

St Michael's Catholic School

Daws Hill Lane, High Wycombe, HP11 1PW

Inspection dates 24–25 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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.

- Students make good progress in the primary and secondary phases. Standards at the end of Key Stages 2 and 4 are broadly average.
- Teaching is usually good and some is outstanding. Teachers have good subject knowledge, present introductions clearly to classes and support students well with their learning. Teachers check on learning regularly in lessons and adapt activities where necessary so progress remains good.
- Teaching assistants are particularly effective throughout the school and ensure that disabled students and those with special educational needs make good progress.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is particularly strong and the wide range of interesting activities on offer supports children's development well in all areas of learning.
- Students have positive attitudes to learning and behave well around the school. They say they feel safe in the school and they have a good awareness of how to keep themselves safe in different situations.
- Leaders, managers and governors have overseen the growth of the school from a small secondary school to an all-through school very effectively. They have ensured that good standards of teaching and achievement have been maintained in the secondary phase and that these have improved in the primary phase.
- Governors hold senior leaders to account effectively and have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- There is not enough outstanding teaching. Work does not always help the most-able make the fastest progress and marking does not give students clear steps to improve.
- Standards of presentation and handwriting in the primary phase are not high enough and there are not enough opportunities for pupils to write at length.
- The sixth form requires improvement as some students do not do well on some courses and students' progress is not monitored closely enough.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 39 lessons or part-lessons. Some of these observations were carried out with members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors held meetings with several groups of students across the primary and secondary phases. They also met with senior staff, subject leaders, four governors and a representative from the local authority learning trust.
- Inspectors looked at a range of students' work in lessons and some in more detail with one of the school's senior leaders.
- The inspection team took into account the responses of 47 parents and carers to the online questionnaire Parent View, written correspondence from parents and carers and questionnaires completed by 59 staff.
- Inspectors reviewed records of students' recent attainment and progress, the school's evaluation of its own work and plans for the future, minutes of meetings of the governing body, and safeguarding, behaviour and attendance records.

Inspection team

Susan Williams, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Kevin Morris	Additional Inspector
Caroline Pardy	Additional Inspector
Lynne Thorogood	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is an all-through school. The primary phase is larger than the average-sized primary school and the secondary phase is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The majority of students are White British with others from a range of backgrounds including other White, Caribbean and African. The proportion of students whose first language is not English is double the national average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also below average.
- The proportion of students for whom the school receives the pupil premium funding (additional funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, children who are looked after by the local authority and those from service families) is below average. There is one student from a service family in the school.
- The school does not receive any Year 7 catch-up funding. This is additional government funding for students who did not achieve the expected Level 4 at the end of Key Stage 2.
- A small number of secondary students attend part of their education off site at the local authority pupil referral unit.
- The school works closely with other secondary schools in a local sixth form consortium.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards at the end of both Key Stages 2 and 4. These set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The school expanded from a secondary school to include a primary phase starting with reception children from September 2011. A new nursery opened in September 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that more is outstanding by:
 - precisely planning work that helps all learners, particularly the more-able, to make faster progress
 - ensuring all learners have clear next steps in marking and feedback to help them in their learning and give them opportunities to reflect on these and to respond to teachers' comments
 - improving the quality of presentation and handwriting in the primary phase and giving pupils more opportunities for extended writing across different subjects.
- Improve the effectiveness of the sixth form by ensuring students choose more appropriate courses based on their prior attainment and assess them regularly to ensure their good achievement in all areas.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and knowledge below the levels expected for their age, with particular weaknesses in their communication and language development. A wide range of activities and a good balance of child-initiated and adult-led activities enables children to learn skills quickly and make good progress. At the end of Reception in 2012 standards were broadly average, and in 2013 the majority of children reached a good level of development before moving into Key Stage 1.
- In the first year of the primary phase the proportion of pupils reaching the required standard in the phonics (letters and their sounds) check was below national levels. A new reading and writing scheme has been introduced, with comprehensive staff training and pupils taught in small groups. The impact of this has been significant, with most pupils reaching the required standard in the check in 2013 and a similarly high proportion in Year 2 having caught up.
- Key Stage 1 pupils say they enjoy reading and read a variety of books including fiction, non-fiction and poetry. They say they read regularly at school and at home. They use the strategies they have learnt to help them read difficult words automatically without any prompting or extra help. The school promotes the development of literacy and reading well at all key stages.
- When Year 2 pupils entered the school in 2011 they were behind the expectations for their age. By the end of the year they had caught up in reading and mathematics, reaching average standards and had made good progress in writing, although this remained below average. Standards improved in 2013 in reading, writing and mathematics with pupils making good progress from their starting points, although the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels is lower than usually seen nationally.
- Standards at Key Stage 2 were broadly average in 2012 and, as in Key Stage 1, progress was strong, helping pupils to make up ground during the year. There were improvements in 2013 although performance at the highest levels was less strong.
- Students make good progress across a range of subjects, including English and mathematics, in the secondary phase. The proportion of students gaining five good GCSEs, including English and mathematics, was broadly average in 2012 and similar standards were maintained in 2013. The proportion of students who achieved five A* to G grades at GCSE has been above the national average for the last three years, with all students achieving at least five qualifications in 2013. Although there was some slight variation between subjects in the past, students make at least good progress across the school and the gaps between subjects reduced further in 2013. There were also increased proportions of A* and A grades in most subjects.
- Early entry for GCSE is only used in mathematics for the highest set in Year 10 and in the first examination session in Year 11 for other students. Students are not disadvantaged because the school ensures that they have the opportunity to resit the examination if they do not reach their target grades.
- Students known to be eligible for pupil premium funding had previously not made as rapid progress as others. These pupils were just over two years behind other pupils in the Year 6 national tests in English and mathematics in 2012 and students at Key Stage 4 were just under a grade behind in English and a grade-and-a-third in mathematics. The school tracked the impact of different types of support in 2012 and adjusted how it used this funding the following year. In 2013 the gap narrowed at both key stages and the school now tracks the progress of these students very carefully, and makes sure extra help accelerates progress. School data show that those students currently in the school who are eligible for additional funding are making good progress and gaps are narrowing. Students receive individual and small-group support and the school has used the funding to provide targeted support for emotional development and mentors, which has supported students' improved progress.
- All groups of students, including White British, any other White, Black Caribbean, Black African and those whose first language is not English, make good progress across the school.
- Support in lessons for disabled students and those who have special educational needs is

