

St Michael's CofE Primary School, Great Lever

Green Lane, Bolton, Lancashire, BL3 2PL

Inspection dates 16–17 June 2015

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		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- St Michael's is a happy, popular and successful school which pupils enjoy and show pride in. Relationships between pupils and teachers are strong and valued.
- The headteacher and her senior leadership team are resolute in their determination to improve the school further. Parents and staff responding to inspection questionnaires were overwhelmingly positive about the work of the school and its leaders.
- The capacity of leaders to make further improvements is very strong. Subject leaders and their teams, for example, have a clear overview of quality in their subjects and areas.
- The early years provision is outstanding. Consequently, children make very good progress and are very well prepared for Year 1.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The curriculum, including extra-curricular activities, which are wide, varied and rich, contributes to this quality very well.
- Pupils' safety and welfare is promoted well. Pupils have a mature understanding of what is right and wrong. Their behaviour is good and they demonstrate British values very well.
- Individual programmes of support for disabled pupils or those who have special educational needs promote pupils' academic, social and emotional development very well. Partnerships with external agencies to support such progress are strong.
- From often well below average starting points, pupils achieve well. They reach standards at the end of Year 6 that are broadly average. This is because the quality of teaching is good.
- Good teaching of reading and writing is leading to improved outcomes for pupils in these areas.
- Attendance is above average, demonstrating the school's very effective partnerships with parents and pupils' enjoyment of school.
- Governors share the commitment of leaders to improve the school further. They hold leaders to account well.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils, particularly the most able, are not always routinely challenged to record their responses in their own words or to use reasoning skills to solve problems in mathematics.
- When observing lessons, leaders' records of teaching quality do not routinely make clear the impact such teaching has on the learning of pupils.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed the school at work.
- Inspectors looked at teaching and learning over time. When visiting lessons, they spoke with pupils and looked at the work completed in books. Four visits to classes were conducted jointly with members of the school's senior leadership team.
- Inspectors observed pupils at break and lunchtimes, speaking with them informally. Meetings were also held with 24 pupils in four groups: Year 2; Years 3 and 4; Years 5 and 6; and a group of Year 6 pupils holding specific responsibilities in school, prefects for example.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including that relating to pupils' achievement, the quality of teaching, safeguarding, pupils' behaviour and governance.
- Discussions were also held with senior and subject leaders, members of the governing body, a representative of Bolton local authority, and a representative of the Anglican Diocese of Manchester.
- Informal discussions were held with a small number of parents as they brought their children to school. As there were too few responses online to Parent View, Ofsted's questionnaire, inspectors, with the help of the school, distributed paper copies of the same questions on the morning of the second day of the inspection. Fifty-six returns were received. These were considered alongside the 124 responses received by the school to its own questionnaire issued in March 2015.
- Inspectors also took into account the 54 returns from the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Mark Williams, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Faheem Chishti

Additional Inspector

Jeremy Barnes

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger in size when compared to other primary schools in England.
- Over 90 percent of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Almost an equal percentage of pupils do not have English as their first language. Around 70 percent of pupils are of Pakistani heritage.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils, those who are eligible for funding through the pupil premium, is above average. The pupil premium funding is additional government funding to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is below average.
- The school met the government's current floor standards for 2014, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The local authority uses the school to provide support for other schools.
- The school holds a number of externally validated awards including the Basic Skills Quality Mark, Investors in People and the International Schools Award.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Leaders should build on the good improvements made since the previous inspection to ensure greater levels of challenge to pupils, particularly the most able, by providing opportunities for pupils to:
 - routinely record their written responses in their own words
 - use reasoning in mathematics to solve problems.
- Make clear in records of teaching quality the impact such teaching has had on the learning of pupils.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The school has moved on well since the previous inspection over five years ago. The headteacher and the senior leadership team have been resolute in their determination to improve the school further. Parents and staff responding to inspection questionnaires were overwhelmingly positive about the work of the school and its leaders.
- The capacity of leaders to make further improvements is very strong. Subject leaders and their teams have a clear overview of quality in their subjects and areas. However, an area for improvement acknowledged by leaders is the need, when observing lessons to judge the quality of teaching, to routinely make clear the impact such teaching has on the learning of pupils.
- Leaders know the school and the community well. Their self-evaluation is accurate and identifies clearly strengths and what needs to be improved further. Leaders have tackled issues of low attainment in reading and, as a result, outcomes for current pupils are improving.
- Because pupils achieve well, with no discernible differences between groups of current pupils, leaders promote equality of opportunity well. The pupil premium funding is targeted well. Gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in school are small.
- Because strong links with the community have been developed and pupils show high levels of respect, leaders also foster good relations and tackle discrimination well.
- The performance of teachers and additional adults in the school is checked regularly. Opportunities for training and development are provided according to individual need and the priorities set in the clear plans for improvement. No teacher moves up the pay scale without demonstrating outcomes for pupils have improved.
- The curriculum, including extra-curricular activity, is wide, rich and varied. Both contribute very well to pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils, as demonstrated by the above average and, over time, improving rates of attendance, enjoy school and all that it offers. The building is bright, cheerful and well-maintained. Classrooms and corridors contain stimulating displays, including those promoting British values and awareness of other faiths and cultures. The school makes use of a range of external providers to enhance its provision including the local authority's music service and sports coaches. This is money well spent, including that from the additional government funding known as the primary physical education and sport funding.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and are effectively implemented.
- Both the local authority and the diocese hold the school in high regard. The local authority has given light-touch support for the school and is using it to support other schools.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors share the commitment of leaders to improve the school further.
 - The linking of two governors to each class helps them to understand the progress pupils are making and builds up relationships with teachers well.
 - Governors hold leaders to account well and understand how funding, including the pupil premium funding, is spent to support pupils' learning and development. They are given helpful information by leaders to help them understand pupils' achievement, the quality of teaching and the performance management of teachers.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They are smart in their appearance, courteous and take pride in their school. The great majority of pupils behave very well. On occasions, a few pupils do not reach the same high standards displayed by their peers, for example when playing outside or by engaging in low-level chatter that sometimes gets in the way of learning.
- Older pupils, particularly those in Year 6, relish the opportunities they have to take responsibility as librarians, prefects, assisting during assemblies or as office assistants, for example. As a result of such opportunities, the self-confidence and self-belief of pupils are strong. When carrying out such roles, these pupils are treated with respect by adults and fellow pupils alike. Consequently, relationships between pupils and teachers are strong and valued.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is outstanding. They have a mature understanding of what is right and wrong and demonstrate British values very well. For example, they

