

Michaelchurch Escley Primary School

Michaelchurch Escley, Hereford HR2 0PT

Inspection dates	21–22 June 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

- The headteacher provides clear and effective leadership. She is ably supported by a united staff team and dedicated governing body.
- Leaders have addressed the key issues from the previous inspection well. Teaching is consistently good and pupils across the school achieve well.
- The numbers on roll are rising because leaders work hard to cater for the needs of individual pupils and parents.
- There are many strengths in teaching. Teachers plan interesting and challenging activities for pupils with different levels of ability.
- Pupils are polite, courteous and well behaved. They are very proud of their achievements and their school.
- Attendance is above average as pupils enjoy school and are keen to learn.
- Pupils make good progress from their individual starting points in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2014 and 2015, attainment at the end of Year 6 in reading was well above average.
- Children in the early years make a good start to school life. Teaching focuses on their individual needs and staff ensure that children develop the skills and knowledge needed to achieve the expected standards.
- Governors are highly effective in their roles. They make a significant contribution to setting the right priorities for the school and collecting first-hand evidence of how well the school is doing.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The teaching of phonics (letters and their sounds) is not good enough to ensure that pupils reach the level required in phonics by Year 1.
- Some pupils do not have secure spelling strategies to help them spell unfamiliar words.
- Not all available information is taken into account when determining children's starting points on entry to the Reception class.
- Subject leaders are not fully involved in checking the quality of teaching to identify where further improvements can be made and where best practice can be shared.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the teaching of phonics to ensure that pupils reach the levels required by Year 1 and teachers give equal attention to promoting writing alongside reading.
- Improve the teaching of spelling so that pupils have the strategies needed to spell unfamiliar words.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that all forms of evidence are used to determine secure starting points for children in the Reception class
 - developing the roles of subject leaders so that they are fully involved in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning in order to identify where further improvement can be made and where best practice can be shared.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher, governing body and staff team are resolute in their determination to provide high-quality care and support to every pupil at Michaelchurch. Together, they have created a caring and nurturing school where pupils thrive socially, academically and physically. The highly inclusive nature of the school ensures that all pupils are happy, feel safe and achieve well.
- Leaders' evaluations of the school's strengths and weaknesses are honest and accurate. Clear and comprehensive action plans are drawn up in association with school governors to tackle areas of weakness. Leaders regularly review these plans to determine which actions are leading to success.
- The headteacher sets targets for all teaching staff to ensure that pupils make good progress. Midyear and end-of-year reviews are carried out to check that these targets are met. Coaching and support for teachers who are newly qualified have ensured that they quickly gain the skills needed and match the expectations set within the school.
- Being a small school, teachers carry several subject responsibilities. All teachers assess pupils at regular intervals and the headteacher collates and shares this information with staff and governors. As a result, all staff and governors have a good understanding of how well pupils are achieving in different classes and in different subjects. However, under their leadership roles, teachers do not routinely have opportunities to observe the quality of teaching of colleagues or check work in pupils' books to identify where improvements are needed or where best practice exists. The headteacher is keen to develop this aspect.
- Pupils benefit from a well-planned, rich and varied curriculum. Exciting topics help develop and build on pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, but also offer opportunities for research and enquiry. The school's motto of 'be curious' is strongly promoted and incorporated into visits to support topics studied. Pupils particularly enjoyed their local history topic and the visit to Michaelchurch graveyard to gather fascinating facts from gravestones about local families. All pupils enjoy 'forest schools' on Fridays when they work outdoors and learn less conventional skills, such as building fires. Exciting clubs and a range of visits also help enrich the curriculum and provide memorable learning experiences for pupils.
- All staff pay due attention to developing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils have a good understanding of different cultures and people who hold different beliefs because these are taught well in lessons and assemblies. They have a good knowledge of British values and can articulate clearly the meaning of democracy and the rule of law. Staff make good links to current affairs in order to make these aspects relevant, for example through the recent mini-referendum for pupils about being a member of the European Union. As a result, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders use the pupil premium grant effectively to support the very small number of pupils who are eligible. The school provides additional help in the classroom and through one-to-one tuition where pupils have a particular need, for instance with extra reading sessions. The funding is also used to assist with school trips and participation in wider curricular activities, for example music tuition. Additional staffing costs are also subsidised so that pupils receive social and emotional support from teaching assistants and lunchtime supervisors.
- Leaders have made good use of the sports funding provided. They have purchased resources and provided additional training for staff from sports specialists in order to increase their confidence in teaching physical education (PE), for example, and dance and football. Pupils participate in a wider range of activities as a result of the opportunities offered, for example fencing lessons. They enjoy local competitions such as cross-country running. Regular participation in sports activities strongly contributes to pupils' physical health and well-being.
- Parents have very positive views of the school. Those who access the 'flexi-school' arrangement are hugely grateful for the opportunity this affords them to be closely involved in their child's education by home-schooling their child for one or two days a week. Typical comments made by parents include 'My children are developing to be happy, confident, well-rounded individuals.' and 'Our children love this school!'
- The local authority has carefully monitored the progress of the school since the previous inspection. It has provided suitable levels of support and challenge. For example, it has carried out checks on safeguarding and the quality of teaching to ensure that pupils are safe and receiving a good education.

