

St Michael's Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114520
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	378878
Inspection dates	7–8 December 2011
Reporting inspector	Sheila Browning

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	94
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Darryl Wall
Headteacher	John Greenway
Date of previous school inspection	3 October 2008
School address	Houghton Green Lane Playden Playden Rye TN31 7PJ
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Age group	5–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors, one of whom focused on safeguarding. Observations included eight lessons taught by eight members of staff. Meetings were held with the Chair of the Governing Body, staff and pupils. Inspectors analysed the school's work including samples of pupils' work, documents such as school improvement and lesson planning, and the governing body minutes. Inspectors took account of questionnaires completed by 29 parents and carers and those completed by staff and pupils.

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

- The effectiveness of the school's strategies to raise boys' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics, especially in Years 3 to 6.
- The extent to which teaching is successfully closing the gap between boys' and girls' achievement.
- Pupils' understanding of, and involvement in, communities outside the local area.
- The impact of school leaders at all levels on driving improvement.

Information about the school

St Michael's is much smaller than most primary schools. The pupils are taught in four mixed-aged classes. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are included in the Reception and Year 1 class. Most pupils are White British, with very few from a range of minority ethnic heritages. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is much lower than found nationally. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. Since the last inspection, the school had a monitoring visit carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors on 4 November 2009. The school runs a breakfast club managed by the governing body.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

St Michael's is a good school. It is rapidly improving and has made significant progress since its last inspection. The decision by leaders and members of the governing body to participate in local authority programmes for improvement has been a key factor in raising its effectiveness. A significant strength is that teachers are clear about national standards and their expectations of what pupils can achieve are higher as a result. The improvement in pupils' achievement is seen consistently across the school. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have an excellent start to their school life, because the leader inspires young children to learn in a rich, exciting learning environment. As they move up through the school, pupils continue to make good progress because they are taught well. As a result, by Year 6, their attainment in English and mathematics is above average. Some, especially girls, make outstanding progress, particularly in mathematics, because teachers make learning practical and fun. The most recent national tests were disappointing, however, in terms of those reaching the higher levels in writing. Leaders have identified some causes for this and are beginning to tackle them head on. Robust systems ensure that pupils' progress is accurately assessed and tracked. Pupils know their targets and marking ensures they are clear about what they need to do next. Detailed and evaluative monitoring by the headteacher and staff indicates that teaching has improved, although those pupils who are more able are not always stretched sufficiently in developing their writing skills.

Pupils develop excellent personal skills, including exemplary behaviour. Pupils say they like school and told inspectors, 'It's a lovely, small, calm place' and 'Mr Greenway is the best and is always looking out for everyone.' In questionnaires, one parent's comment typified many, 'The academic standards are very good but so important to me is the sense of community, and the way in which this school nurtures caring and kind attitudes amongst the children.' A great strength lies in the outstanding quality of care, support and guidance. Consequently, pupils enjoy attending, show an excellent understanding of how to stay safe and healthy, and contribute exceptionally well to the school and wider communities. The modified curriculum ensures pupils' imagination and multi-sensory skills are captured through exciting topics. A review of provision for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities ensures any pupil at risk of underperforming is identified early on. Support is tailor-made and targeted in class so that pupils do not miss out on any other learning and achieve well. Excellent links with a wide range of specialists and schools have had a strong impact on provision leading to pupils' good achievement.

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The key factor in the school's success is the headteacher's high expectations and drive for higher standards. In turn, this filters down to staff, governors and pupils alike. Good self-evaluation procedures have resulted in improvements in teaching, pupils' achievement and personal development, the curriculum, and devolved leadership. These factors, and the considerable improvements to the building since the last inspection, show the school has a good capacity to further improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise pupils' attainment in writing at the higher levels to meet the school's challenging targets by:
 - embedding recent initiatives to improve pupils' higher order writing skills
 - ensuring teaching and the curriculum provide even greater opportunities and challenge for those who are more able.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

Children join the Reception class with age-related skills and knowledge, except in their early reading and writing skills, which are less secure. Excellent resources, learning activities and teaching mean that they make outstanding progress. Elsewhere in school, pupils are engaged by an exciting and practical curriculum, and they achieve very well in mathematics because teachers make learning fun and interesting. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 enjoyed learning how to measure objects and each other using string, rods and rulers, and eagerly compared sizes of different objects. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 enthusiastically went on a treasure hunt to find clues, which helped them gain a greater understanding of fractions and how to solve related problems. By the end of Year 6, most groups of pupils have made good progress from their starting points in reading and mathematics. Pupils apply their very well-developed personal and basic skills, including information and communication technology, most effectively so that they are excellently prepared for secondary school.

