

St Michael's School

Harts Lane, Burghclere, Newbury, Berkshire RG20 9JW

Inspection dates

14–16 May 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Senior leaders' decisive and determined actions have improved the school notably since the last inspection. Safeguarding is now rigorous and effective. All parts of the independent school standards are now met.
- Senior leaders know their school well and are ambitious for it to be even better. The impact of their improvement work is evident in the secondary phase of the school. Wider leadership, both in the primary phase and of provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), is earlier in its evolution, having changed personnel recently.
- The proprietor provides appropriate support to school leaders, contributing usefully to improvements in safeguarding and management routines. Currently, strategic challenge around standards of teaching and pupils' outcomes is less well developed.
- Leaders ensure that pupils learn about a suitably broad range of subjects. Early experiences in the primary phase prepare pupils appropriately for the academic rigour of the secondary curriculum. Planned opportunities for wider learning develop pupils' understanding of the world successfully.
- Pupils attain well because teaching is consistently good. Pupils work hard and are supported effectively by their teachers. Consequently, pupils gain qualifications by the end of Years 11 and 13 that equip them suitably for their next steps in learning.
- The very small number of students in the sixth form receive a good quality of education. Leaders ensure that students' academic and pastoral needs are met successfully. As a result, students are mature, thoughtful and well prepared for life beyond school.
- Standards of welfare are extremely high. Leaders give careful thought to pupils' specific needs, especially those who join the school from overseas and those who attend as boarders. Pupils feel extremely well cared for.
- Pupils rise to adults' very high expectations for their attendance and conduct. Absence from school is extremely rare. In lessons and around the school, pupils behave impeccably, showing respect for each other and the adults around them.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that leadership across the school is of consistently high quality by developing:
 - the rigour by which the proprietor holds senior and middle leaders to account for their impact on the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes
 - the skills and effectiveness of the school's wider leadership, particularly in relation to the primary phase and provision for pupils with SEND.
- