

Maidstone, St Michael's Church of England Junior School

Douglas Road, Maidstone, Kent ME16 8ER

Inspection dates

13–14 March 2018

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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders have maintained the good quality of education the school provides since the previous inspection.
- Parents are very happy with the education their children receive at St Michael's.
- Middle leaders, including those responsible for English, mathematics and pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, have had a positive impact on improving provision, teaching and pupils' progress.
- Pupils write well in English and in other subjects. They enjoy writing and take pride in their work.
- Pupils feel safe and enjoy the wide range of interesting activities planned for them, including trips and enrichment events.
- The curriculum is engaging and helps pupils make valuable connections between areas of learning.
- The effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment in the school is typically good, so that most pupils make good progress in most subjects.
- Pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare are good. Pupils are polite, friendly and respectful to each other and adults. Their positive attitudes support the good progress they make with their learning.
- Following a dip, teaching and learning in mathematics has improved, but is not yet sufficiently well embedded to ensure that all pupils make good or better progress.
- Disadvantaged pupils are now making similar progress to their peers. While they are not all catching up with others nationally, they are not falling further behind.
- Leaders and governors do not always evaluate the effectiveness of their actions precisely. Therefore, it is sometimes difficult for them to see clearly how well changes made are improving pupils' outcomes.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the impact of leadership, management and governance by:
 - ensuring that leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness is accurate and based on clear evidence, so that any weaknesses are identified precisely and addressed promptly
 - making precise use of assessment information to evaluate school performance, including the progress of different groups of pupils such as the disadvantaged, and to check success in making improvements
 - evaluating the impact of the new mathematics curriculum while embedding new approaches to teaching, so that all pupils reach their potential.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- School leaders and governors are passionate about the school and ambitious for the pupils. They are proud of recent improvements they have made to the curriculum and to the learning environment.
- Parents are very positive about the school and know that staff look after their children well. Attendance is good because pupils enjoy coming to school. As one parent wrote, 'My daughter skips into school and always has lots of exciting things to tell me about. She's happy, so I'm happy!'
- Middle leaders are enthusiastic and can identify areas where improvements are still needed. They have improved their specialist knowledge and use this well to support others and develop helpful policies and practices. As a result, teaching has improved in mathematics, high standards have been embedded in writing and provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities has been strengthened.
- Leaders check pupils' progress regularly. They identify individuals who fall behind and provide additional intervention and support. Leaders have ensured that disadvantaged pupils benefit from helpful additional opportunities and pastoral support. Although progress has improved, funding is not yet reducing the differences in attainment rapidly enough between these and other pupils.
- Staff are positive about the school and feel well supported. They receive regular training and as a result have improved their skills and subject knowledge. They work together to plan and develop their teaching. Leaders' checks on the quality of teaching and the management of performance of teachers focus on classroom activities and pupils' engagement in learning. Leaders do not always focus sufficiently on the achievement of individual pupils or different groups of pupils to make sure that learning is as effective as possible.
- Sometimes the school's evaluation of its own performance is not precise. The school's development plan correctly identifies the school's priorities. However, leaders do not use information about pupils' achievement precisely, to inform their improvement goals. This limits leaders' ability later to check the school's progress accurately and identify the appropriate next stages of development.
- Pupils receive a broad and balanced curriculum which allows them to gain a good knowledge of the world and current issues. Areas of the curriculum are often linked together, which adds to pupils' engagement and enjoyment of learning. An example is making 'plastic milk' in science, considering the impact of plastic on society and relating this to stories and research about plastics. During the inspection a dedicated week of special activities brought learning in science to life.
- Pupils' understanding of British values is promoted well. Displays around the school are well designed to demonstrate the school's values and to celebrate the achievements of pupils. There are a wide range of valuable leadership roles for pupils, including house captains, school council representatives, librarians and learning detectives.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

successfully. This means that the school is a calm, orderly environment where pupils work and play happily together.

Governance of the school

- The federation shares one governing body, who are motivated to support the school's leaders to do a good job. Appointments are carefully made to broaden the range of expertise and experience of the governing body. The committee structure has been designed to focus on key strategic areas and respond to statutory duties.
- Governors attend meetings and receive information from the school's leaders about how well the school is doing. They check school leaders' evaluation of improvement work but do not challenge leaders enough to provide clear evidence of the impact of this work. For example, while governors monitor the use of additional sport funding effectively, they are less effective in testing the evidence they are given about pupils' progress, including the progress of disadvantaged pupils.
- Governors visit the school to view changes to the curriculum and to monitor areas of the school's development plan and other areas such as pupils' behaviour and safeguarding. They are effective in making sure that the school takes the right steps to keep pupils safe and behaving well.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and governors ensure that staff are fully up to date with information about keeping children safe. School leaders comply with the requirements of safer recruitment.
- Staff know pupils well and are quick to report any concerns they have about children in the school. These concerns are acted on in a timely way and appropriate referrals are made to other agencies. However, initial concerns, notes of actions taken and next steps required are not always recorded in a systematic way.
- Pupils feel safe in school. Lessons on topics such as internet safety, bike safety and stranger awareness help pupils to understand how to keep themselves safe. Supervision in the playground is good and makes sure that pupils are secure. Parents agree that pupils are safe in school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers successfully stimulate pupils' interest in learning. They plan work that builds on and extends pupils' knowledge and understanding. Where teaching is strongest, pupils make consistently good progress because teachers are clear about what pupils need to do to succeed.
- Teaching is generally characterised by positive working relationships. Pupils know what is expected of them and comply with requests from staff very quickly. Teachers often make effective use of discussion to develop pupils' understanding. There are plenty of

opportunities for pupils to reflect on their learning, share ideas and learn from each other. This promotes their good progress.