Pupils say they feel very safe at school at all times, and have an exceptional knowledge about internet and road safety. Pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is seen in the way they follow the Golden Rules and show great respect for one another. Play leaders help younger ones to use and play with the super games and equipment available at playtimes, chosen by the school council. They raise considerable funds, hold entertainment afternoons for local old folk, recycle card and paper and more recently, recycle unwanted clothing which turns into cash for the school. This, alongside growing and selling fruit and vegetables locally, encourages their superb enterprise skills. They are proud monitors and house captains, and prepare outstanding daily PowerPoint computer presentations at the reception desk.

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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	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

The school's involvement in the 'making good progress' local authority pilot programme has successfully developed teachers' skills and the reliability of their assessment. Teachers' planning is well focused on the different ages and most abilities within classes. Teachers are steadfastly tackling boys' relative underperformance and are working hard to challenge and extend more-able writers. To this end, the curriculum and resources have been reviewed to identify where improvements can be made. This has resulted in finding subjects and books that really engage boys' interest. Drama and technology are used most effectively to motivate pupils' learning. Authors have talked about their work, and parents, carers and pupils have created a willow den for story-telling. There are plans for a more-able boys' writers group to raise their confidence in writing creatively. The achievement gap between boys and girls is successfully narrowing due to the initiatives introduced by the school to remedy weaknesses. A number of pupils are nudging towards the higher levels in writing but it is too early as yet for the full impact of recent initiatives to be seen in pupils' day-to-day work. Teachers' subject knowledge is good, they use questioning effectively to check pupils' understanding, but on occasion the pace of lessons slows. Talk partners and guided-reading sessions also have a positive impact

Curriculum changes, including a greater focus on the teaching of phonics (the knowledge of letters, letter combinations and the sounds they make), speaking and listening, and cross-curricular links between subjects, are all having a positive

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

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impact. In an excellent literacy lesson, pupils in Years 5 and 6 used connectives to link their ideas after a debate about endangered species and whether or not zoos were a good idea. In doing so, they also extended their knowledge of, and compared differences between, Africa and the United Kingdom, in terms of climate, clothing and food.

The new skills-based, cross-curricular curriculum, though developing well, is not yet embedded fully. Pupils learn through first-hand experiences, whether printing Norse patterns, making Viking helmets, enacting Nordic invasions or dressing up as Tudors. French language teaching, breakfast club, a nurture group and many extra clubs, along with visits and visitors, further enhance the curriculum. The school's Activemark award represents the many sporting activities pupils participate in, despite not having a hall or large indoor space. Instrumental lessons and singing develop pupils' musical talents well and displays celebrate pupils' high-quality art. Gifted and talented pupils benefit from attending mathematics master classes at a local secondary school. The recent audit and reorganisation of support for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities has greatly improved the quality of provision.

Support staff, as well as teachers and senior leaders, make a very strong contribution to the outstanding provision for pupils' care, guidance and support. Staff know pupils as individuals and show genuine care for them. As one parent put it, 'It's like a family.' Teaching assistants provide most effective support in class and are well trained and deployed. Parents and carers value the approachability of staff, and say how very supportive staff are and speak very highly of the headteacher. The excellent transition arrangements at entry, change of classes and leaving ensure pupils' needs are very 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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and senior leaders set aspirational targets for pupils' achievement. Staff share the drive for improvement and know they are held to account. Excellent staff morale and teamwork ensure mutual support and professional development. Leaders delegate responsibilities well and subject leaders, some of whom are developing their roles, make a strong contribution to the school's success. The robust systems for monitoring and evaluating the school's work has led to good improvement, and in several areas of its work, especially in pupils' personal

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development and in teaching and learning, the school knows that it is close to being top quality. Governors actively contribute to the life of the school because they are linked to subjects and have a direct insight into the quality of provision. Leaders are proactive in ensuring pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are identified and supported early on so that they make good progress. The school runs smoothly; classrooms are quickly reorganised to double up as space for lunch or assembly. The school has effectively used its partnership with local secondary schools to enhance sporting opportunities for pupils. Outstanding links with a wide range of professionals, including social, welfare, speech and language specialists, and close partnership with the local authority support pupils and their families exceptionally well. Engagement levels with parents and carers are excellent. Parents and carers attend 'meet the teacher', mathematics and 'Letters and Sounds' workshops and are involved in the school's internet-based 'Learning Platform'. The website, newsletters, text messaging and reminders inform them of events. Any concerns are sensitively dealt with. The school works particularly closely with those pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable and their families.