know while it is important if one has a faith to see that faith as precious, they are also clear that it is wrong to belittle someone who holds a different point of view. Consequently, pupils are prepared very well for life in modern Britain.

- Pupils spoken with and all parents responding to the inspection questionnaire were of the view the school makes sure its pupils are well-behaved.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils spoken to and parents contributing to the inspection were all of the view pupils were happy and safe in school.
- Pupils' safety and welfare is promoted well with strong links in place with external agencies, particularly to support vulnerable pupils. The extensive, stimulating play areas are supervised well although, on occasions, a few examples of less than good behaviour are not always noticed. Leaders are to put plans into place to address this.
- The attendance of pupils is above average. This demonstrates well both the very effective partnerships and communications with parents and pupils' enjoyment of school.
- Pupils have a clear understanding of the different types of bullying that exist, including racist, homophobic and cyber. All spoken with were adamant any instances are extremely rare. All were equally clear they could speak to an adult if they had concerns and any issues would be dealt with well.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Pupils make the progress they do because of good teaching and their positive attitudes to learning. Teachers and additional adults check regularly on the progress pupils are making, both in lessons and in regular progress meetings.
- Of particular note is the good teaching of reading and writing which is leading to improved outcomes for pupils in these areas. Year 6 pupils, for example, were writing sentences such as, 'As I came upon the tarnished gate, I cautiously looked into the scariest place I had ever experienced.' Such sentences capture the imagination of the reader well.
- Also of note is the way pupils in Year 6 are using different skills in 'mini-enterprise' projects. Such activities provide good levels of challenge, for example, to produce graphs to show how many sweets were sold to other children in order to justify to leaders why the projects should continue.
- These levels of challenge, however, particularly for the most-able pupils, are not always available to pupils across the school. The over use of restrictive worksheets in some classes, for example, does not allow pupils to routinely record their responses in their own words. In addition, while in some classes there are opportunities for pupils to use reasoning skills in mathematics to solve problems, these are not consistently provided. Teachers sometimes miss opportunities to test out pupils' mastery of mathematics by not setting challenges to explore reasoning once pieces of work have been completed correctly.
- Leaders are aware there is some variability in marking and feedback; they have plans to ensure consistency in line with the school's policy. Most marking makes clear to pupils what they have done well and what they need to do next, but not all does so.
- Where teaching over time is best, a number of key elements are evident. First, pupils are clear about what is expected of them throughout the lesson; they know what they are expected to achieve. Second, the questioning of teachers and additional adults draws out from pupils how well they understand the subjects and concepts being taught. For example, a skilled teaching assistant working with a group of Year 6 pupils helped the pupils develop increased fluency and expression when reading a text that included some challenging and unfamiliar words. Without dominating the discussion, gentle intervention led to pupils reading these words with confidence and understanding. Such questioning ensures pupils build on previous knowledge well and enables adults to adapt lessons quickly to meet pupil needs as they arise. Third, independence is promoted. In such instances, teachers think very carefully about the activities the pupils are going to complete and the resources needed to be made available. In Year 3, for example, opportunities for pupils to work together in pairs or small groups encouraged them to comment on and improve the tongue twisters being created.
- Support for disabled pupils or those who have special educational needs helps such pupils make good progress in their learning and development. Teaching assistants and additional adults are deployed very effectively to support these and other pupils in the school.

