

St Michael's Church of England Infant School Maidstone

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118626
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	358404
Inspection dates	9–10 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Margaret Coussins

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	118
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Craig Carter
Headteacher	Lorna Priddle
Date of previous school inspection	13 February 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. They observed nine lessons and five teachers. Meetings were held with the headteacher, other staff with leadership responsibilities, pupils and governors. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including the school improvement plan, the school self-evaluation form, monitoring records, pupils' progress records and safeguarding procedures. In total 52 questionnaires returned by parents and carers were analysed along with those from the staff.

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

- The impact of the school's work to raise attainment so that more are reaching at least the expected levels in all subjects.
- The achievement of different groups, particularly boys and the more-able pupils, to determine how effectively teaching and the curriculum are meeting the needs of all learners.
- The impact of the school's focus on mathematics.

Information about the school

St Michael's is smaller than the average sized school. The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The next largest groups are from Mixed and Black African heritages. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals has increased considerably since the last inspection and is now above average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is similar to that found nationally. Their needs relate mainly to specific learning difficulties, behavioural, emotional and social or speech, language and communication difficulties. Provision is made for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage in a Reception class and a mixed Reception and Year 1 class. The school has National Healthy Schools status and has gained Artsmark Gold and Activemark awards. The headteacher is also the executive headteacher of St Michael's junior school, which is currently in a soft federation with the infant school. This will become a hard federation from 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 is an outstanding school. The pupils at St Michael's are great ambassadors for their school of which they, staff, governors and parents and carers are justifiably very proud. The school provides an extremely stimulating, caring and supportive environment where pupils thrive and develop an enthusiasm for learning under the outstanding direction and leadership of the headteacher. Relationships between pupils and adults are excellent and trusting, as a consequence pupils feel very safe. Pupils' personal skills and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness are outstanding. Pupils develop as well rounded individuals who are happy, confident and excited by all their experiences at school. One parent summed up the views of many by writing, 'We feel incredibly lucky that our child attends St Michael's Infant School. The care and education that he is receiving are second to none. The staff and teachers genuinely care for the children and are fully invested in their welfare and future.'

Behaviour is exemplary and pupils are friendly, polite and exuberant. The outstanding, rich and vibrant curriculum inspires and motivates pupils to become independent and resourceful learners. The work the school has done to gain the Healthy Schools and Activemark awards is reflected in the pupils' excellent awareness of how to keep fit and healthy. Pupils enjoy school as shown in their above-average attendance. The school works hard to promote the importance of regular attendance, although pupils from a small number of families are absent from school too frequently which means they miss out on important learning.

Good teaching ensures that activities are firmly based on pupils' interests and needs. As a result pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language, make good and sometimes outstanding progress and achieve well. Pupils' current work and the school's progress data show that pupils are on track to reach above average attainment by the end of Year 2. There is, however, no complacency and expectations are high. The school has correctly identified the need, and is relentless in its work, to fine tune and fully embed its effective assessment procedures even further, to ensure that outstanding progress becomes consistent across the school.

There is an outstanding capacity for sustained improvement. The school's self-evaluation is highly effective and clearly demonstrates its relentless drive for further development from its existing successful position, particularly in further raising attainment and progress. For example, additional support for individuals through the 'numbers count' programme has had a very positive impact on pupils' mathematical achievement and teachers' skills and expertise. Carefully planned curriculum themes to motivate and stimulate writing have encouraged more opportunities for writing for real, meaningful purposes. This has motivated all pupils and boys in particular to become more enthusiastic and skilled writers.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve attendance by building on the excellent partnerships with parents and carers and other agencies to ensure the more regular attendance of a small number of pupils.
- Sustain the improvements in attainment and progress over the last year by fully embedding and further developing the good assessment practice to more precisely identify the learning needs of individuals and groups to promote consistently outstanding progress.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Children start at school with attainment below that expected for their age. They make good progress and achieve well. By the time they leave, attainment is above average. Additional needs are identified at an early stage and effective individual or group support is provided by skilled teaching assistants or through initiatives such as 'numbers count'. This ensures that all groups make similar progress. Pupils' enjoyment of school is infectious. A group agreed with one who said that they, 'really love school because it's fun, the teachers are kind and help you and we're all best friends.' Pupils' outstanding personal skills make a significant contribution to their good achievement. They show great determination to succeed and are proud of their achievements. As a consequence, progress is sometimes outstanding.

Pupils were very excited to discover answers to their own questions about snails by observing them in the garden and the classroom and researching information in books and on the internet. They collaborated exceptionally well and learnt a lot about snails as well as enriching their vocabulary and having a real purpose for their writing. A strong feature in all lessons is the opportunity for pupils to share their ideas. They always work extremely well together. For example, in a mathematics lesson pupils collaborated well to explore different ways of working out subtraction sums. The opportunity to work together very effectively helped to develop good speaking and listening skills as well as mathematical skills.

Pupils enjoy the responsibilities they are given and take them seriously. They champion issues affecting society as a whole, for example through the work of the eco team. School council members feel valued and listened to and feel they make a difference. Pupils make an excellent contribution to the local community and take part in many fund-raising events for a range of charities and causes and this helps them develop an understanding of people who are less fortunate than they are. Pupils reflect on their feelings and learn about the diversity of cultures and faiths in their own society and about other cultures and communities through the curriculum, for example during Italian week, Africa Day and Indian Dance Day. They gain an appreciation of the wider world through art and music. Displays of pupils' very impressive artwork reflect the work the school has done to achieve the Artsmark Gold award. The good level of pupils' basic skills and excellent personal qualities prepare them exceptionally well for their next school.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
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	1
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	2
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?

Themed and creative approaches to the curriculum are used exceptionally well to stimulate pupils' interests and learning is challenging and memorable for them. The curriculum is enhanced extremely well by outstanding enrichment opportunities including excellent use of the school gardens, visitors to school and trips. Pupils and parents and carers appreciate the wide range of activities and clubs. One parent wrote, 'I'm impressed with the number of opportunities to view the "outside" world. Additionally, brilliant after school clubs which many of their peers in other schools don't have.' Teaching is skilful, motivating and enthusiastic. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils and themselves and are constantly striving to improve their skills and practice. The school has correctly identified the need to fine-tune its assessments to maximise the opportunities for pupils to make the best possible progress. Pupils know their targets for learning and good marking and feedback inform them about how to improve their work.

Parents and carers and pupils agree that the school looks after them exceptionally well. In addition to the work of the senior leaders and managers, the work of the family liaison officer makes a considerable contribution to the outstanding care, guidance and support offered to pupils and their families, particularly for those whose circumstance may make them vulnerable. Well-established and effective links with other agencies and well-targeted support ensure that these pupils integrate very well and make good progress relative to their starting points. Pupils attending breakfast club get a good healthy start to

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the day and a good social time where children play well and happily together. Outstanding arrangements to support children and their families ensure there is a smooth transition into school and across the classes. The federation with the junior school has enabled very effective transition procedures into Key Stage 2.

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?

All staff work together very successfully and highly effectively to embed outstanding ambition and drive improvement. The headteacher inspires, motivates and challenges the whole school community to develop their skills to provide the best possible learning experiences for the pupils. One member of staff commented, 'We are a strong team because communication is excellent and our headteacher leads us in a positive but challenging way.' Across the team there is a dedication to removing barriers to learning and celebrating the achievements of pupils at every stage.

The highly inclusive, caring and Christian ethos of the school, its clear, detailed policies and the diligence of all staff ensure that all pupils have equal opportunities to learn and develop without fear of discrimination. Community cohesion is outstanding. Leaders have developed the school as a very cohesive community in which pupils show tolerance and respect towards others. A parent commented, 'This is a fantastic school with great and dedicated leadership. As a parent of ethnic minority children, my children have never felt left out at this great institution.' The school forges excellent links with local community groups, working with, for example, churches and charities to provide emergency food supplies for families who may be vulnerable. The school actively reaches out to its community, for example providing English classes for those who speak English as an additional language and there are wider, international links with a children's home in Grenada.