■ The governance of the school

- Governors are highly effective in their roles. They were resolute in their determination, after the previous inspection, to support the school in regaining its status as a good school. They are now striving to become outstanding. They are fully involved in checking the quality of teaching and monitoring the achievement of pupils. They have a good knowledge and understanding of the key areas for improvement as they contribute to the formulation of the school development plan.
 - Governors ensure that their own knowledge and skills are kept up to date. They attend relevant training, for example, in relation to finance, to ensure that the budget is well managed. They also carry out regular audits and evaluations of their own skills and respond to areas that they feel they need to strengthen. This contributes significantly to the effectiveness of the governing body as they have an accurate and detailed understanding of strengths and weaknesses.
 - Governors have a good grasp of assessment information. They receive regular reports from the headteacher about the progress made by different groups and cohorts of pupils. They set challenging targets for the headteacher which are based on whole-school priorities and monitor these carefully. They have a good overview of the quality of teaching and the performance management of teaching staff. External advice is commissioned to ensure that the headteacher and governors receive an objective view of how well the school is achieving.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The headteacher and governors have created a culture that successfully aims to keep pupils safe and teach them about personal safety. All staff know the procedures to follow if they have a concern about a pupil as they receive regular training. School policies are shared widely and kept up to date. Leaders have improved site security so that staff and pupils are not at risk. Safer recruitment checks are carried out on staff to ensure that they are suitably qualified and able to work with children.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching is good throughout the school. Teachers plan stimulating lessons which enthuse and motivate pupils. They question pupils well to check their levels of understanding and probe their thinking further. Teachers check pupils' progress regularly throughout the lesson. They provide effective support to those who are struggling and move pupils on when they show they are ready.
- Teachers are aware of the needs of pupils with different abilities and set work at the right level. Teachers and support staff provide additional help for pupils who have special educational needs or disability, and for those who are disadvantaged, both in lessons and through one-to-one intervention sessions. Good levels of challenge are set for the most able pupils to extend and deepen their thinking. Teachers also set and mark work for pupils who are flexi-schooled. This extends work learned at school. Clear criteria and instructions are given so that parents and pupils know precisely what to do. As a result of good attention to detail for all groups, all pupils achieve well.
- Teachers encourage pupils to read widely and often. Pupils in Years 2 to 6 are fluent readers and develop good reading habits, such as reading at bedtime. They show good levels of comprehension and can talk about their favourite authors. Although most children in the Reception Class and Year 1 learn their letters and sounds, some struggle to reach the level required in the phonics check at the end of Year 1. This is because the teaching of phonics is not always precise enough and some misconceptions are not addressed. For example, during the inspection, children were learning to use and spell words with the 'ow' sound, as in 'low, mow, blow'. Children added single letters in front of the taught sound to make new words. While the teacher explained that 'fow' was not a real word, children's offers of 'jow' and 'dow' were accepted and not explained. Additionally, acceptable words, such as 'snow' were not put into context or into sentences in order to develop and extend the writing capacity of pupils.
- Teachers plan different writing activities to cover the various genres of writing within the national curriculum. They manage the mixed-aged range of pupils in their classes well and have high expectations for all age groups. Good levels of challenge are set which pupils respond to. For example, pupils in Years 2, 3 and 4 ably added more complex vocabulary and detailed descriptions to a short piece of simple text produced by the classteacher in order to make it more interesting for the reader and less 'boring'. All pupils were highly motivated and used words such as 'exhilarating' and 'exhaustedly' which added significantly to the quality of their writing. However, pupils' spelling remains weak in most classes and pupils lack strategies to spell not only difficult words but common words such as 'upon', as in 'once upon a time'.