particularly strong, with highly skilled teaching assistants working across both primary and secondary phases ensuring these learners make good progress. In the sixth form, disabled students and those with special educational needs are given excellent support and they make rapid progress in their courses. This demonstrates the school's success in promoting equality of opportunity in students' learning.

- The small number of students who have part of their studies elsewhere make good progress in their learning and the school monitors their progress carefully.
- Achievement in the sixth form is not overall as strong as in the rest of the school. Although attainment at the end of Year 11 is broadly average, students' starting points on entry to the sixth form are below average for this stage. Achievement has fluctuated over the last three years and is less strong in A-level and AS-level qualifications than in vocational subjects. Sometimes students start courses with low grades, which means they struggle to tackle the demands of some courses. The development of vocational subjects has been very successful and has supported disabled students and those with special educational needs to achieve well. All students are successfully supported to take up apprenticeships or go on to higher education and all Level 3 BTEC students gained places at university last year.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching is usually good and there is some that is outstanding in both the primary and secondary phases, leading to students' good achievement.
- Particular strengths of teaching across the school are the respectful relationships between staff and students and the way staff and students respect the contributions of others in lessons. Teachers have good subject knowledge and presentations to classes are clear. Teachers check on learning in lessons, give individual support where necessary and adapt activities to ensure students make good progress in their learning.
- Support for disabled students and those who have special educational needs is particularly strong across the school. Teachers adapt activities skilfully to help these students access them and teaching assistants are able to engage students in their work, help them to work out answers and use questioning skilfully to guide learning. This helps these students to make good and in some cases better progress.
- In the primary phase the teaching of early reading is now very effective. A comprehensive training programme has ensured all staff deliver an early reading scheme to a high standard to small groups in Year 1. The sessions contain a range of activities linking reading with writing and ensure that pupils enjoy the learning and make consistently good progress. However, teachers do not always ensure pupils' handwriting and presentation are of a high standard or that there are enough opportunities for pupils to write at length across different subjects.
- Although teachers adapt activities well for less-able students, tasks which enable more-able students to make rapid progress in their learning are not routinely used across the school. Although these students make good progress, this limits them making rapid progress and more students achieving the highest grades. Teachers regularly mark books but they do not routinely give students clear next steps in marking and feedback to help them in their learning or give them opportunities to reflect on and respond to their comments.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is particularly strong. The staff have worked as a team to build on the success of the reception area, providing the new nursery with a wide range of equipment, including a superb outdoor play area set up with a variety of experiences for children to explore. Children learned particularly well, for example, in an outstanding session in the nursery. They enjoyed making woven 'Elma the elephant' pictures linked to the theme of the rainbow, as the teacher modelled the process expertly and children succeeded in creating their own pictures. Children made shakers which they used to record music and some explored the light from different coloured torches in a tent. They thoroughly enjoyed their learning and made excellent progress.
- Although teaching in the sixth form is often good, over time it has not resulted in good

