

St Michael's Community Academy

Holland Street, Crewe, Cheshire, CW1 3SL

Inspection dates 3–4 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	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.

- St. Michael's Academy is a good school which has improved because of the strong and focused leadership of the principal and senior vice-principal.
- The governing body, the St. Bart's Multi-Academy Trust and the local authority have provided good support for the leadership team. This has had a very positive effect on improving the quality of teaching and raising pupils' achievement.
- Teaching and learning are consistently good. As a result, most pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics from below average starting points.
- In 2014 the progress made by pupils by the end of Key Stage 2 was in the top 16 percent of schools nationally.
- Behaviour is good. Pupils have a positive attitude to their lessons. Strong relationships between all staff and pupils provide the foundations for this.
- Pupils say they feel very safe and well looked after. This view is shared by virtually all parents.
- The strong emphasis on promoting pupils' understanding of values prepares them well for life in modern Britain.
- The curriculum and the range of after-school activities promote pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Children in the early years make good progress because of consistently good teaching.
- The overwhelming majority of parents value the school highly and are very supportive of its work.
- Governors monitor all aspects of the school's work and hold staff rigorously to account. They know how effective teaching is and how well pupils are doing.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Occasionally, the work set for pupils is not hard enough to enable them to reach the highest standards in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils do not have enough opportunities to practise and apply their writing skills in subjects other than English.
- Pupils do not always have enough time to respond to teachers' marking and learn from their mistakes.
- Middle leaders are not given enough opportunities to evaluate the quality of teaching.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in a range of lessons. In addition, they made a number of short visits to lessons and listened to pupils from Year 2, Year 4 and Year 5 read. They also gathered other evidence relating to the quality of teaching over time.
- The inspectors observed two lessons jointly with the principal.
- Inspectors held meetings with the principal, senior vice-principal and senior and middle leaders. They also met six governors, a representative of the local authority and the Chief Executive of St. Bart's Multi-Academy Trust.
- Inspectors took account of the 18 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), the discussions with parents who brought their children to school and the 28 questionnaires returned by staff.
- Inspectors observed the school at work and scrutinised the work in pupils' books, the school's own data on pupils' current progress, improvement plans, planning and monitoring information and minutes of governing body meetings. Inspectors also reviewed records relating to behaviour and attendance and documents relating to safeguarding and child protection.

Inspection team

Anthony Kingston, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Mark Williams

