

# St Michael's Church of England Infant School

Douglas Road, Maidstone, Kent, ME16 8ER

**Inspection dates** 28–29 January 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>1</b>
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an outstanding school.

- St Michael's is a happy school where pupils make excellent progress, love learning and care for each other. As one pupil said, 'If I could change one thing about the school, it would be that I could live here.'
- Colourful displays are everywhere around the school, celebrating pupils' work and encouraging pupils to do their best.
- Achievement is outstanding because, from starting points that are often below or well below those typical for their age, pupils reach well above average attainment by the end of Year 2 in reading and mathematics and above average attainment in writing.
- Hard-working teachers make sure that all lessons are lively and fun so that pupils want to learn. Teaching is typically outstanding because teachers plan carefully to help every pupil succeed.
- Pupils behave extremely well in lessons and around the school. They are friendly, have excellent manners and are polite and respectful to adults and each other.
- Safety is a high priority at the school and, as a result, pupils feel very safe. Their parents and carers agree that their children are looked after exceptionally well.
- The inspirational executive headteacher has been the driving force behind maintaining the very high expectations that the school has for all pupils. She is very well supported by the excellent leadership of the head of school.
- Together with strong subject leaders, other managers and governors, they have made sure that the school has continued to improve since the previous inspection whilst maintaining outstanding teaching and achievement.
- Governors provide excellent support and challenge to the school. They make frequent visits to check how well the school is doing.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed 10 lessons and saw all of the teachers in a range of subjects and year groups, including the Early Years Foundation Stage. She also watched an assembly and saw the breakfast club.
- All of the lessons were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- The inspector took account of the 14 responses to the online parents' and carers' survey, Parent View, and of the 87 responses to the school's own recent parents' and carers' survey. She also took account of two letters received from parents, looked at the questionnaire responses from staff and spoke to parents and carers at the beginning of the school day.
- Meetings were held with various members of staff and representatives from the governing body and the local authority. The inspector spoke to pupils and looked at behaviour in lessons and around the school.
- The inspector also looked at documentation about pupils' progress, teaching and planning. The school's safeguarding policies, procedures and practice were scrutinised, together with records of attendance and pupils' behaviour.
- She listened to pupils reading and looked at samples of their work.

## Inspection team

Helen Howard, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- St Michael's is a small infant school with more boys than girls. There are four classes, some of which are taught in mixed age groups.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding (additional government funding for pupils who are eligible for free school meals, pupils from service families and those in care) is lower than the national average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs who are supported by school action is slightly higher than seen nationally. The proportion who have a statement of special education needs is lower than average.
- Most pupils are White British. Approximately one fifth of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, predominantly mixed heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is just above the national average.
- The school is federated with St Michael's Church of England Junior School and the Executive Headteacher leads both schools. She is also Executive Headteacher of The Archbishop Courtney Primary School, Maidstone. She is a National Leader of Education.
- The school runs a daily breakfast club and after-school clubs, run by an external provider. The school has a number of awards including Artsmark Gold.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Embed the recent changes made by the school so that when teachers give comments about how to improve work they check that pupils make the improvements.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Leaders and managers have a relentless focus on improving teaching. As a result, pupils achieve exceptionally well because teaching is outstanding. Pupils are very well prepared for their next stage of education.
- The majority of children start school in Reception with skills and abilities that are below, and often well below, those expected for their age, especially in reading, writing and numeracy. They have a great start to their education because learning is fun as a result of expert teaching for this age group. By the start of Year 1, the majority of children have already caught up and reached the expected level of development.
- This rapid rate of progress continues throughout Key Stage 1 so that, by the end of Year 2, pupils' attainment in reading and mathematics is significantly higher than seen nationally in reading and mathematics and above average in writing. This high standard of attainment has been maintained successfully for the last three years.
- The school ensures equality of opportunity and checks that there is no discrimination. As a result, all groups of pupils including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make the same rapid progress as other pupils. The challenge that teachers give to more able pupils means that they are reaching the highest levels of attainment.
- The pupil premium funding is used well to ensure that pupils catch up quickly, including providing individual programmes of support in numeracy and in phonics (the sounds that letters make). These skills are taught exceptionally well by teaching assistants and, consequently, this group of pupils makes fast progress.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language make outstanding progress because they and their parents are well supported when they join the school. For example, parents are offered English language classes and are encouraged to read with their children so that both they and their children benefit from the regular practice.
- Pupils love reading. When the inspector was listening to pupils read, one pupil excitedly reported that he had 'learned a new sound that had three letters'. Another told of her 'most favourite book in the whole universe'. From Reception onwards, the school's expectation that all pupils read on a daily basis and the strong links between reading exciting books and writing are having a huge impact on pupils' confidence, enjoyment and achievement.
- Pupils are encouraged to write at every opportunity. In a Reception lesson, children were writing lists. They were so engrossed that, when they were offered play time, almost all chose to carry on writing. This shows how much they enjoy their learning and want to do well. As a result, they make very rapid progress in forming letters and words, with more able children beginning to write in sentences. Older pupils write at length with increasing confidence and skill.
- Pupils make excellent progress in mathematics because the quality of teaching is consistently high. Teachers make sure that pupils learn at a pace that is right for them and that matches their ability and so they are able to quickly move on.