achievement, particularly in academic subjects. Students taking these courses are not always assessed regularly and given extra help if they start to fall behind and they do not do as well on these courses as students who study vocational options.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students across all key stages have positive attitudes to school and to their learning which results in effective engagement in lessons and good progress in most of the school. Behaviour in lessons is consistently good, and students listen to instructions and are respectful of staff and each other. Outside and in dining rooms students respond politely to adults and behave well.
- Staff and parents and carers agree that behaviour is good. Students also said that they thought behaviour was good and staff deal very well with any instances of misbehaviour. They understand the importance of rules and that the community is happier and safer if everyone keeps them. Behaviour logs show improvement over the last three years and short-term exclusions have reduced. The school is effective in promoting positive relationships and ensuring there is no discrimination.
- Behaviour is not outstanding as students do not display a thirst for knowledge and take enough responsibility for their own learning. Students of all ages have a good awareness of different forms of bullying, including cyber bullying. All those spoken to said they felt safe in school and show high levels of awareness of how to keep themselves safe, including out of school on roads and in social contexts. There have been no racist incidents and no bullying recorded over the last year.
- The school ensures students who attend part of their courses elsewhere are safe and well looked after.
- Overall attendance in both the primary and secondary phases is above average and improving. Students are routinely punctual to school and to their lessons.

The leadership and management are good

- Leaders, managers and governors have managed the transition from a secondary school to an all-through school very well. A new leadership structure is in place across the school and the vast majority of staff are positive about the leadership of the school.
- The school's own evaluation of its work is accurate and there are well-focused improvement plans with clear steps and monitoring which have led to improvements, particularly in the primary phase, to teaching and pupils' achievement. Good standards of achievement and teaching have been maintained in the secondary phase over time.
- There is a clear structure for performance management which is linked to the national standards for teachers. Teaching is monitored regularly and leaders' judgements are accurate. Targets are linked to students' progress and have a whole-school focus, and staff each have an individual target to help them improve their teaching.
- Subject leaders in the primary and secondary phases are taking increased responsibility for leading improvements in their areas. Professional development for staff is strong and new leaders are being developed in their roles and supported to become the senior leaders of the future. Areas for development are identified and used to plan specific training for staff.
- The curriculum has been developed in the primary phase to support pupils' development of reading. However, although writing has improved, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to write at length. Good use is made of secondary specialist staff, for example in science and physical education, to support pupils' learning in these areas.
- The school has an effective plan for use of the new sports funding, including the use of specialist staff to develop primary teachers' expertise, and to increase the opportunities for extra-curricular provision, for example with tag rugby, cross-country running and multi-skills activities.
- The secondary curriculum has been developed with the introduction of AS-level critical thinking

in Year 9 and a wider range of vocational qualifications which have been extremely successful, with high pass rates in 2013.

- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well with good opportunities for prayer and reflection. There is a strong moral code in the school with a sense of what is right and wrong. Students have the opportunity to discuss topical issues in lessons such as the one child policy in China. There is a wide range of trips, clubs and societies which support students' cultural development including theatre trips and visits to museums.
- The leadership and management of the sixth form require improvement. The sixth form curriculum is developing and use is made of the sixth form consortium to provide a wide range of choice for students. Students also have the opportunity for retakes at GCSE in English and mathematics. However, leaders have not ensured that students are successful on all their courses, particularly students taking A-level qualifications. Students receive strong guidance in writing personal statements to support their applications for university or work-based employment and all students continue with apprenticeships or higher education.
- The local authority learning trust has provided effective support for the school in helping it to develop an accurate view of its own performance and in improving teaching.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have a thorough understanding of the school. They provide challenge for senior leaders and hold them to account for bringing about improvement, questioning them in meetings and visiting the school to see for themselves what is happening. They have a good understanding of the school's performance compared with that of other schools and receive regular updates on students' progress which they discuss in detail. They know how pupil premium funding is being spent and what changes have been made to make sure progress for these pupils has improved. Governors receive updates on performance management, including targets for all staff, so they know that this has been carried out thoroughly. They know about the quality of teaching in the school and ensure pay awards are linked to strong performance and meeting targets. They know where underperformance has been challenged in the past and the difference it has made. They ensure statutory requirements are met, including for safeguarding.

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	110516
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	400235

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

Type of school	All-through
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,062
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	72
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Maggi Bull
Headteacher	Robert Simpson
Date of previous school inspection	29–30 September 2010
Telephone number	01494 535196
Fax number	01494 446523
Email address	rsimpson@bucksgfl.org.uk

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