

St Michael's Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109796
Local Authority	Reading
Inspection number	356627
Inspection dates	19–20 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Melanie Clapton

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	204
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Margaret Fletcher
Headteacher	Anne Higginbotham
Date of previous school inspection	17 September 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Fifteen lessons were observed taught by six teachers. Meetings were held with a group of pupils, middle leaders and the headteacher and members of the governing body. They observed the school's work, and looked at samples of pupils' work, the school improvement plan and monitoring evidence of teaching and learning. The books of Year 5 and 6 pupils were reviewed in detail to get a clear picture of their progress and attainment. The views of the staff, pupils and 92 parents and carers who returned questionnaires were also taken into account.

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 view of pupils' current attainment, particularly in mathematics.
- The school's use of assessment information to plan for differing abilities and in remedying any underachievement.
- Whether expectations in teaching and learning and the curriculum cater for the more able and are accelerating achievement for all pupils, whatever their starting points.
- How the roles of all leaders and managers are developed to secure improvements.

Information about the school

This is a smaller-than-average-sized primary school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is above that found nationally. The largest group is White and Black Caribbean, 10% of the school's population.

The school has experienced turbulence in staffing since the previous inspection, particularly in Key Stage 2. The leadership team as a whole is relatively new, with two new appointments at senior level. A new headteacher joined the school in September 2010. During the inspection two classes were away on a residential journey with three members of the school teaching staff. The school has Healthy Schools Status.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

St Michael's is a satisfactory school. There are some good aspects of its work and there are positive signs of improvement. In a short time, the headteacher has forged a strong team ethos to help drive the school forward. Inconsistencies in pupils' attainment and progress, particularly in Key Stage 2, are reducing. Through better monitoring and improvements in teaching, pupils' rates of progress are improving. However, this is inconsistent and there has not been sufficient time for this improved progress to boost pupils' outcomes. Given these recent improvements, the school's capacity to improve is satisfactory.

School monitoring information shows that teaching is improving, but it is not yet consistently good. In many lessons, including some taught in the Early Years Foundation Stage, pupils spend too much time sitting on the carpet or in adult-led activities, with insufficient time to maximise independent learning opportunities. Teachers' planning and approaches are not always flexible enough to meet the needs of all learners, particularly in challenging the more able. Marking is supportive, but pupils are not always involved enough in setting their own longer-term targets.

Attainment at the end of Year 6, whilst broadly average, has varied each year since the previous inspection. This has been due to turbulence in staffing and the resultant inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. Since the beginning of the academic year, pupils' progress has improved, particularly where leaders task teachers with applying more rigorous attention to pupils needing extra adult support. The greater gains in progress for all pupils are in writing, where approaches to learning are more engaging and marking more consistently indicates next steps for learning. This approach is less consistently applied in mathematics.

Middle leaders' monitoring routines for improvement are developing, but as yet their role in directly monitoring teaching to support other colleagues is less well developed. The governors' monitoring of the school is starting to re-establish, following recent changes to their membership, but their systems to oversee its work systematically are not fully embedded.

Well-developed routines support pupils' personal development. Their considerate behaviour around school adds to the overall good picture. Pupils are confident to engage with adults as a result of good support in developing their personal qualities. Pupils feel safe and show a good understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle. This is reflected in the school's Healthy School status award. Community cohesion is promoted well through the integration of the school community and their knowledge of others, both locally and more distant from the school. Pupils appreciate the changes to the curriculum which enliven the approach to literacy activities, particularly writing. Other subjects are catered for well to give pupils a broad experience. Extra-curricular activities are wide ranging and

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well attended. Links with a local special school and the recent cluster work on writing strategy serve to enhance pupils' learning.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all pupils make consistently good progress by:
 - routinely involving pupils in assessing their own learning and setting future targets
 - ensuring that the current marking policy is used more consistently to give pupils better guidance for their next steps for learning, particularly in mathematics.
- Increase the proportion of good teaching through the school by:
 - involving pupils in Years 1 to 6 in learning tasks which are more creative to engage their learning, particularly for the most able
 - ensure that teachers' whole-class explanations are briefer so pupils can get down to work quickly
 - giving children in the Early Years Foundation Stage more opportunities for their independent learning.
- Extend the skills of governors and middle leadership to secure improvements by:
 - involving middle leaders more routinely in judging the quality of others' teaching to support colleagues and share best practise.
 - ensuring that the governors' new systems for monitoring the work of the school are fully implemented.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Pupils enjoy learning and when it is more creatively promoted they respond and concentrate particularly well. They are keen to discuss their learning and ask questions and work well in groups and teams in practical activities. In a Year 1 lesson, pupils applied their knowledge of tens and units in using money and writing word problems. They were excited about challenging their peers, while other pupils used real coins to make amounts and buy real items. Practical activities in science stimulated challenging questions, and pupils particularly enjoyed planting seeds and designing land yachts linked to the topic on pirates.

