

St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	115157
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	379024
Inspection dates	10–11 May 2012
Lead inspector	Cheryl Thompson

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	418
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jennifer Bailey
Headteacher	Mandy Short
Date of previous school inspection	18 June 2009
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Cheryl Thompson

Additional Inspector

Bimla Thakur

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Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 21 lessons taught by 15 teachers. The work of learning support assistants supporting small groups of pupils and individuals was also observed. Meetings were held with staff, members of the governing body and groups of pupils. Inspectors heard a small number of pupils read in Year 1, Year 2 and Year 6. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at school evaluation documents, safeguarding documentation, data on pupils' progress and development planning. Responses from questionnaires completed by 196 parents and carers were analysed, as well as those from pupils and staff.

Information about the school

St Michael's is larger than the average primary school. It is popular and oversubscribed. There are two classes in each year group. A third of the places in the Early Years Foundation Stage (Reception classes) are reserved for those who regularly attend a local church. The overall proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average; however, 11% of pupils in the current Year 6 have a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The large majority of pupils come from White British backgrounds.

The school meets current floor standards, which are the minimum standards expected by the government for attainment and progress. The school has achieved the Activemark for high-quality physical education provision, the Eco-schools silver award and the Intermediate International Schools award. The school was Essex Sports School of the Year in 2011.

Since September 2010, the school has had a new headteacher, assistant headteacher and three teachers, including two newly qualified teachers.

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

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

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. It is not yet outstanding because pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching are not yet outstanding. The key to the school's good overall effectiveness is the headteacher's drive and determination which have raised teachers' and the governing body's aspirations and improved pupils' academic achievement while maintaining the school's excellent pastoral care.
- Achievement is good because all groups of pupils, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, make good progress from their starting points. Children in the Reception classes make good progress overall and outstanding progress in developing and using early literacy skills. Attainment is above average at the end of Year 2 and significantly above average at the end of Year 6.
- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding and their attendance is above average. Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning whether in lessons, sports activities or dance. Safeguarding systems meet government requirements and pupils feel safe. They know they are part of a caring community and are trusted within it.
- Teaching is good and there are examples of outstanding practice across the school. The most consistently outstanding practice is noted in Year 6 where pupils make rapid progress, especially in reading. Teachers' good planning ensures pupils practise literacy and numeracy skills in a range of subjects. The use of information and communication technology (ICT), although satisfactory, is underdeveloped and pupils make only satisfactory progress in developing ICT skills. Homework is set regularly but there is too much variation in the amount set for older pupils to prepare them well for the next stage of their education.
- Leadership and management are good and there is a strong capacity for further improvement. The management of teachers' performance is very effective and has been the catalyst for halting underachievement, promoting rapid improvement in pupils' progress and raising attainment.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By January 2013, improve the quality of teaching further so that more teaching is outstanding by:
 - sharing the outstanding practice that exists within the school especially with less-experienced colleagues
 - increasing teachers' expertise in making changes to their planned lessons in response to how quickly pupils make progress within the lesson
 - agreeing and implementing an appropriate amount of homework which helps pupils to make progress in their learning and prepares them for the next stage of their education.

- By April 2013, improve the development of pupils' ICT skills and their application of those skills in a range of contexts by:
 - developing teachers' proficiency in using ICT in a range of subjects
 - increasing the links between subjects to provide more opportunities for pupils to use their ICT skills, especially for research.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils' achievement is good and there are no significant differences in achievement between different groups of pupils whatever their ability or gender. These findings endorse the views of most parents and carers who consider their children are making good progress. Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics in Year 6 is significantly above average. For example, pupils in Year 6 are around a year ahead of pupils of the same age in writing and mathematics and, in reading, close to two terms ahead. The school identified that pupils in Years 5 and 6 were not reading as well as they should and put in place various successful strategies to tackle this. As a result, almost all pupils in Years 5 and 6 have made a year's progress or more in six months.

Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress. These pupils are known exceptionally well by staff and their peers. Teachers' planning provides appropriate tasks, includes recommendations from outside agencies and is frequently broken into very small steps. Pupils are exceptionally supportive of their friends who find learning or managing their own behaviour difficult; in many lessons, it was very apparent that they provided quiet encouragement for concentrating on tasks and persevering.

Achievement across Key Stage 1 is much improved this year. Attainment in the current Year 2 is broadly average in reading and mathematics and above average in

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writing which is the result of the school's recent successful focus on improving the teaching of phonics (the sounds which letters make). The lessons observed and the work in pupils' books indicate that good progress is the norm. Attention to detail noted in lessons in Years 1 and 2 ensures pupils develop and use correct letter formation in their handwriting. Recently introduced 'numeracy passports' ensure pupils know their targets for improvement and develop a secure understanding of basic concepts which they apply to problem solving.

Children's starting points on entry to the Reception classes are in line with those expected for their age. They make good progress as a result of good teaching and a curriculum which is well matched to their abilities and aptitudes. They make outstanding progress in learning and using their early literacy skills to begin reading and writing. Children are very confident in their attempts to write what they want to say using their understanding of phonics to help them. They are very positive about reading, enjoy sharing books and talking about their favourite characters.

Quality of teaching

The quality of the teaching is good; occasionally, it is outstanding. A key strength is the excellent relationships in classes which are used very effectively to manage pupils' behaviour and encourage a good rate of work. All teachers promote the school's agreed core values of 'love', 'integrity', 'resilience' and 'creativity'. For example, teachers encourage pupils to consider both sides of an argument and the 'right' thing to do.

