

St Michael's Roman Catholic Primary School

Hills Terrace, Chatham, Kent ME4 6PX

Inspection dates	3–4 February 2016
Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders and staff have built well on improvements evident at the previous inspection. Standards are higher in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Outcomes in mathematics have particularly improved. Pupils have a strong grasp of mathematical vocabulary and do not give up when given tricky problems to solve.
- Leaders and teachers work well together to develop the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. It is typically good in all key stages.
- Teachers expect pupils to work hard and pupils rise well to the challenge. They have good and sometimes excellent attitudes to learning.
- The teaching of letters and the sounds that they make (phonics) and grammar, punctuation and spelling are strong. In Key Stage 2, current pupils are using these skills well to become better writers.
- The headteacher has a clear vision for improving the school. Staff share and believe in this vision, meaning that the school is moving forward well.
- Pupils enjoy school and feel safe.
- The positive environment and conduct of both adults and pupils are testament to the school's clear ethos.
- Aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are very strong. Pupils are not only tolerant but also proud of each other's similarities and differences.
- Children do well in Nursery and Reception Year. They are well prepared for the challenges of Year 1.
- The governing body has a realistic picture of how well the school is performing. Leaders at all levels have high aspirations for the school and its pupils.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The quality of subjects other than English and mathematics is not as strong as in these two subjects.
- Some strengths in teaching are less securely embedded at Key Stage 1.
- Leaders do not use information about pupils' progress well enough to check that all groups of pupils do equally well.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve standards in other subjects to a similar quality as English and mathematics.
- Strengthen the quality of teaching, learning and assessment further, especially in Key Stage 1 by:
 - stretching the most-able pupils to reach the highest standards
 - giving pupils more opportunities to develop their writing skills through writing for different purposes
 - making sure that pupils have time to master enough different aspects of mathematics to meet the expectations for pupils' ages.
- Sharpen the use and analysis of assessment information in order to:
 - check and close any gaps between the performance of different groups of pupils, including White British pupils and others
 - check more rigorously the impact of all actions to promote improvement
 - check that all additional funding is used in ways that make the most difference.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Leaders and staff have built well on improvements already recognised by the previous inspection. The governing body and local authority worked closely together with school leaders to keep the momentum going during a change of headteacher. As a result, higher standards at the end of all key stages have been sustained since the previous inspection.
- The new headteacher provides strong and determined leadership. In post for just over a year, she has a clear view of how the school can be even better. Other leaders and staff are behind her and feel part of this journey. Morale is high and there is a strong sense of teamwork.
- Leaders know the school very well. They celebrate its strengths but are very frank about areas that still need developing, without making any excuses. This honesty means that the school addresses the right priorities at the right time.
- The school's strong ethos contributes well to the sense of togetherness and unity. Pupils have a deep understanding of the school's longstanding values of care, independence, resilience, church, learning and enjoyment, the first letter of each spelling out 'circle'.
- Leaders' actions to improve teaching are effective. This is because they identify strengths and areas for development accurately and explain them well to teachers. They also encourage teachers to reflect on how they can improve their own practice. Teachers are good at this and respond very positively to feedback they are offered.
- Teachers and leaders meet regularly to check the progress of each pupil, focusing carefully on disadvantaged pupils. This leads to swift action to help any pupil that is falling behind to catch up, such as individual or small-group teaching. However, leaders are not drawing all of this information together well enough to check on gaps between the performance of different groups collectively across the school.
- New leaders responsible for particular aspects of the school's work, such as literacy or computing (middle leaders), have made a good start. Ongoing training is developing their leadership skills and deepening their understanding of their roles.
- There are significant strengths to the promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are very proud of the wide range of nationalities represented in their school and like learning about these different backgrounds and cultures. They enjoy learning about inspirational people such as Anne Frank and Mother Teresa. The school promotes British values well because they link strongly with its own existing and embedded 'circle' values. Pupils aspiring to be on the school council have to produce a manifesto and stand for election. The school also held mock elections alongside the general election last year.
- Extra-curricular clubs are popular and offer a wide range of choice, from musical theatre to karate. Pupils are highly enthusiastic when recalling their learning through events such as Black History month, speaking passionately about Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' speech. Despite this range of enriching experiences, leaders know that standards in subjects other than English and mathematics lag behind. This also limits some aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, they lack broad experiences in art.
- Pupils find it motivating to be taught physical education by specialist sports coaches, partly provided through additional sports funding. This also extends the range of festivals pupils take part in, from table tennis to tag rugby. This has made a difference to pupils' attitudes, engagement in physical activity and self-esteem. However, leaders and governors have not found a way to evaluate this formally.
- Support from the local authority has played an important part in the school's journey, including helping the headteacher to manage underperforming staff where necessary. Current work with middle leaders is helping to strengthen capacity for further improvement. However, the local authority has not challenged school leaders to gather and use the information about how different groups of pupils are performing to sharpen improvement plans or check that actions are working as well and quickly as they could.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The governing body is ambitious for the school.
 - Governors are knowledgeable and realistic about the school's effectiveness. They do not just rely on information provided by the headteacher, but visit lessons, talk to pupils, look at books and meet with other leaders and staff too.
 - The governing body makes effective use of training to improve its own work. Minutes of meetings

make clear that the governing body asks challenging questions of leaders. Governors' instincts are right, but they do not always have enough information about different groups' performance. This means that governors cannot be certain about which uses of additional funding are making more or less difference to how well gaps are closing between disadvantaged pupils and others.