Children join the school with broadly average skills. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 is broadly average and for older pupils, attainment has risen in English. Results in mathematics were below those expected for their age. Current Year 6 work and the school's checks on progress indicate that pupils' achievement, while generally accelerating, is taking time to catch up from previous underachievement. Below-average numbers of pupils attained the higher levels in last year's tests. This is set to improve this year in Year 2, but not for Year 6 pupils. Any differences between boys' and girls' attainment were minimal in their current work. Those pupils with minority ethnic heritage achieve in line

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with their peers. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress but, along with fellow pupils, this is sometimes uneven through the school.

Pupils' well-developed spiritual understanding was evident in the awe of having live chicks in assembly. Pupils' understanding of healthy eating and the importance of exercise supports them in making healthy choices. Regular support and fundraising for charities and the range of jobs in school for pupils ensure a strong contribution to its pleasant ethos. Pupils' effective roles as 'Guardian Angels' in caring for and supporting younger pupils add to the calm purposeful playtimes that supports pupils' personal development. Cultural links help pupils have an appreciation of the music and artistic aspects to different faiths and religions represented both in the school and beyond.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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?

Teaching is satisfactory, but as yet there is not enough consistently good teaching to secure faster progress for all subjects and for all pupils. In well-taught lessons, pupils actively engage in their learning and move it forward through discussion, particularly in more practical activities. In a Year 4 literacy lesson, good teaching encouraged pupils to work together to improve a story text, by acting out different paragraphs of a story and in discussing how characters might react. In some lessons, teaching is too predictable or too much time is spent on the carpet listening to the teacher, rather than working. In some classes the use of worksheets limits pupils' progress and the teaching does not stretch the

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pupils' thinking. Through good questioning skills, teaching assistants routinely make a significant contribution to pupils' learning, particularly for some pupils from minority ethnic heritages and for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Secure assessment procedures result in accurate individual pupil targets, but as yet this is not effectively used to adapt planning approaches for all abilities, particularly for the most able. Some pupils are aware of the purpose of targets, but this awareness varies from class to class. Marking effectively identifies next steps for learning in English activities. However, this is much less well developed in mathematics. Opportunities for pupils to respond to marking comments and assess their own learning are not fully developed.

A full range of extra-curricular opportunities to support learning adds to the good curriculum and uptake is high across the whole school. Themed weeks and visitors, for example, 'Mad Science' week, motivate the pupils to learn. During the inspection, a visiting group of musicians were observed working with pupils' who enjoyed writing and performing music on their guitars. The 'Electives' weeks, where pupils make other activity choices for several weeks, support a wider range of skills such as learning sign language and tag rugby. Residential visits enhance class-based work. Well-developed links with external agencies add to the good care provided for all pupils. Parent and carer questionnaires comment on the good support and how the curriculum activities enhance it. One parent commented how tag rugby 'really boosted his confidence and sense of belonging' and another how school 'has helped, nurtured and prepared my child for her next transition to secondary education'. The school's support through issuing work at home for extended absences is having a positive impact on supporting learning for these pupils.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The energy and enthusiasm articulated by all leaders is gaining momentum. The headteacher and the newly formed leadership team are focused on raising pupils' achievement and driving improvement. Despite the headteacher and some middle leaders only joining the school recently, there are already evident improvements to teaching. Middle leaders are developing their roles and are beginning to use a range of skills to identify weaker teaching. However, they do not routinely observe others to share practice. Staff are positive about recent changes in routines. Careful monitoring of different groups, such as those from minority ethnic backgrounds, helps ensure equal opportunities. The school identifies patterns of progress and discusses any variations in depth at the termly pupil progress meetings. This is particularly effective in identifying those pupils' who can benefit from additional monitoring through what the staff call 'Pupil Pitstops' and 'chain

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monitoring'. These initiatives are effective in linking information from teacher's planning, lesson observations and pupils' progress meetings and identify common areas to focus upon and increase pupils' progress further.