The school engages outstandingly well with parents and carers. Excellent communication, both formal and informal, keeps parents and carers both involved and informed. One parent wrote, 'I feel happy and confident as a parent and despite working full-time, feel part of the school's community.' Parents' and carers' views are sought regularly and acted upon, for example the provision of a breakfast club in response to their requests. Excellent partnerships with other schools, organisations and the church enhance the curriculum very well and make an excellent contribution to pupils' well-being. The governing body has a very clear view of the strengths and areas for improvement in the school and holds the school to account exceptionally well through its strategic work and regular monitoring visits. Its strategic decisions have a very positive impact on the school's performance, for

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example ongoing investment in the initiative to improve pupils' number skills. Along with staff, the governing body ensures that safeguarding procedures, which are well established, are extremely effective and that pupils have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves safe.

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	1
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	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children get off to an outstanding start in the Reception Year. They make excellent progress and reach, and some exceed, the expected goals for their learning by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. This is because of an outstanding curriculum and very skilled teaching and support, which help them to achieve exceptionally well. Children clearly enjoy learning and settle extremely well in a happy, purposeful environment. A very good balance exists of activities directed by adults and those where children make their own choices, and they very effectively develop independence as learners and learn to work together very well. Children make a very real contribution to the smooth running of the day and enjoy the responsibilities they are given, for example taking the register to the office, tidying away equipment and planning and reviewing their activities for the day. These opportunities help them develop excellent skills for their future. Excellent relationships between adults and children and exemplary attention to their welfare mean children feel very safe and secure. They behave very well and play and work together extremely well. Children learn well in a well-equipped, stimulating and welcoming environment where activities are very well matched to their needs and interests. Excellent use is made of the outdoor area to very successfully develop children's learning in all areas. There is a strong sense of teamwork with all adults extremely well focused and sharing the responsibility of assessing progress, planning the next steps in learning and creating an environment where children can thrive.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	1
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Views of parents and carers

Around 44% of parents and carers responded to the questionnaire. Their very positive response to all of the statements reflects the school's outstanding engagement with parents and carers. All agree that they are happy with their children's experience at school. The inspection findings support their positive views.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Michael's Church of England Infant 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 52 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 118 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	42	81	8	15	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	45	87	6	12	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	40	77	11	21	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	41	79	9	17	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	46	88	5	10	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	40	77	11	21	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	37	71	14	27	0	0	0	0
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)	33	63	14	27	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	39	75	11	21	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	38	73	12	23	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	35	67	13	25	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	43	83	8	15	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	42	81	10	19	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.



13 June 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Michael's Church of England Infant School, Maidstone ME16 8ER

I am writing to thank you for the lovely warm welcome you gave to the inspectors when we visited your school and for telling us what you thought about your school. One inspector was there for just a morning but I was lucky enough to spend two whole days with you and what a lovely time I had. You are right to enjoy coming to St Michael's because it is an outstanding school. We agree with you and your parents and carers that your school is an exceptionally caring and safe place to be and this, as well as your excellent attitudes to learning and good teaching, helps you make good progress. You do well in your reading, writing and mathematics by the time you leave the school.

We were very impressed with the way you all get on so well together and the fact that you care for and respect each other in your work and play. The headteacher, all of the teachers and other adults look after you very, very well. Your mums, dads and carers think so too and they are very pleased with how well you are doing. Your behaviour is extremely good. You are exceptionally good at knowing how to stay fit and healthy. You know what food is best to eat to be healthy and that you need to do lots of exercise. Everyone works very hard to make sure you enjoy yourselves and have fun while you learn lots of exciting things. Adults listen to you really well and help you learn in lots of different ways. You do especially well in using your initiative and becoming independent in your learning, well done for this.

There are two things that we know will help the school get even better.

- All of you should try to come to school every single day because if you are away you miss out on important learning.
- Teachers have already decided that they are going to look very, very carefully at exactly how well each one of you is doing and how they can help you to do even better.

We were very impressed with your lovely pictures and paintings that we saw all around your school. Thank you again for all your help and being so polite, friendly and interesting to talk to.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Coussins

Lead inspector

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