Additional Inspector

Peter Martin

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St. Michael's Community Academy converted to an academy school on 1st November 2013. When its predecessor, Oakefield Primary and Nursery School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be satisfactory overall. The academy is part of the St. Bart's Multi-Academy Trust.
- The academy is part of the Britannia Teaching School Alliance.
- St. Michael's is much larger than the average-sized primary school.
- Recent staff changes include the appointment of two newly qualified teachers.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is well below average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils, eligible for support through the pupil premium is more than twice that of the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding that the school receives for those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those children who are in the care of the local authority.
- Children attend part time in the Nursery in the morning or afternoon and full time in the Reception class.
- Although most pupils are of White British heritage and speak English as their first language, the number from other ethnic groups and at the early stages of learning English is rising rapidly.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and increase pupils' progress by ensuring that:
 - work is always hard enough to enable them to reach the highest possible standards in reading, writing and mathematics
 - pupils are provided with more opportunities to apply their writing skills in subjects other than English
 - pupils are provided with guidance to improve their work and that enough time is given for them to respond to teachers' written comments, in order to learn from their mistakes.
- Strengthen leadership and management and accelerate the rate at which the school improves by developing and sharpening the skills of middle leaders in monitoring and improving the quality of teaching.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The school is led extremely well by a very determined and highly effective principal who is very ably supported by the senior vice-principal.
- The principal's relentless drive for improvement, shared by all leaders and governors, has improved teaching and raised standards successfully. Together with all staff, leaders have created a culture where the needs of the individual child always come first. This has enabled leaders to promote consistently good teaching and good behaviour.
- Leaders' self-evaluation is rigorous and accurate. Senior leaders analyse comprehensive, detailed information on pupils' attainment and progress. They monitor the school's effectiveness, identify priorities for improvement and plan these carefully.
- There are thorough and effective systems in place to check on teaching, learning and the progress pupils make. As a result, leaders have an accurate view of the school. This means that school action plans focus on the correct priorities and support the school to improve further. However, middle leaders do not have enough opportunities to monitor teaching. Consequently, they do not play a significant enough part in driving improvements in those subjects for which they are responsible.
- Teachers feel well supported by the principal and senior leaders and welcome feedback about their performance in lessons. Feedback is sharp and focused. Clear targets are set and training and support are given to ensure that they are met. This process has played a significant role in the school's improvements.
- The academy trust has provided very effective support for St. Michael's and works well alongside colleagues in the local authority, who provide valuable support. This joint approach is based on the fact that they both see that they are supporting pupils' learning.
- The curriculum is carefully planned to meet pupils' interests and provides them with many memorable experiences. For example, the Year 5 mini-production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in preparation for their performance at the Manchester Exchange Theatre was spectacular.
- Art is a strength of the curriculum. Pupils use a range of media to produce some eye-catching art work throughout the school. For example, the displays of Mayan masks, life-size sculptures, in the style of Antony Gormley, decorating corridors and outdoor areas and the modelling of sea urchins are stunning.
- The school promotes 'life values', such as kindness, friendship, respect, determination and equality extremely well. As a result, pupils show positive attitudes to others and tolerance and respect for people from all faiths and cultures. Pupils understand about democracy and the rule of law and fairness. They are very well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and makes a significant contribution to their good behaviour and positive attitudes to school and to each other. Relationships are excellent. These are underpinned by a caring and nurturing culture. Staff do not tolerate discrimination of any kind.
- The pupil premium is spent very effectively on ensuring that eligible pupils make even better progress than their classmates. In this way, gaps in attainment between these pupils and other pupils in the school are closing rapidly.
- Individual tuition and small-group work cater very well for the needs of pupils supported by the pupil premium. As a result, the school ensures that all pupils know they are valued and have an equal opportunity to succeed. They know that discrimination is not tolerated.
- The primary sport funding is spent extremely effectively on specialist coaching, training for staff and a wide range of additional sports. These include cross-country running, gymnastics, boccia, tennis and sports-hall athletics. Participation rates have increased considerably. Almost 50 percent of pupils have competed this year in different sports with other schools, enjoying a growing success. For example the school was crowned Crewe and Nantwich gymnastics champion and one pupil won the district's Year 4 cross-country championship.
- The school works very closely with St. Bart's Multi-Academy Trust, the Britannia Teaching School Alliance and the local authority. It has benefited from their support right from the beginning, but now the Trust is using the expertise of the school's leaders to support other schools.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils are exceptional. All staff receive high quality training and are very well versed in all aspects ensuring pupils' safety. The school carries out rigorous checks on all new staff and ensures that the single central record is kept fully up to date. Leaders keep thorough records of any concerns and what has been done to address them.
- Parents are extremely supportive of the school. They appreciate how staff go out of their way to support the whole family.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors have a very clear view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Consequently, they are very effective in challenging and supporting the work of the school.
- They provide a wide and relevant range of experience and expertise and are ably led by the Chair of the Governing Body. Together, they strengthen the school leadership, sharing the ambition of all senior leaders to take the school forward.
- Governors are kept well informed by the principal and by making regular visits to the school to work in classrooms and meet with teachers, leaders and pupils. Their systems for rewarding good teaching through performance management are thorough and they tackle any underperformance in the classroom with rigour. They have a very good knowledge of the quality of teaching in the school.
- Governors seek appropriate training to support them in fulfilling their roles to the best of their abilities. For example, they have received training so that they understand the data on pupils' performance and what this tells them about how well the school is doing. As a result, they support, monitor and challenge school leaders very effectively.
- They monitor finances carefully so they know how the additional pupil premium funding is spent and its impact on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.
- Governors carry out their statutory duties effectively, ensuring, for example, that procedures for safeguarding pupils fully meet national requirements.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. All adults have high expectations for pupils' behaviour. The overwhelming majority of pupils rise to this expectation. Pupils move around the school in an orderly way and are polite and courteous to adults.
- The school's systems to encourage good behaviour are understood by pupils and are applied with a high level of consistency by staff reminding pupils that they have a choice of how they should behave. All staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning.
- The school has been very successful in bringing about significant improvements in behaviour over time. This was exemplified extremely well by one parent who said, 'The school has done so much to help my son to settle down. It's made his and our family life more comfortable, enjoyable and stress free.'
- Pupils willingly take on responsibilities, such as helping to keep the school clean and tidy or acting as peer mentors, play leaders and sports leaders. One pupil explained that it was important for everyone to take on responsibilities, 'because it's a way of showing our teachers how much we appreciate the time they give to organising so many clubs just so that we can have lots of fun and make school even more enjoyable.'
- The school has rigorous procedures to monitor and improve attendance, including the roles of the new learning mentor and attendance officer. Action is taken when poor patterns of attendance are noted. As a result, more pupils are now arriving at school on time but, because a few families do not send their children to school regularly enough, attendance remains below average.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Staff and the governing body are well trained and vigilant in ensuring that pupils learn in a safe and secure environment. All parents who responded to Parent View agree that their children are safe in school and that the school cares for them well. Pupils know that staff will always be there for them. This was exemplified by one pupil who said, 'The school is my family to me. Everyone in it cares for everybody else.'
- Pupils say that incidents of bullying have reduced significantly and are now very rare. They are confident that an adult will sort out any concerns they may have. They know all about different types of bullying, such as cyber-bullying and racially prejudiced bullying and how to respond to it.
- The school teaches pupils how to avoid risks extremely well. Pupils receive clear and unambiguous guidance on how to stay safe when using computers and other technology, on pavements and when riding their bicycles on the road.

