

St Michael's Catholic Primary School

St Michael's Road, Widnes, Cheshire, WA8 8TD

Inspection dates 25–26 November 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Early years provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Achievement is good. When children enter the school, the majority have skills and abilities that are below those typical for their age but they make good progress throughout school due to the good quality of teaching that they receive.
- The early years is led and managed very well. The provision in the Reception class ensures that children make good progress when they first start at school.
- Pupils' overall attainment increased at the end of Year 6 in 2014 and was broadly average. This picture of improving standards in 2014 was seen in nearly all year groups where pupils made accelerated progress during the year.
- Disadvantaged children and those with special educational needs all make good progress during their time at school.
- The leadership of the headteacher and other leaders is good. They have an accurate view of how well the school is doing and what it needs to do to improve further.
- Governors are very well informed about the school's performance and provide excellent support and challenge to leaders. They have contributed well with other leaders and managers to recent improvements in the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement, especially in Key Stage 1.
- The curriculum is interesting and varied and is enhanced by an exciting range of visits and visitors.
- Pupils take part in a range of sporting activities and the school has been successful in ensuring a large proportion of pupils benefit from extra-curricular opportunities.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. Children are polite, courteous and demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. The school's work in keeping children safe is outstanding. Pupils' attendance is above average. The school's strategies to reduce absence have been very effective.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The quality of teaching does not yet result in outstanding achievement for all pupils. Sometimes work is not hard enough to fully challenge the most able pupils.
- Pupils do not have enough opportunities to practise and develop their skills, particularly in writing, in other subjects.
- Effective marking and feedback is not evident in all classes.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed lessons or part lessons across the school.
- Meetings were held with school leaders and with five governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. The lead inspector also had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors met two groups of pupils and also spoke informally with other pupils in lessons and during breaks and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors looked at the work pupils were doing in lessons and recorded in their books over time. They listened to pupils read and talked with them about their enjoyment of reading.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school and examined a number of documents concerning pupils' current achievement and progress, development plans and information about teachers' performance. They also looked at records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding arrangements. Minutes of governing body meetings were also scrutinised.
- Inspectors took account of 51 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and to a recent parent questionnaire carried out by school. They also considered 18 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Mark Williams, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Clare Daniel