As a result of the headteacher's introduction of an agreed set of 'non-negotiables' for the planning and delivery of lessons, all teachers' lesson plans include statements of what each group of pupils is expected to learn and clear guidance for the team of proficient teaching assistants. These features ensure pupils, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, have the right level of work and support to ensure at least good progress. Where pupils' progress is satisfactory rather than good is in ICT. Regular ICT lessons ensure that pupils learn the required skills. However, a few teachers lack confidence in their use of software programs and there are few planned opportunities for pupils to practise their skills in a range of subjects which limits their progress, particularly in research.

Where teaching is outstanding, teachers use questioning very effectively to check on pupils' understanding and quickly adjust their teaching to maximise or consolidate learning. For example, in a lesson in Year 6, the teacher noted that pupils needed extra explanation to help them clarify their strategies for checking their work calculating the radius, diameter and circumference of a circle. She quickly demonstrated step-by-step calculations to help pupils clarify their thinking. Where teachers stick rigidly to their lesson plan and do not make quick adjustments to their teaching, such as providing extra challenge for those who have finished their work quickly or further explanation for those who are struggling, pupils make satisfactory rather than good progress.

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Regular homework is set for practising reading, spellings and mathematical skills such as multiplication tables. The amount of homework set for older pupils is generally insufficient and, therefore, does not help them develop good study habits ready for the next stage of their education. Pupils' work in a range of subjects shows good progress and careful presentation. Teachers' marking helps pupils know how to improve. Discussions with pupils indicate that they are pleased with their progress, know how well they are doing and what they need to learn next. All parents, carers and pupils consider that teaching is a strength and inspectors endorse their views.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour around the school and in lessons is outstanding. The views of most pupils, parents and carers indicate that this impressive standard of behaviour is the norm. Pupils are very polite and friendly to those they know and respectful towards visitors. In lessons, pupils have very positive attitudes and take pride in working to the best of their capabilities. They work very well together and respect each other's views. Older pupils can discuss at a mature level the difficulties of following the school's core values of 'integrity' and 'love', for example, when giving an honest opinion that may hurt people's feelings. Older pupils understand that a few of their peers have difficulty managing their behaviour and explain that they 'make allowances' and 'try to help'.

Pupils know about different types of bullying, such as what is meant by cyber or racist bullying. They are confident that there is no such bullying in the school and know that should they have concerns, any member of staff will help them. Pupils like taking on responsibilities, such as being sports leaders or members of the school council. They have a good idea of how to keep themselves and others safe and are well aware of how to keep themselves safe when using the internet.

Children in the Reception classes make excellent progress in developing very positive attitudes to learning, respecting others and knowing that they must take responsibility for how they behave. This excellent development of their personal qualities prepares them very well for their futures. Forest School activities allow the children to try out adventurous activities that enable them to assess risks, such as how high they can climb and remain safe.

Attendance is above average. Pupils love coming to school and all that it provides, particularly mathematics, sports and dance club.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good. There is no complacency in this improving school. In the past two years, because of the headteacher's uncompromising drive to improve the quality of teaching and learning, the school has made good improvement in all areas of its work. Pupils' attainment in Year 6 has risen rapidly from broadly average to being around a year ahead of pupils in most schools nationally. Principled leadership, good management systems and high-quality

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teaching by the senior team are at the heart of the school's success. The school tackles discrimination robustly and equality of opportunity is promoted very effectively because the school knows exactly how well different groups of pupils are learning and can show that gaps in rates of progress are closing. Safeguarding systems follow recommended good practice and fully meet current government requirements.

The headteacher ensures that the subject knowledge and teaching expertise of the deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher and senior teachers are deployed very effectively to ensure a clear overview of the school's strengths and areas for improvement as well as to help staff improve and develop their practice. Less experienced colleagues have not yet had enough opportunities to improve their own practice by observing or working alongside teachers whose practice is judged outstanding. The school is very well placed to continue on its path of successful improvement.

The curriculum is good and provides good opportunities for pupils to practise and reinforce reading, writing and mathematical skills in subjects such as history and science. The headteacher introduced specialist teaching for physical education with the result that these teachers provide examples of outstanding practice and standards in physical education are high. Pupils take pride in their success. The curriculum also provides well for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In lessons, there is a strong focus on pupils working together; they check each other's work and learn to make helpful comments. Teachers encourage pupils to consider all aspects of a situation with such questions as, 'How would you feel?' and 'What would be the consequences of that action?'

Since the last inspection, the governing body has developed a detailed understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in the school and shares the headteacher's high aspirations for the school within its community.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

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

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

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

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

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

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

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



14 May 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Braintree, CM7 2NS

Thank you so much for welcoming us to your school. We were very impressed with your kindness and good manners. Like you, we think it is a very friendly place to be and you get on very well together. We would like to thank all those of you who shared your lunchtimes with us and to give our special thanks to the dance club for coming in early to school to show us your remarkable dance routines. We found the performances amazing and what you had to say very helpful. In return, I now want to share with you our findings.

Yours is a good school. You told us that you like school and we could see why, particularly when we saw the interesting lessons you have. You told us that the best things about your school are the teachers and your friends. We noted that teaching is good and occasionally outstanding and all the adults care about you a great deal and work hard on your behalf. Your attainment is above average and you make good progress because teachers and teaching assistants keep a close eye on how well you are getting on. Your headteacher and senior teachers provide good leadership and are working hard to make your school even better. We have asked them to do two things to make your school even better:

- to make sure that teachers share their expertise so that all your lessons are very good and that teachers set enough homework, especially for older pupils, so that you are well prepared for when you move to your next school
- to make sure you have more opportunities to use ICT in your work, especially for research.

Thank you again for your contributions to the inspection. You can all help your school improve further by doing your homework and continuing to work hard.

Yours sincerely

Cheryl Thompson
Lead inspector

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