- Pupils' writing is a strength of the school. Teachers use high-quality texts to promote an interest in writing and to help pupils to develop their writing skills. Pupils are helped to enrich their vocabulary and use relevant technical language. They have opportunities to write at length and to develop their writing using links to other subjects or contemporary issues. As a result, pupils enjoy writing, write well and take pride in their work.
- In the past, the teaching of mathematics has not been good enough. Leaders have taken successful action to develop teachers' skills in this subject. Teachers now make more effective use of resources to support pupils' learning. They make sure that pupils have opportunities to explain their ideas, use their skills to solve problems and develop their reasoning. However, the school's new approach to mathematics is not yet fully embedded. As a result, on occasions, some teachers do not set work that consistently meets the needs of all pupils.
- Pupils are given frequent opportunities to develop their reading skills and they are encouraged to read for enjoyment. They make good use of the library. As a result, pupils read well and can explain what they are reading.
- Teachers provide clear explanations of what they want pupils to learn and useful guidance for pupils to check how well they are doing. Teaching assistants contribute well to learning. They use their specialist knowledge effectively to support pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities to improve their learning.
- Homework is used effectively to support learning. Most parents are satisfied with the amount of homework which is set, but some comment that homework is sometimes general rather than specific to the ability of the pupils.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are happy and enjoy coming to school. They appreciate the care they receive from adults and feel confident that there is always an adult there to talk to and support them.
- Leaders and staff provide effective help for pupils who need additional support for their social and emotional well-being. This is helping many of these pupils become more successful learners.
- Pupils are given a wide range of leadership opportunities. They spoke positively about their impact on the school community. For example, they make choices about improvements to the school playground. They also report on the effectiveness of classroom strategies as 'learning detectives'. These responsibilities help develop pupils' social skills and confidence.
- Pupils understand the different forms that bullying can take but this is rare at the

school. They do not tolerate derogatory language. They know that adults will respond rapidly to any concerns they might have.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils move sensibly around the school and hold doors open for visitors, for example. They are polite and courteous and keen to talk about their school and their learning.
- Pupils take pride in their work, their appearance and the school in general. The inspectors saw no low-level disruption during lessons. Some pupils reported there are times when they are distracted and talkative. When this happens, teachers help them to behave well.
- Attendance is above the national average but there are a small number of pupils who do not attend regularly enough. Staff are persistent in their efforts to improve the attendance of these pupils and provide support to them and their families when concerns emerge.
- Occasionally, when teaching is not challenging enough, pupils lose concentration. However the pupils understand the expectation to 'stay green' as good learners and quickly refocus on their learning with teachers' help.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- In 2017, the proportion of pupils that attained the expected standards in mathematics was below the national average. Disadvantaged pupils and the most able did not make enough progress. Leaders responded by improving teachers' subject knowledge and changing the ways in which mathematics is taught. As a result, the majority of current pupils are starting to make more rapid progress. Nevertheless, there is more to be done to embed these new approaches fully across the school so that all pupils do as well as they should.
- Across the school, pupils' progress in reading has improved because of the consistently effective teaching. Pupils of all abilities can use phonics to sound out unfamiliar words and pupils read for meaning. The school promotes reading well through activities such as the use of stimulating texts related to the wider curriculum and current issues, which capture the interests of both boys and girls.
- There has been a whole-school focus on developing pupils' skills as writers. Pupils have opportunities to write in English and in other subjects. They are learning a wide range of new vocabulary and have developed technical skills. As a result, pupils' writing has become a strength.
- The most able pupils, in the past, did not consistently achieve higher standards in all subjects. This has now been addressed through staff training and changes to teaching. Pupils are now working at greater depth, through more frequent opportunities to write at length, solve problems and apply their mathematical reasoning. As a consequence, the performance of most-able pupils is improving.
- The needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, those with low prior attainment

and disadvantaged pupils have all been identified by teachers. As a result, they are given helpful additional support to overcome barriers to learning and are making better progress. However, while disadvantaged pupils are making good progress, they are not making the accelerated progress needed in order to close gaps rapidly enough between them and other pupils nationally.

School details

Unique reference number	118625
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10040706

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	7 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	164
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nicholas Morgan
Executive Headteacher	Lisa Dicker
Head of School	Sue Heather
Telephone number	01622 751502
Website	www.st-michaels-junior.kent.sch.uk
Email address	sheather@st-michaels-junior.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11–12 December 2013

Information about this school

- St Michael's is a smaller-than-average-sized junior school. The school is part of the St Michael's Church Schools Federation with St Michael's Church of England Infant School. There is one governing body for the federation.
- The large majority of pupils (71%) are of White British heritage. A higher-than-average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above average. The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is below average.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors met with governors, the executive headteacher, the head of school, school leaders and other members of staff. Inspectors took account of the 21 responses to the Ofsted staff survey.
- Inspectors observed pupils' learning in all classrooms, including joint observations with the executive headteacher and other senior leaders. Inspectors looked at pupils' work from all year groups and in different subjects, both during visits to classrooms and through a separate work scrutiny. Meetings were held with pupils to discuss their learning and gather their views about the school, the curriculum, behaviour, safety and leadership opportunities. Inspectors listened to pupils read and observed pupils in classes and around the school.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documents and policies, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement documents and information about pupils' learning and progress. Inspectors reviewed safeguarding policies and procedures, including the records of checks on the suitability of staff. Behaviour and attendance records were also reviewed.
- Inspectors took account of the 35 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 20 free-text responses. Inspectors also spoke with parents and carers at the start of the school day.

Inspection team

Ann McCarthy, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Peter Wibroe

Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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