

St. Michael's Church of England First School

Howling Lane, Alnwick, Northumberland, NE66 1DJ

Inspection dates 6–7 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils of all abilities achieve well whatever their starting points, because they are eager to learn, work hard and enjoy lessons because learning is fun.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding make better progress than formerly. This is because regular checks on their progress help teachers to provide highly effective support when pupils are at risk of falling behind.
- Teaching is good. Teachers and teaching assistants work in very good partnership to meet the needs of every pupil, especially in Key Stages 1 and 2.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. Pupils are friendly and support each other well in class and in the playground. They are well mannered and welcoming to visitors. Excellent pastoral care creates a warm, safe environment where pupils feel safe and their learning flourishes.
- Outstanding leadership by the headteacher has enabled the gaps in achievement between groups of pupils close rapidly this year as the result of improvements in the quality of teaching. Staff and governors are fully supportive of the headteacher's ambition for every child to achieve their best in a happy, secure school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- A small proportion of pupils do not have a strong knowledge of letters and the sounds (phonics) they make. This hampers both their ability to read fluently and with good understanding, and it slows the pace at which they write.
- Improvement is needed to provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage so that a higher proportion reach the level expected for their age in phonics; the social skills and independence of boys in the nursery are under-developed; and the considerable skills of teaching assistants are not shared effectively for the benefit of all children.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 20 lessons or parts of lessons, two of which were shared observations with the headteacher.
- Discussions were held with senior leaders, staff, governors, pupils and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors looked at a range of evidence including: the school's self-evaluation of its own work, the school's information about pupils' progress and documentation relating to teachers' performance and safeguarding procedures.
- Inspectors took account of 25 responses from parents to the online questionnaire (Parent View) as well as 21 responses from staff.

Inspection team

Moira Fitzpatrick, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Philip Scott

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in the care of the local authority, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, and pupils whose parents are serving in the armed forces, is above average.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage, and a tiny proportion speaks English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action is above average, so too is the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' reading and writing skills even further by:
 - improving pupils' knowledge of letters and the sounds they make so that they can apply this to building words and accelerate their reading skills
 - encouraging pupils to use their knowledge of letters and sounds to aid their spelling, thereby accelerating the rate at which they can write.
- Improve provision in the Nursery and Reception classes by:
 - ensuring that all children have at least one session each day when they learn about letters and sounds, and by increasing the number of sessions for those children who are learning at a slower rate than the majority
 - developing strategies to improve the social skills and independence of all boys, so that they become confident successful learners
 - ensuring that the Early Years Foundation Stage leader has designated time to check the work of the unit, in order to recognise the skills and expertise of key workers and teaching assistants, and to share their best practices for the benefit of all children.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children join the Early Years Foundation Stage with attainment that varies widely from above to below the level typically expected for their age, and is overall below what is expected. A large proportion, especially some boys, get off to a slow start because their social skills and independence are not effectively developed. During the Reception Year, children's progress accelerates as provision improves and more children reach the expected level for their age. Nevertheless, fewer children than usual reach the expected level for their age by the end of the Reception Year in early reading skills, because provision for this is not given a high enough priority in the Nursery class.
- Progress in Years 1 and 2 is good. The majority of pupils make good gains in reading, writing and mathematics, because teaching is consistently good and often outstanding. By the end of Year 2, the majority of pupils reach standards of attainment in line with the national average. However, the statutory phonics check at the end of Year 1 is still well below the national average. This weakness is reflected in the reading skills of a small proportion of pupils who are not able to read fluently or with good understanding by the end of Year 2.
- Pupils continue to make good progress to the end of Year 4. By the time they leave, the majority reach the expected level for their age. Each year a good proportion of pupils exceed this level. Work in pupils' books shows that the quality of their writing is sometimes reduced by weaknesses in spelling, although handwriting shows a strong improvement in response to more rigorous approaches introduced in the last year by the headteacher.
- Recent developments, to regularly identify pupils who need extra support, are having a positive impact on the learning of pupils with special educational needs. A wide range of interventions have been introduced to meet the individual needs of these pupils so that they are able to catch up and achieve as well as their peers. School data and inspection evidence indicate that the gap between the attainment of these pupils and others is closing rapidly, as is the gap between boys' and girls' performance and between pupils in receipt of the pupil premium and others.
- Pupil premium funding is well used to ensure that pupils who are eligible for free school meals and those with parents in the armed forces, achieve as well as other pupils. Funds are used to give access to extra-curricular activities and to provide additional resources to ensure these pupils have equal access to all the school has to offer.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good overall. School data on pupils' progress and work in pupils' books confirm that this is the case over time.
- Teachers' planning is now based on more accurate knowledge of pupils' needs because of the rigorous tracking systems introduced by the headteacher in the last year. These, and regular progress meetings where pupils' needs are discussed and additional support is planned are accelerating pupils' progress.
- Information about boys' learning is not used rigorously enough to develop their confidence and independence, consequently, too many boys are not yet settling to tasks for any length of time in the nursery, so their learning is hampered.
- Good progress begins with teachers' high, but realistic expectations of what pupils can do. Their detailed knowledge of pupils' learning allows them to provide tasks which match the different abilities and needs in the class so that all pupils are able to begin work independently and find success for themselves. A good example was seen in a Year 3 and 4 mathematics lesson, where one group of pupils began their tasks early with the teaching assistant, while the teacher continued to explain methods for finding fractions to the rest of the class.
- Teachers' management of behaviour is good, especially that of some boys who find extended concentration difficult. The success of this and of closer checks made on pupils' learning is seen

