	3	5	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



16 March 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of St Michael's RC College, Bermondsey SE16 4UN

Thank you for the friendly and polite welcome you gave us when we inspected your school. We enjoyed meeting you and your teachers, visiting some of your lessons and looking around the wonderful new building. We think your school has improved considerably since the last time it was inspected and it is now outstanding. It is a very special place because of the exceptional care and support you receive and the opportunities that allow everyone to have an equal chance to learn. As well as helping you to achieve excellent results in examinations and make outstanding progress, the school encourages you to have high aspirations for the future. We were very impressed with the respect that you show each other and your commitment to learning. Your behaviour in lessons and around the school is outstanding and your attendance is excellent.

You have many opportunities and to learn outside lessons by taking part in a wide range of study clubs, trips and activities, especially those linked to business and modern foreign languages. These activities help you learn valuable skills for your future life.

The headteacher and senior staff lead your school very well. They make sure that you are continually encouraged to have high expectations of yourselves and set you challenging targets. Your teachers and other adults are very committed to helping you and work very hard to make sure that you do the best you can.

Although there are so many excellent things about your school there is always room for improvement. We have asked the teachers to use the information that they have about your progress, knowledge and understanding to challenge you more, especially those students who are capable of getting the highest grades in examinations. You can help by discussing your learning with your teachers and letting them know if you find work too easy or too hard.

We wish you all at St Michael's College a very happy and successful future.

Yours sincerely

Anne Wellham

Her Majesty's Inspector

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