The quality of teaching is good

- The principal and school leaders have taken determined action in the past year to improve the quality of teaching. As a result, teaching throughout the school, including the early years, is good, with some that is outstanding. This good teaching contributes much to pupils' rapidly improving standards and good levels of progress.
- Teachers establish excellent relationships with their pupils and generally have high expectations. This is reflected in the vibrant displays of pupils' work in classrooms, corridors and communal areas of the school. They show the richness of the curriculum, celebrate pupils' achievements and help to create a positive climate for learning in which pupils are eager to learn, work hard and try to do their very best.
- Teachers make good use of accurate assessments of pupils' progress to set clear targets for them to achieve well in all subjects. Teachers are making increasingly good use of new assessment procedures to raise expectations and meet the higher expectations of the new National Curriculum. Consequently, the work set for pupils is generally challenging and well matched to pupils' different needs. However, observations of classrooms and pupils' books reveal that occasionally work is too easy or overly repetitious.
- In English, teachers provide many interesting and exciting opportunities for pupils to engage in and apply their writing skills to extended writing activities. Teachers ensure that pupils talk about their writing and share their ideas to extend their vocabulary and identify possible improvements. This is improving the rate at which pupils make progress and the standards they attain. However, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to engage in extended writing activities in their topic work. This limits the opportunities for pupils to apply and develop their skills in writing and, as a result, slows down progress.
- Reading is taught skilfully and systematically. This is proving successful in helping pupils to develop the skills and understanding they need to be confident readers. Any pupils in danger of underachieving receive regular additional support from highly skilled teaching assistants and this is aiding their progress well.
- Mathematics is taught effectively. Pupils use their good mathematical knowledge to solve increasingly complex problems and are given opportunities to discuss their work so they learn from one another.
- Teachers generally give pupils clear and constructive advice about how to improve their work. However, the time given to pupils to respond to marking is variable. Consequently, pupils do not always learn from their mistakes and continue making them in successive pieces of work.
- Teaching assistants play a key role and are used well to support individuals and groups of pupils with particular needs. Support for disabled pupils, those with special educational needs and those who are disadvantaged is good across the school. This is the reason why different groups of pupils achieve well.

The achievement of pupils is good

- The number of pupils who join the school part way through their education is rising rapidly. Many of these pupils are at the early stages of learning English as an additional language. These pupils make good progress, but do not always attain national standards.
- Pupils' achievement is good in all years. They are now working at higher levels than previously and making better progress. This is due not only to improvements in teaching, but to pupils having a much more positive approach to school.
- Although pupils make good progress from their starting points at the beginning of Key Stage 1, standards in 2014 were well below average in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2. This was largely due to the high proportion of pupils who entered Key Stage 1 with standards well below those expected and the relatively large proportion of pupils who entered Year 2 at the early stage of learning English.
- At Key Stage 2, the standards reached by pupils in reading were average, slightly below average in mathematics and well below average in writing. These standards, however, reflect extremely good progress from pupils' starting points. For example, the proportion of pupils who made expected and better than expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics was well above average, placing the school in the top 16 percent of schools nationally.
- Inspection evidence from a scrutiny of pupils' books, observations of learning in lessons and school performance data on the progress made by each year group show that pupils across the school are continuing to make rapid progress. Consequently, standards too are rising rapidly. This is as a direct result of improvements in the quality of teaching.
- Reading is a priority throughout the school. The teaching of phonics is enabling younger pupils to tackle new and unfamiliar words with greater confidence.