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St. Michael's Catholic Primary School is an average-sized primary school.
- The current headteacher was appointed just over a year ago and there have been other changes in staff since the previous inspection.
- The large majority of pupils are White British. The proportion of children from minority ethnic groups or who speak English as an additional language is very small.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils, those supported by the pupil premium, is above average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The early years comprises of two Reception classes. The school also offers part-time pre-school provision for three- and four-year-old children funded by the local authority. These children are integrated into the Reception classes.
- The school has recently been awarded the Quality Mark for physical education.
- The school has a breakfast and after-school club.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve pupils' achievement in order to ensure that a greater proportion of pupils, especially the most able, make more than expected progress by:
 - ensuring that there is enough challenge for pupils in all lessons
 - building on the effective practice that already exists in school to ensure that feedback given to pupils in lessons and through marking helps them to improve their work, and that pupils consistently respond to the guidance provided.
- Further improve standards, especially in writing, by ensuring there are sufficient opportunities for pupils to practise and apply their skills in different areas of the curriculum.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher provides strong leadership and has been successful in improving pupils' progress throughout the school in the last academic year. He is supported well by a highly effective and ambitious governing body and other leaders in school. Their strong leadership has tackled weaknesses in teaching and ensured that teaching is now good overall. This has ensured that progress has accelerated and is now good in all year groups after the recent dip in standards, especially at the end of Key Stage 1.
- Senior leaders have a key role in monitoring standards in their areas of responsibility and talk knowledgeably about the impact of their work. For example, the introduction of a support programme for pupils who needed help with their reading was very successful. The leadership of middle leaders, although effective overall, is currently being developed further to ensure all these leaders are fully involved in school improvement planning and can have a greater impact on standards in their areas of responsibility.
- Pupil premium funding has been used extremely well, resulting in a beneficial impact on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils throughout the school. The school has used this funding mainly for additional staffing, including a learning mentor and school counsellor, to provide appropriate support and intervention work.
- Leadership of teaching is effective. Staff are extremely positive about the training they receive to improve their teaching or to develop themselves as leaders in school. Staff morale is high.
- The school's curriculum is broad, balanced and provides a wide range of exciting experiences for the pupils. It is enhanced by a wide range of after-school clubs, trips, residential visits and visitors to school. During the inspection, pupils in Year 3 and 4 enjoyed re-enacting a battle scene with a visiting Roman soldier.
- The school has used its primary school sport funding effectively, employing a specialist physical education (PE) teacher, which has enhanced the teaching of PE in the school, especially gymnastics. Pupils take part in a wide range of sports, including traditional team sports such as football, netball and cricket. Pupils are also given the opportunity to try new sports, such as table tennis and tri-golf. Pupils in all year groups, including Reception, take part in after-school clubs.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through the curriculum and also through the links that the school has developed with a diverse range of schools, both in England and abroad. These include children who visit the school each year from Belarus, near to Chernobyl.
- Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Pupils learn about democracy through the election of the school council and the understanding and tolerance of other faiths is promoted well.
- The school is committed to providing an equal opportunity for all pupils. This is demonstrated in the way that two additional 'nurture classes' have been introduced to provide extra support for pupils who need it. As a result of this initiative, these pupils are making good progress.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils are effective and meet statutory requirements.
- The local authority provides effective light-touch support for the school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are very ambitious for the school and determined that all pupils receive the best possible education. They bring a range of different skills and knowledge to the school which enables them to fulfil their statutory duties very effectively.
 - The headteacher provides detailed reports to the governing body to ensure governors are well-informed about how well the school is doing compared to schools nationally. They have a good understanding of what the school's priorities are. Comprehensive minutes of meetings demonstrate how governors ask relevant and challenging questions regarding all aspects of school life.
 - Each class has an assigned governor who works closely with the class, for example coming in to hear pupils read or accompanying them on school trips. These regular, informal visits give governors a good overview of school life, especially how good teaching is and how well pupils are doing.
 - Governors have a good understanding of the performance management process and how decisions about teachers' pay are linked to performance. They are fully aware of the overall quality of teaching in the school and of the expectations of teachers who are at different stages in their career.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. At playtimes, pupils play well together with few incidents and on the Key Stage 2 yard, in particular, there is a range of activities to keep them occupied. When talking to pupils, they say that occasionally there are incidents of misbehaviour but teachers deal effectively with any problems.
- Pupils, parents and staff are all extremely positive about the behaviour of children in school.
- Pupils have good attitudes to learning. Most work hard and are fully engaged in lessons. In lessons where staff have high expectations and work is planned well for the different abilities within the class, pupils are engrossed in their work and their behaviour and attitudes are excellent. However, when work is not challenging enough in some classes or activities do not interest the pupils, a few can become distracted and lose focus.
- Pupils are friendly, polite and welcoming to visitors.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. The school works very effectively with external services in order to ensure children are safe.
- A rigorous child protection policy and effective procedures are in place to ensure the safety of pupils. All statutory requirements regarding safeguarding are met.