### The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Pupils make fast progress in English and mathematics because teachers have such high expectations and ensure that everyone maximises their achievement. Pupils rise to the challenge and their excellent attitudes to learning mean that no time is wasted in lessons. Teachers are very skilled in adapting lessons so that slower learners get extra help to catch up and more able pupils can move on quickly.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is excellent. Teachers capture children's interest and imagination as soon as they come into the classroom with interesting resources and lively stories, and this helps them make even faster progress. For example, having read the story *Biscuit Bear*, children were encouraged to write a list of ingredients to make some biscuits the

following day.

- Almost all of the teaching observed during the inspection was outstanding and none was less than good. Leaders' and managers' observations show that teaching is typically outstanding over time.
- Pupils say that lessons are fun and parents and carers who responded to Parent View or the school's survey agree that their child is taught very well. Teachers start lessons very promptly and quickly arouse the interest of pupils. For example, Year 1 pupils were reading *The Gruffalo*. The class returned from break to find giant footsteps and evidence of a 'monster's visit' to the room. This captured their imagination right from the start and supported their reading and writing skills extremely well throughout the day.
- Teachers know the pupils very well, assess their progress regularly and plan work that gives the right amount of difficulty. For example, in a Year 1 mathematics lesson on addition and subtraction, more able pupils had tablet computers during an activity so they could work out ten more than or less than a number and look for patterns. Other pupils used practical equipment to add and subtract in tens or units and a few had a game of 'one in the bed', using miniature bears to add on in units. This meant that all pupils made fast progress and were able to firm up their knowledge and deepen their understanding of number rules.
- The very good progress that pupils make in literacy and numeracy is the result of excellent leadership of teaching, the strong team work and sharing of best practice. Teaching throughout the school links reading closely to pupils' writing, and the regular daily practice means that pupils write increasingly longer pieces of work to a very high standard. All teachers are positive role models and expect the highest standard in handwriting. As a result, pupils' work is beautifully presented.
- High quality resources, both indoors and out, encourage and interest pupils. The 'story towers', wooden two-tier constructions, inspire pupils to read and dress up in their favourite characters' costumes. The outdoor 'cottage' and play house invite pupils to use their imagination. Every part of the limited available outdoor space is used creatively to support learning through play.
- Teachers have worked hard to improve their teaching of mathematics. They focus strongly on using correct technical language so that pupils learn to use it too. They give pupils practical equipment and this is helping them to understand about numbers and make calculations. Some pupils benefit from well taught programmes of individual and small group support. As a result, progress in mathematics is excellent.
- Teachers give pupils information about how to improve when they mark work and when they talk to individual pupils in lessons. Recently, some teachers have started giving specific time for pupils to practise these areas for improvement and their assessments show that pupils are making even faster progress. This is not yet happening in all classes.

## **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are outstanding

- From Reception onwards the behaviour of pupils is outstanding. They behave consistently well in lessons and around the school with all adults. They love coming to school and thoroughly enjoy learning. Their ability to concentrate on work helps them to make fast progress.
- Staff have the same high standards of pupils' behaviour that they have for achievement. This starts in Reception, where children learn to sit quietly, listen to each other and play well together. As one child said, 'We all love each other here.'
- Older pupils enjoy extra responsibilities, for example as playground 'buddies', trained to support other pupils who are having problems or who need someone to play with. A school council is represented by pupils from all year groups and they say that the school responds well to any ideas they have. The school is extremely tidy and a 'green team' of pupils helps to make sure that it stays like that by picking up any litter.
- Pupils learn how to manage their own behaviour and increasingly understand the impact that their behaviour can have on others. Across the school, pupils and staff show great levels of care for each other.