- Pupils in Key Stage 1 enjoy reading and talk enthusiastically about the stories they read and those that adults read with them. They make good progress, yet the proportion that reaches the expected level in the Year 1 phonics check is well below average. By the end of Year 2, however, the proportion reaching the expected level is close to average.
- As pupils move through the school, they continue to develop a love of reading. This was exemplified by a group of Year 5 pupils who agreed that 'books take you into imaginary and fantastical places which are nothing like our own world.'
- Pupils' writing is helped by the emphasis that is given to reading and to speaking and explaining ideas in lessons. This is increasingly reflected throughout pupils' writing, enhancing the fluency and meaning of what they write.
- Throughout Key Stage 2, the most able pupils make good progress. This is reflected in the fact that far more pupils reach the higher Level 5 at the end of Key Stage 2 than reach the higher Level 3 at the end of Key Stage 1. In reading, the proportion of pupils reaching Level 5 is well above average. However, no pupils reach the very high Level 6 in reading, writing or mathematics.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress, because accurate assessment of their skills ensures that extra support and work in lessons meet their specific learning needs successfully.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils in 2014 was well above that of all other pupils nationally. Consequently, the gap in standards between disadvantaged pupils in the school and all pupils nationally closed. This is reflected in the test results which show that standards attained by disadvantaged pupils were one term ahead of all pupils nationally in reading, one and a half terms behind all pupils nationally in writing, but three terms behind in writing.
- Disadvantaged pupils attained overall standards only slightly below those of their classmates. As a consequence, they were one term behind their classmates in mathematics, half a term behind in writing but half a term ahead in reading.
- As a result of the spending of the pupil premium funding, disadvantaged pupils make significantly better progress than all pupils nationally in mathematics and reading and above average in writing. The school checks that all pupils have equality of opportunity to succeed. Current data and inspection evidence show that disadvantaged pupils are continuing to make rapid progress across all year groups. As a result, they are reaching standards similar to those of their classmates and catching up with all pupils nationally, especially in mathematics and writing.

The early years provision

is good

- Children start in the early years with skills which, for the overwhelming majority, are below those typical for their age.
- Children make good progress in all areas of learning and in 2014 the proportion of children who reached a good level of development was only slightly below average.
- The current rate at which children in the early years make progress continues to increase and achievement is improving. This is because staff have a very clear understanding of children's knowledge and skills, and plan exciting learning activities which are well matched to individual children's interests and needs.
- Pivotal to this good progress is the focus on developing children's communication and personal skills. Adults explain sensitively how to behave in the early years, what the routines are and gently encourage children to work and play together and to support each other. Consequently, children are happy, settle down well to the school's way of working, are eager to learn and enjoy school life.
- The quality of teaching is good and provides a secure base for future learning throughout the rest of the school. Assessments are used well to plan future learning experiences that match children's needs and interests. This promotes rapid gains in their learning.
- Phonics are given a high priority in the early years. Children are making good progress because sessions are taught effectively and followed up by activities that enable children to build successfully on what they have learnt.
- Adults use every opportunity to develop children's language skills. For example, they encouraged children to use appropriate language such as short, shorter and shortest to compare the lengths of 'worms' in a fascinating worm-charming competition. This enthralled children. Others cared for their beans growing outside a giant's castle role play area and relished the opportunity to explain that, 'all plants need soil for food, sunshine and water to grow big and strong.' Children display great enjoyment in their work.

- Children's behaviour and safety are good. They play well together and are increasingly confident in talking about their work and in expressing their ideas.
- Good leadership and management are achieved through a team approach that is supported exceptionally well by the school's senior vice-principal. The progress of the children is checked on carefully and gaps in attainment are identified and work planned that will support learning. Provision has become more consistent this year, resulting in rapid progress across the areas of learning.
- Relationships and communication with parents are very positive. All staff work hard to make parents feel welcomed into the school.

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	140175
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	450204

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	429
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Molly Stone
Headteacher	David Jobling
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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