The achievement of pupils is good

- From often very low starting points when entering school in Nursery or Reception, pupils, regardless of background or first language, achieve well.
- While standards in end of Key Stage 1 assessments in reading, writing and mathematics were low compared to national averages in 2012, 2013 and 2014, they represent at least expected and often good or better progress.
- By the time pupils leave school at the end of Year 6, rates of progress in mathematics and writing stand out. Published data, for example, shows in 2012 and in 2014 the progress made by pupils between Years 2 and 6 was significantly above that found nationally. It was also significantly above in writing in 2013 and 2014. The result is pupils at the end of Year 6 reach standards that are broadly average.
- The exception to this is standards in reading which, in 2013 and 2014, were low. Leaders are well aware of the differences in standards and progress in reading compared with other subjects. The actions they have taken are bearing fruit. Current pupils are making much better progress in reading than in the past.
- Published data also shows the differences between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in school in reading, writing and mathematics were small. In some instances, in writing in 2014 for example, disadvantaged pupils outperformed their peers. Compared with all pupils nationally, in 2014 disadvantaged pupils at St Michael's were just over two terms behind in reading, about half a term ahead in writing, and about one term behind in mathematics. Inspectors found no discernible difference in the progress of different groups of pupils currently at the school.
- One reason why reading standards are improving throughout the school is the school's close attention to the teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make). Regular teaching and checking of progress is paying dividends with pupils reading a range of words with increased fluency, including those with tricky spellings. The result of this concerted approach, with regular word lists sent home for younger children to work on with parents, is that in 2014 more pupils in Year 1 reached the expected standard than those nationally. Given the high numbers of pupils whose first language is believed not to be English, leaders have correctly focused on developing reading comprehension as well as word recognition.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs achieve well in their academic, social and emotional development. This is because the individual programmes of support and strong partnerships with external agencies promote such development very well.
- The most-able pupils also achieve well but are not challenged strongly enough. Leaders recognise this and in improvement plans have set targets for higher numbers to attain the higher Levels 3 and 5 at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 respectively.
- Pupils' achievement across other areas of the curriculum is at least good. Pupils in Reception and in Year 4, for example, sing with good tone and diction while those in Year 2 are developing a strong sense of rhythm. The school excels in sport, for example winning the Bolton Primary Cricket Championship for a number of years in a row.

The early years provision is outstanding

- Assessments, validated as accurate by the local authority, show that children enter the early years provision often with skills and abilities well below those typical for their age. Of those entering the Nursery class in 2014, 81 percent were well below in writing, 90 percent were well below in reading and 97 percent were well below in number. Of those entering the Reception class in 2014, over half were working well below in writing, nearly two thirds in reading and 70 percent in number.
- By the time children leave Reception and go into Year 1, they have made very good progress in their learning and development. Even though the proportions attaining a good level of development are below average, they are increasing well. In 2015, over half the children reached this level. When children enter Year 1, they are increasingly mature, confident and independent individuals.
- Children make the progress they do because of excellent leadership that has ensured strong links exist with parents, including home visits as appropriate, and other early years settings. This means adults at St Michael's know their children well as they start. Consequently, children settle in quickly and become used to established routines.
- Regular, accurate assessments of children's progress mean that levels of challenge are consistently high in all areas of learning, regardless of ability levels. This consistency in challenge is one reason why the early years provision is so strong.
- An example of the independence children are developing follows. Three children, working together writing healthy fruit words, were applying their knowledge of phonics well to sound out letters confidently and

accurately. Furthermore, they were checking each other's sounds and helping one another out. Other children were developing their writing skills very well, recording their thoughts in their own words. The writing they were producing was showing elements of that typically found in Year 1. This demonstrates well that children are prepared well for the next stage of their schooling.

- The attractive, well-presented provision is very well organised and stimulating, both indoors and outdoors. Adults promote speaking and listening skills very well, meaning children are very sociable.
- Children respect the environment in which they work and play, and respect one another too. They move around sensibly, showing awareness of other children around them. They thoroughly enjoy the activities they undertake, including cutting up kiwi fruit and bananas, playing in the mud kitchen and using modern technology.
- The progress of children is there for all to see. Beautiful, lively large books showing children at work are available for parents to browse through as they drop off children or remain for 'stay and play' activities. These books, brimming with photographs and comments by adults, show just how well children are counting, matching, reading and writing.
- Such is adults' awareness of children, when one child mistook a kiwi fruit for a coconut, the teacher went to her stock cupboard and as if by magic produced a real coconut for the children to observe and handle. As a result, similarities and differences between the two were quickly established by the children. Given the quality of the provision, it is little wonder the local authority is making use of it to help other schools and providers in their efforts to achieve the same.

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	105214
Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	448301

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	419
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Margaret Brockie MBE
Headteacher	Alison Hart
Date of previous school inspection	27 April 2010
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