- In its drive to improve further, the governing body has already begun to engage in an external review to look closely at its work.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school completes all relevant checks on staff systematically and the governing body monitors these arrangements. Regular and effective training in different aspects of safeguarding ensures that staff follow agreed policies and procedures.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment **is good**

- Teachers demand high-quality work from pupils, especially in English and mathematics. They make pupils think hard. From the younger year groups onwards, pupils learn not to give up. This is particularly helpful when trying to work out tricky mathematics problems, for example. As one older pupil put it, 'We come to school to face challenges and the teachers help us to overcome those challenges.'
- Teachers' skilful questioning pushes pupils to extend and explain their answers. This probes pupils' thinking and deepens their understanding, including the most-able pupils. Teachers 'bounce' ideas between pupils as appropriate, judging the pace and momentum of the lesson carefully to support learning.
- Pupils report that teachers explain things clearly, which helps their understanding. Teachers are adept at picking up and tackling pupils' misconceptions and often anticipate what these might be.
- Teaching assistants make a strong contribution to pupils' learning. They work well in partnership with the teacher, reinforcing their high expectations. Teaching assistants are clear about their intended role, dovetailing with teachers so that lessons run smoothly. This enables teachers to spend valuable time teaching small groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, to close any gaps in their understanding and help them catch up with their peers.
- Teachers give pupils helpful written and verbal feedback. Pupils say that this helps them to improve their work and move on in their learning. Teachers make sure that pupils have time to follow their advice and guidance and make necessary changes to their work.
- Mathematics teaching has particularly improved since the previous inspection. Teachers make good use of real-life objects, mathematical apparatus and visual images to support pupils' understanding of concepts and calculations. Regular problem-solving tasks challenge pupils to use their skills in different contexts. However, leaders have correctly identified that in some classes pupils do not always cover enough different aspects of mathematics in a sufficiently timely manner to be certain to meet all expectations for their age.
- The school follows a highly structured literacy programme to teach pupils about the sounds letters make (phonics). Teaching in these sessions is sharply focused. Sessions dedicated to teaching English grammar, punctuation and spelling are also moving on pupils' skills well. However, pupils do not always have sufficient opportunities to really use and embed these skills by writing freely for a longer period, especially in Key Stage 1.
- Leaders have correctly identified that not all of the strengths in teaching are embedded as consistently at Key Stage 1 as they are in other years.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare **is good**

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils have good and often exceptionally positive attitudes to learning. They respond well to teachers' high expectations, taking care with and showing pride in the quality and presentation of their work. As one pupil reported, 'We have to think about the quality of our work.'
- When working together, pupils cooperate and collaborate very well. They are polite, courteous and respectful to each other and adults. By the time they reach Year 6, pupils are well equipped with the learning behaviours that will stand them in good stead in secondary school.

- Pupils feel safe. They understand about how to keep themselves safe, including learning what to do and what not to do when online. Pupils know about good habits to keep themselves healthy. The 'friends' society donated a water bottle for each pupil at the start of the year and pupils understand the importance of keeping hydrated.
- Bullying is infrequent and dealt with well by the school. Parents that spoke to inspectors with any direct experience of issues reported that these were well dealt with and resolved quickly. However, not all parents share this confidence. Pupils understand what bullying is and feel that they can talk to adults in school if they have a problem. The school council helps plan anti-bullying week, but work to make sure that pupils understand the different actions they can take if they have a problem is ongoing, such as using class 'worry boxes'.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The highly organised, purposeful and attractive environment throughout the school and classrooms sets the tone for the high expectations within. Pupils' conduct around the school and at breaktimes is good.
- Pupils are very positive about what they see as recent improvements in behaviour. They like the clear system of rewards and consequences introduced this year and report that adults follow it consistently. Occasionally, one or two pupils do not stay focused in lessons, or interrupt by calling out. Although behaviour in lessons is good, leaders and pupils would like to see these incidences reduce still further.
- Pupils enjoy school and attend regularly. Attendance fell slightly in 2015, although it was still broadly in line with the national average. Current attendance is now much closer to the above-average levels seen in 2014.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils make good progress across all key stages in reading, writing and mathematics. Progress in mathematics has especially improved since the previous inspection.
- Standards at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 have been broadly average since the previous inspection. This is a significant improvement on previous levels, which were below average. In recent years, a greater proportion of pupils that needed to catch up with others nationally, did so. This meant that they were better prepared for the start of their secondary education.
- In many cases, the gap between outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and others in school and nationally have closed well. In most cases for current pupils, they continue to do so. In recent years, disadvantaged pupils have sometimes overtaken other pupils, for example by the end of early years and in the Year 1 phonics screening check. However, at the end of Year 6, these gaps have fluctuated over time. Leaders are currently using some of the pupil premium funding to provide additional lessons for the current Year 6 on a Saturday morning to reduce existing gaps further. These are well attended.
- Pupils with special educational needs and disability make good progress in line with other pupils. Strong leadership of this area has led recently to more accurate identification of special educational needs. Rigorous monitoring of the quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs is leading to further improvement.
- At the previous inspection, pupils' grasp of mathematical terminology was holding back their progress. This is no longer the case. Across the school, pupils now know, understand and can use increasingly complex mathematical vocabulary. Effective use of counting sticks in mathematics supports pupils' learning and rapid recall of multiplication tables and other number facts.
- In Key Stage 2, where pupils often have more opportunities for writing for extended periods, pupils apply their grammar, punctuation and spelling increasingly well. They learn well how to adapt their writing for different purposes and how to edit and redraft their work to make it even better, guided by feedback from the teacher. The most-able writers make careful choices in their writing, knowing that sometimes a simpler word might be the most effective.
- Pupils make good use of their phonics skills to read and write. The results of the Year 1 phonics screening check have risen steadily in recent years. Current pupils are on track to match or exceed previous national averages. In the past, those that have not met the standard in Year 1 have caught up quickly in Year 2.
- The most-able pupils make similar progress to their peers across Key Stage 2. In early years, more