in the improved performance of boys this year, which is now similar to that of girls.

- Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and give good tips for improvement. Marking in English and topic books is more effective than in mathematics books. A review of this is planned for the coming year to improve feedback to pupils on their work in mathematics.
- Teaching assistants are well trained and prepared to support pupils, because they work closely with teachers on planning learning activities. They are skilled at assessing pupils' progress and make a very good contribution to closing the gaps in pupils' learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils behave well. They show care and concern for others and follow the rules well, both in and out of the classroom. Their good behaviour creates a calm atmosphere around the school and makes a good contribution to their learning. School records show that good behaviour is the norm.
- Pupils have good attitudes to learning and are keen to work hard to please their teachers. They say they feel safe in school and know how to keep themselves safe, because they have been taught the risks connected with the internet and cyber bullying. Parents are unanimous that their children are safe in school.
- Pupils say that bullying is rare, though they explain that there is sometimes name calling in the playground. They have full confidence in teachers to sort out any problems that arise. Some pupils felt that more playground equipment would be useful in keeping them occupied at playtimes. Inspectors agree that there is less opportunity to be involved in purposeful play than is usually seen.
- Pupils are well involved in helping to improve the school through the school council. They are keen fund raisers and are constantly suggesting and organising ways of helping those in need of support. The school's Christian ethos gives them a good understanding of the needs of others in this country, and across the world.
- Attendance has improved this year, as a result of the headteacher's determined drive to reduce the amount of holidays taken in term time and convince parents of the need for regular attendance. She has successfully won the support of parents for this initiative so that attendance is now average.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has shown outstanding drive to bring about improvements to pupils' achievement and attendance since she joined the school. Much has been achieved through her astute and accurate evaluation of the school's performance. Her delegation of responsibilities across the staff has given a real impetus to school improvement. Staff are delighted to have a role in the school's improvement and morale is very high.
- Highly effective tracking systems have been introduced to keep a close check on pupils' progress, and these have been very well implemented in Key Stages 1 and 2. Staff fully support these and the pupil progress meetings where they are helped to ensure that all pupils succeed through the right intervention or challenge. The effectiveness of these new systems is seen in the consistency of progress for pupils from different groups, and in closing the gaps in performance between them.
- The considerable skills and expertise of key workers and teaching assistants in the Early Years Foundation Stage are not being fully used to enhance provision for all children. Consequently, there are inconsistencies in the quality of work because the best practice is not being captured regularly by the Early Years Foundation Stage leader to accelerate children's learning.
- Teachers' performance is well organised through straightforward, measurable targets linked to the pupils' progress and other school priorities. Staff are aware of their accountability for pupils' progress and welcome the new systems which help them achieve their targets.

- The well-planned curriculum gives pupils many opportunities to make links between different subjects which consolidate their basic skills well. There are frequent visits to extend pupils' horizons, for example, Years 2 and 3 pupils had a thrilling time at the local Children's Countryside Day and they tackled follow up work next day with zeal!
- Safeguarding meets requirements. Record keeping is thorough and up to date.
- The local authority provides light touch support for the school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors provide good support and challenge for the development of the school. They are aware of how well the school performs and know from new tracking systems that there has been good improvement in the achievement of pupils with special educational needs in the current year. They have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and have plans to link this to pupils' progress and salary progression from the start of the next school year. The governing body is aware of how the pupil premium funding is spent and the impact this is having on the achievement of those pupils who receive support through this funding.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	122280
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	412436

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	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	185
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Veda Robinson
Headteacher	Debbie Boughen
Date of previous school inspection	2 March 2010
Telephone number	01665 602850
Fax number	01665 606991
Email address	stmichaelsalnwick@northumberland.sch.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2013