- Pupils understand what bullying is and say that it does not happen. They say that they have someone to go to if they have a problem, either a buddy or a teacher, and they are confident that they will get help. There have been no exclusions in recent years and very few incidents of poor behaviour over time. Those that are recorded are for very minor incidents. During the inspection, there was no disruption in lessons because pupils were so interested in what they were learning and so keen to do well.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Pupils are carefully supervised and are taught how to keep themselves safe, including when they use computers. Parents agree that this aspect of school life is very positive.
- Attendance, which was an area for improvement in the previous inspection, has improved considerably and is now average. This is because there is a strong focus by leaders and managers on tackling poor attendance and rewarding those who attend regularly. Staff model good attendance and encourage pupils because they too get their own certificates in assemblies.

### **The leadership and management are outstanding**

- The inspirational executive headteacher leads by example. Her very high expectations mean that the school continues to improve. She is supported well by the head of school's excellent leadership and by strong governors, subject leaders and other managers. Together, they have created a happy, purposeful and caring school where pupils thrive.
- Since the previous inspection, pupils' achievement has continued to rise, attendance has improved and engagement with parents and carers has increased. This demonstrates clearly the school's strong capacity for further improvement.
- Leaders and managers regularly check the impact of actions they have taken to make improvements and maintain high standards. They often observe teaching, look at pupils' work and talk to pupils to see how well they are doing. They arrange support and development for teachers based on what they find out and from managing teachers' performance. Their targets for further improvement are based on this detailed and accurate self-evaluation. Staff respond well to leaders' approaches and, consequently, the high quality of teaching is maintained.
- Parents and carers who expressed a view are very happy with school and feel the school is well led and managed. As one wrote, her son's teacher had given him 'a fantastic foundation to have a very positive start in junior school'. Leaders and managers often meet parents and carers in the mornings and at the end of the day and this helps to form good relationships and involve parents in supporting their child.
- Leaders and managers make sure that the curriculum provides excellent additional trips and visits and opportunities that develop pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural awareness. Pupils regularly reflect on their own and others' faiths, beliefs and values in lessons, assemblies, church visits, with visiting speakers and on trips. The school has strong links with a children's home in Grenada, and pupils regularly raise money for charities so that they can learn to think about others who may be less fortunate than themselves.
- The new primary sports funding has enabled the school to purchase specialist expertise across the three schools led by the executive headteacher. This is providing a wider range of sports for pupils, including in the holidays. It also enables talented pupils to be encouraged to join a local sports academy. Staff are benefiting from expertise in planning and teaching physical education lessons and activities. Pupils' increasing participation in the activities is laying the foundations for the pupils to lead a healthy lifestyle.
- The school has formed powerful collaborations with other local schools. As a training school, it frequently supports the professional development of other teachers, leading to improved outcomes for pupils across the authority.
- The local authority provides light touch support by monitoring the progress that pupils make and by offering a range of professional development for teachers and governors.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors have continued to provide a good balance of support and challenge to leaders and

managers and they are instrumental in guiding the school forward. As the governing body of two federated schools, governors have a wide range of experience, expertise and skills and they use these very effectively when they visit the school and check on how well it is doing. They are able to question and interpret the data, so they have excellent knowledge about pupils' performance, including about groups of pupils. They know how the pupil premium funding is spent, together with the impact it has on progress. They regularly watch lessons to check for themselves the quality of teaching. They are fully involved in making sure that the outcomes of teachers' performance management are closely related to pay. They keep up to date with current developments by attending regular training at school and in the local authority. They ensure that safeguarding arrangements meet all requirements.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	118626
<b>Local authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	441043

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

<b>Type of school</b>	Infant
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary controlled
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–7
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	120
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Jeanette Ardley
<b>Headteacher</b>	Lorna Priddle
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	9–10 June 2011
<b>Telephone number</b>	01622 751398
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