The governing body quickly identified the need for external support and training after some new, inexperienced members joined them. This has aided their understanding of how to influence school improvement, but revised systems to oversee activities are yet to be fully embedded. Their secure policies for safeguarding procedures, combined with regular staff training and the recently installed CCTV, ensure pupils are kept safe. Good partnerships have been forged with local community groups which are effective at promoting pupils' good personal development and well-being. Parents show confidence in the headteacher and are appreciative of the visibility of senior leaders at the school gate each morning to aid engagement with them. The school's senior leaders' good knowledge of the diverse community which it serves encourages pupils to be proud of their heritage, and the recent 'Sense of Place' cross-curricular week enhanced this. Pupils participate in a wide number of local community events. The school's clear community cohesion action plan is driving improvements further to firmly establish United Kingdom links and a productive partnership with a school in Australia.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enter Reception with broadly average levels, with some areas above, notably personal and social development, but with weaker literacy skills. Positive relationships that adults form through the key worker system mean that children settle well and are keen and enthusiastic to learn. Children enjoyed using their senses to explore, with adult supervision, a wide variety of exotic fruits, which linked well with the topic of Africa and the story Handa's Surprise. Children enjoyed using traditional musical instruments from

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Africa and learning songs in Swahili. Children talk confidently about their learning and ask questions. Activities are purposeful and linked to exciting curriculum themes, but often lack challenge because they are constrained by too much adult direction. The recent introduction of the 'Letters and Sounds' program has secured better progress in learning letter sounds and, when given the opportunity, children are capable of applying these skills to independent writing. Children make satisfactory progress, reaching the expected levels when they enter Year 1.

Teaching is satisfactory, although there is an over-reliance on worksheets to support learning, or too much teacher direction. The outside environment is much improved since the last inspection and children like using it, although activities are often led by adults. Leadership is satisfactory and, as a result of working with the support of the local authority advisor, improvement plans are clear. Detailed records of children's learning are kept and a clear overview of each child, which is updated each term, tracks gains in all areas of learning during the term. Given the range of settings that the school caters for, transition links are handled well through a range of home visits and visiting children whose circumstances make them vulnerable, within their pre-school environments. The organised reading sessions, involving parents and carers, is serving to add to home links and good engagement with them.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

The response to the Ofsted questionnaire was about average for primary schools. Parents are very positive about the school but a small minority expressed some concerns over its work, particularly in dealing with some aspects of behaviour. Behaviour seen by inspectors was good and the school follows up any particular issues with urgency and effectively, involving additional support and advice where necessary. The school recognised that in a few instances it may not always clearly communicate this to parents.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Michael's Primary School 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 received 92 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 204 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	65	71	25	27	2	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	70	76	21	23	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	56	61	34	37	1	1	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	54	59	34	37	3	3	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	60	65	31	34	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	54	59	35	38	3	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	43	47	40	43	5	5	2	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)	45	49	39	42	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	45	49	40	43	2	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	34	37	47	51	7	8	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	33	36	52	57	6	7	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	57	62	32	35	1	1	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	66	72	26	28	0	0	0	0

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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 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 2010/11 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.



22 May 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Michael's Primary School, Reading RG30 4AS

Thank you for making us all so welcome when we visited your school. We were lucky to be there whilst you had the chooks in school and we were sorry that we did not get to meet those of you who were away on your school journey, but your friends supported your school well.

Yours is a satisfactory school where you reach average standards when you leave and achieve satisfactorily. We particularly noted some positive things about your school. You behave well and enjoy your learning. You told us that you feel safe and enjoy school. You shared with us the things that you liked about your school and how you liked the recent changes to school lunches which help you to keep healthy. You are enjoying the new approaches to literacy, writing in particular.

We know that your new headteacher has been working hard with all the staff to make your learning even better and we have asked her to do some things in particular. We have asked the staff to make their lessons even better by including more independent tasks to make your learning more interesting. We have asked her to check on your learning more regularly to make sure that you are making the best progress that is possible. We have suggested that all the leaders of the school work together to check that your school is getting better all the time so you can achieve your very best.

We hope you continue to enjoy your learning and all continue to do well.

Yours sincerely

Melanie Clapton

Lead inspector

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