- Teaching in mathematics has improved and teachers increasingly set problem-solving activities and tasks which require pupils to draw on and apply different mathematical skills. For example, during the inspection, high levels of challenge were posed for the most able pupils in Year 5 to convert metric and imperial measurements. Pupils used their preferred written multiplication and division methods alongside estimation and mental mathematical skills to reach their answers.
- Homework is set each week by teachers for pupils across the school. A great deal of attention is given to ensuring that the work set is appropriate, builds on previous learning and is marked regularly. Tasks build on and further develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills and knowledge.
- Teachers apply the school's marking policy consistently and provide pupils with helpful guidance to show them how to improve their work further.

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 are confident and have high self-esteem because assemblies, such as the 'gold award' assembly, recognise and celebrate the achievements of individuals. Key values, such as perseverance and the importance of lifelong learning, are also strongly promoted in assemblies and lessons. This makes a positive impact on pupils' attitudes to learning.
- Pupils have a very good understanding of the importance of a healthy diet and regular exercise in order to stay healthy. Pupils enjoy nutritious hot dinners at school or bring healthy picnic lunches to eat outdoors in the summer. They play a wide range of games and sports at playtimes, including football and tennis. Many also choose to climb on fixed climbing frames or on the recently installed climbing wall. All this contributes to pupils' good level of fitness and well-being.
- Pupils show high levels of maturity and readily take on additional responsibilities. Older pupils mingle easily with younger children and keep a careful check to make sure that they are happy at breaktimes. All pupils feel comfortable to offer their opinions and contribute fully in class discussions.
- Pupils say they feel safe and they have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe as this is taught well. During the inspection, Year 6 participated in a 'crucial crew' safety day and increased their level of knowledge and understanding about road, rail, water and fire safety, as well as the dangers associated with electricity and using the internet. Pupils also feel confident to talk to an adult if they have a problem. The school's 'worry box' is a mechanism which allows them to share any anxieties they may have, for example, in relation to the residential trip to London for older pupils.
- Pupils are aware of different forms of bullying but say this doesn't happen at their school as 'Everyone gets on well together.' Several pupils who spoke to the inspector, and comments made by parents, show that some pupils feel they were bullied at their previous school and this was a contributory factor in their moving school. They say this has now stopped and pupils are much happier at Michaelchurch.
- The high levels of nurture, support and care afforded to pupils, together with their improved achievement, ensure that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Pupils are aspirational and keen to get good jobs in the future, for example as an author, vet or physiotherapist. As a result, they work hard in lessons in order to achieve their goals.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave well in and around school. They are polite and respectful to adults, including to visitors, and to each other. They take turns and share equipment sensibly.
- Pupils do not wear school uniform as the school's policy does not require this. However, pupils enjoy the freedom this allows them and feel that wearing their own clothes contributes to their individuality.
- Pupils look after the school environment well. They tidy equipment away when asked and ensure that the playground and outdoor areas are litter free.
- Pupils enjoy school and this is reflected in their good attendance. Attendance over time is above average but has dipped slightly this year due to some pupils leaving the school and not registering at another school for several weeks. They therefore remained on the school roll of Michaelchurch but were marked as absent. Good systems are in place to track and monitor pupils' attendance.
- All parents, staff and pupils who expressed a view agree that behaviour is good.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics across the school. This ensures that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education. The school's own assessment information, together with work in pupils' books, shows that the large majority of pupils are working at age-appropriate levels. Attainment in reading is strongest but there is clear evidence of improvement in mathematics and writing, although spelling remains a relative weakness.
- Attainment at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2 fluctuates due to the impact that the very small numbers of pupils have on published data. It is average overall over time, but above average in reading at the end of key stage 2. The proportion of pupils making good progress from their respective starting points in key stage 2 was in line with national figures in 2014 and 2015. This demonstrates that actions taken by leaders since the previous inspection have been successful.
- Pupils enjoy reading and many read for pleasure. However, the numbers reaching the level required in the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2014 and 2015 were below the national average. Inspection evidence suggests that not all the pupils currently in Year 1 are working securely at the levels required.
- The pupils who are flexi-schooled make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders carefully monitor their progress and reserve the right to withdraw the flexi-school agreement if pupils begin to fall behind others who attend school full time.
- The most able pupils make good progress, especially in key stage 2. This is because teachers set suitably challenging work, which extends and deepens pupils' skills and knowledge.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability receive good support both in class and through one-to-one tuition. This enables their individual needs to be fully met. As a result, pupils make good progress and achieve as well as others in their class.
- There are only a very small number of pupils who are disadvantaged in the school. The additional academic and personal support each pupil receives, together with wider curriculum enrichment opportunities, ensures that these pupils reach the levels expected for their age and make good progress.