Secure policies and procedures ensure good levels of safeguarding. Vetting procedures meet requirements and risk assessments are securely in place. In this inclusive community, equality of opportunity underpins its work and there are no recorded incidents of discrimination. Any differences in attainment between boys and girls are reducing rapidly. The school promotes community cohesion outstandingly well, especially within its local community. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 visited a contrasting primary school in London; this successfully raised awareness of children from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The school has established links with a school in Gambia, and pupils exchange emails and photographs and show a good awareness of cultural differences.

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	2
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	2
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

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Early Years Foundation Stage

As a result of excellent support and attention to children's welfare by staff, and the involvement of parents and carers right from the start, children quickly become independent learners. Adults model correct spoken and written language well and plan stimulating activities in the high-quality, resource-rich environment that develop and extend children's skills very well. As a result, children make outstanding progress in all areas of learning, particularly their social and emotional development. Children's progress is monitored meticulously as assessment information and observations are thorough. Children are encouraged to reflect on their learning using the exemplary Learning Journals to record their progress. Parents and carers add to these using 'Wow' bubbles to show achievement at home. Altogether, this gives a clear picture of the excellent progress made in all areas of learning whether through self-chosen or teacher-led learning activities.

High-quality teaching promotes children's enthusiasm for learning. The outstanding emphasis on the acquisition of learning letter sounds in regular sessions ensures they make excellent progress in their early reading and writing development. Not surprisingly, they love to use the softly lit writing den to record their thoughts and stories. Children reinforce the blending of letters and sounds, through talk, making streamers and drawing letters in the air, and learn about clockwise and anti-clockwise. They have fun searching for clues for words with 'ai' and 'oi' sounds. In the outside site office and workshop, wearing hard hats, they use tools and make 'stuff', as one child remarked. They write shopping lists and menus before shopping in the class supermarket and post office, choose and weigh fruit and vegetables, and talk about healthy foods. They buy and sell stamps, work out all the prices, so developing good counting skills. The construction and craft areas provide excellent opportunities for their imaginative play and creative development.

The leader extends her extensive knowledge and skills to support other staff in school and further afield within the local authority. She has established excellent working partnerships with parents and carers, pre-school settings and other professionals so children benefit from a highly organised and outstanding provision.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
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

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Views of parents and carers

The number of Ofsted questionnaires returned to the inspectors was below average. Almost all the views expressed by parents and carers in written and informal comments to inspectors were positive. All parents or carers agreed that their child enjoyed school and made enough progress. Others said that the school met their child's particular needs, took account of their suggestions and concerns, and that teaching was good. They also agreed that the school was well led and managed, and were happy with their child's experience at school. Almost all felt their child was safe and felt well informed about their child's progress, and that they were well prepared for the future. Most felt the school dealt effectively with any unacceptable behaviour. Inspectors' evidence supported these 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 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 29 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 94 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	25	86	4	14	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	27	93	1	3	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	15	52	13	45	1	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	16	55	13	45	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	23	79	6	21	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	21	72	8	28	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	20	69	8	28	1	3	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)	17	59	10	34	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	22	76	7	24	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	16	55	9	31	1	3	1	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	20	69	9	31	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	19	66	10	34	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	27	93	2	7	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 08 April 2011 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.



9 December 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Michael's Church of England Primary School, Rye TN31 7PJ

Thank you for being so welcoming to us when we inspected your school. Many of you told us that you like coming to school. We can see that by your high rates of attendance and how much you enjoy your learning. The youngest children get an outstanding start to their education because they make excellent progress. You really get on so well with each other and your behaviour is brilliant.

We have judged St Michael's to be a good school. You are taught well and, because of this, you make good progress so that the standards you reach are higher than for most pupils of your age. Your headteacher and staff work very hard to make sure that you enjoy your learning. They work well with lots of different people so that you have lots of good opportunities to learn, and feel safe because you are extremely well cared for. The headteacher, supported by staff and governors, lead and manage the school well, and this is why the school has made such good progress since it was last inspected. Teachers make sure you get help if you need it. You have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe and healthy, and are very involved in the local community. You told us you were proud to be play leaders and school councillors. You have a very good understanding of the cultures and beliefs of others further from the school and told us how much you enjoyed visiting the school in London. When we asked you what you thought of your school, you told us 'It is just lovely' and that you did not want to change anything!

The school wants to improve even further. We have asked the school to help you improve your writing skills, particularly for those of you who are capable of doing harder work. All of you can help, too, by trying to write carefully, imaginatively and listening to the suggestions teachers give you to help you improve your writing skills.

Yours sincerely

Sheila Browning
Lead inspector

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