- The school's strategies to improve attendance are very effective, and attendance is higher than the national average. The level of persistent absence is also low.
- Pupils feel safe in school and parents confirm this view.
- Pupils say bullying is rare but they would know what to do if it happened. They are confident that they could go to staff in school if they had a problem. They are aware of the different forms bullying can take.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The headteacher has acted quickly to ensure that teaching is now good overall following inconsistencies in the past. This has led to the accelerated progress made by pupils in most classes over the last year, following slower progress in previous years. The most effective teaching is characterised by a high level of challenge to all pupils and effective feedback during lessons and in marking, which gives advice to pupils on how to improve their work.
- There is some excellent practice in marking and feedback but it is not consistent in all classes. School leaders recognise that embedding this good practice in all classes is a school priority. Pupils are given the opportunity to read teachers' comments at the start of the day but they do not always respond to the comments or act on the advice given consistently.
- Pupils make good progress overall, especially those who need extra help, because work is generally well-matched to their abilities. However, work is not always hard enough for the most able pupils and this sometimes limits their progress.
- Staff have warm, positive relationships with pupils, which generates a purposeful and productive atmosphere for learning in most cases.
- Teaching assistants are used very well to support pupils and are used effectively at all points in lessons to help pupils with their work. In Year 2, the teacher was teaching the majority of the class, while the teaching assistant worked with pupils who needed more help and a higher ability group worked by themselves on an investigation. No pupil wasted any time.
- Teachers have a good understanding of what pupils need to focus on in their work, and in the most effective lessons teachers are continually assessing how pupils are getting on and giving them feedback. For example, in Year 4 pupils' use of punctuation improved markedly as a result of teachers' observations and promptings.
- Displays in classrooms and around the school are attractive and are used well to support pupils with their learning, especially in their basic literacy and numeracy skills.
- Pupils and parents are very positive about the quality of teaching in the school.
- Any previous weaknesses in teaching have been tackled effectively and now consistently good teaching is resulting in most pupils making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils' overall attainment by the end of Year 6 in 2014 was broadly average, and this represented good overall progress from their different starting points in Year 3.
- The proportion of pupils making the progress expected of them was higher than nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion that made better than expected progress was very similar overall to that found nationally.
- The majority of children now join the Reception class with skills and knowledge below those typical for their age. They make good progress during their time at the school. Children who benefit from part-time provision in the early years begin school with skills and knowledge below that typical for their age, but also make good progress from their starting points.
- Attainment in Key Stage 1 was below the national average in 2014, reflecting some underachievement due to some previous weaknesses in teaching. However, current school data and analysis of pupils' work indicate that standards for the current Year 2 pupils are on track to be in line with the current national average and that pupils are making good progress from their different starting points. Progress is more rapid in Year 2 due to much better teaching throughout Key Stage 1.
- The teaching of phonics (the link between letters and the sounds they make) is effective. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the Year 1 national phonics check is average.
- In 2014, the proportion of pupils achieving the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 was lower than nationally. By the end of Year 6, the proportion of pupils achieving the higher levels was broadly average overall but no pupils achieved the higher Level 6 in any subject. Progress for the most able pupils is not always as rapid as it could be. This is because work is sometimes not hard enough to fully challenge them. Leaders acknowledge that increasing the proportion of pupils, especially the most able, making better than expected progress is a priority for the school's further improvement.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress because of the support they are given with their work. Their individual needs are met well through the excellent support given by teachers and teaching assistants. The school's decision to provide a 'nurture class' in each key stage for pupils who need extra help with their work has had a positive impact and these pupils are making rapid progress.
- In Year 6 in 2014, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in reading was about two terms behind non-disadvantaged pupils in the school and about two terms behind non-disadvantaged pupils nationally. In writing, they were approximately two and a half terms behind both non-disadvantaged pupils in the school and nationally. In mathematics, they were approximately half a term behind non-disadvantaged pupils in the school and one and a half terms behind non-disadvantaged pupils nationally. The school's own data and inspection evidence show that these gaps are narrowing throughout the school and in several classes the attainment of disadvantaged pupils is higher than that of non-disadvantaged pupils.

The early years provision is good

- The two Reception classes have a combination of Reception children and three- and four-year-old children who attend on a part-time basis. The majority of children join the Reception class with attainment that is low for their age. They make good progress in the early years and are well prepared to move into Year 1.
- The skills and abilities of boys when they start in the Reception class are lower than girls but they still make good progress.
- The early years leader has ensured communication with parents is good. She has developed a high standard of provision and leads the early years extremely well.
- The quality of teaching is good in the early years which ensures the children make good progress. Both the indoor and outdoor areas are used well to support children's learning. There is a good range of activities for children, some of which adults direct them to and some of which they choose themselves. The organisation of the curriculum and resources helps all children to learn well.
- Behaviour is good but when some children do become slightly boisterous, adults reinforce expectations in a gentle, positive way.
- Safeguarding procedures and risk assessments are all in place to ensure that children feel and stay safe.

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	111393
Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	449150

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	243
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lynn Greenfield
Headteacher	Paul Loughran
Date of previous school inspection	8 November 2010
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