Early years provision

is good

- Most children join the Reception class with skills and knowledge which are typical for their age. They make good progress due to good teaching, which is well matched to their interests and needs. The proportion reaching a good level of development was above average in 2015 and the school's own information shows that this is set to be achieved again in 2016. As a result, children are well prepared for life in Year 1.
- All children achieve well in the early years, including the small number who have special educational needs or disability or who are disadvantaged. This is because regular and additional support is provided to help them keep up with their classmates. The most able children, together with others in their class, are presented with good levels of challenge. Weekly 'choosing challenges' are set to encourage children to explore and discover, for example mixing colours to make green or orange and finding resources to double numbers. This extends children's learning and increases their levels of independence.
- Teaching is good. There is a good balance between activities which children choose for themselves and tasks which adults lead. Adults skilfully question and observe children to determine their levels of knowledge and understanding. These observations are carefully recorded and added to children's assessment records.
- Teachers and teaching assistants provide good levels of nurture and support. They have a detailed knowledge of each child's ability in different areas. They use this knowledge to plan a wide range of tasks, which extend and develop all aspects of the early years curriculum. For example, some children skilfully programmed computer robots to develop their technology and directional skills. Others used construction toys imaginatively to make 'robot arms' or vehicles with trailers.
- Good use is made of the outdoor and indoor areas to extend children's physical development and social development. Children use the climbing frame and other outdoor equipment well. They readily socialise and collaborate with the Year 1 pupils in their class and with older children in the school at breaktimes.

- Adults manage children's behaviour very effectively. Firm but calm commands are given when children are not listening or following instructions. Skilful strategies are used to ensure that children quickly regain their focus and pay attention. Adults take children's safety and welfare very seriously. All staff check that children feel safe and are kept safe in school.
- Leadership of the early years is good. Learning journals and children's books contain valuable information about what children know and can do. Photographic evidence and notes made by adults also provide additional evidence to support leaders' assessments. However, on occasion, not all the information available is used to establish a secure judgement of children's abilities on entry: for example, records provided by the pre-school or the very first pieces of work produced by children. As a result, assessments are sometimes overly cautious.
- Strong links are established with parents from the outset. Parents appreciate the information provided by teachers about their child and value the guidance and work provided for those who are flexi-schooled. Links with pre-school are also positive and, as a result, induction procedures are effective and children settle quickly in school. Children are happy, safe and well cared for.

School details

Unique reference number	116714
Local authority	Herefordshire
Inspection number	10012399

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	43
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Benna Waites
Headteacher	Louise Crocker
Telephone number	01981 510208
Website	www.michaelchurchprimary.co.uk
Email address	admin@michaelchurch-escley.hereford.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	4–5 June 2014

Information about this school

- This school is much smaller than the average-sized primary school. Pupils are taught in three mixed-age classes.
- The school offers 'flexi-school' arrangements to 10 pupils currently. This offer is subject to approval by the headteacher but allows pupils to be taught at home for one or two days per week. For the remainder of the week, these pupils are taught in school. This arrangement is aimed at integrating younger or previously home-schooled pupils into full-time education, involving parents more in the education of their child and helping families who have to travel long distances to get to school.
- Children in the early years are taught in a mixed class of Reception and Year 1 pupils. Most Reception Year children attend full time but some attend part time as they are taught at home under the school's flexi-schooling arrangement.
- All pupils are of White British heritage and none speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is well below the national average. The pupil premium is additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those in the care of the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is well below the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 6.
- The headteacher is employed on a part-time contract for three fifths of the week. The deputy headteacher is acting headteacher for the rest of the week.
- Since the previous inspection, the number of pupils on roll has increased from 24 to 42 and most teachers are new to the school.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching in all classes. She saw five parts of lessons, all of which were jointly observed with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with pupils, the headteacher, other staff with leadership responsibilities and members of the governing body. The inspector also spoke to a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector took account of the 27 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the comments made. She also spoke to parents as they brought their children to school. Pupils' views were collected by talking to pupils during the school day and through the 25 responses submitted through the pupils' questionnaire. Staff views were considered through the six responses to the online survey.
- The inspector listened to pupils read, talked to them about their learning and reviewed the work in their books.
- The inspector reviewed a number of documents, including the school's own evaluation on how well it is doing, the school improvement plan, school information on current standards, leaders' reports about the quality of teaching and learning, minutes of governors' meetings and records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Heather Simpson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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