children are on track to exceed expectations by the time they start Year 1 than has been the case in the past. However, the proportions of pupils reaching the higher levels by the end of Key Stage 1 have remained stubbornly low.

- Pupils who speak English as an additional language make especially good progress. Although White British pupils make good progress, they do not do as well as other pupils in school.

Early years provision

is good

- Children make good progress across Nursery and Reception Year. From starting points that are often below those typical for their ages children catch up quickly. This means that the proportion reaching a good level of development has risen above the national average, preparing them well for Year 1.
- Adults' assessments of children's knowledge, skills and understanding are accurate. They use these well to make sure that activities support the next steps that children need to take in their learning.
- Focused teaching in both Nursery and Reception Year gets children off to a good start learning phonics. Adults take opportunities to reinforce this throughout the day, for example asking children to say the first letter sound of items as they play.
- Adults interact well with children, moving their learning on through different activities. An adult playing alongside the children in the farm shop role play area made sure that children were making the most of the social, language, writing and mathematics opportunities that the activity provided. In Nursery, an adult's careful questioning steered children into an investigation to find things in the classroom that were attracted by a large magnet.
- Children enjoy learning and engage well, both when being taught by an adult and when choosing their own activities. They mix well together and show that they feel happy and safe to join in with the varied tasks. Behaviour during focused group sessions is good because adults make them fun.
- Where disadvantaged pupils start with a lower level of knowledge and skills than the other children, additional funding contributes to effective and targeted support to help them catch up. Good links with other agencies and professionals help support children's health needs or identify special educational needs early, so that children receive the additional support that they need.
- Staff work hard to encourage parents to be involved with their children's learning and education, including at key transition points. Very recently, parents have been encouraged to come into school to read with the children every Wednesday, which has proved more popular than previous phonics and mathematics workshops.
- Support for the early years leader from the local authority has helped to secure a greater consistency of good-quality provision in Reception Year. Although now typically good, leaders have identified that the quality of different areas of learning, adult support and the environment is not consistently at the highest level.

School details

Unique reference number	118756
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	10002344

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	447
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Margaret McDowall
Headteacher	Katharine Sexton
Telephone number	01634 832578
Website	www.st-michaels.medway.sch.uk
Email address	office@st-michaels.medway.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	15–16 October 2013

Information about this school

- This school is much larger than the average-sized primary school and the number of pupils is rising.
- The school serves pupils from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. The largest single group is those of White British heritage, although this represents less than one third of the total.
- Nearly half of all pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is slightly higher than the national average. This is additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or looked after by the local authority (disadvantaged pupils).
- The proportion of pupils identified to receive additional school support for disability or special educational needs is just below average. The proportion with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is broadly average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations of pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school provides a breakfast club.
- The headteacher started in January 2015, after the previous inspection.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited all classes to gather evidence about what teaching and learning is typically like. They spent time watching lessons, looking at a range of pupils' work and classroom displays, talking to pupils and discussing with leaders what they had seen. Many of these observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders from the school.
- Pupils, staff, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority met with inspectors to discuss different aspects of the school. Inspectors also spoke to a wide range of people informally, including parents, to gather views.
- Inspectors analysed 37 responses to the online Parent View survey and took account of 30 questionnaires returned by staff.
- They sampled other aspects of the school's work, including leaders' own records of the school's effectiveness, and scrutinised safeguarding arrangements.

Inspection team

Clive Dunn, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Matthew Brown	Ofsted Inspector
Lynn Lawrence	Ofsted Inspector

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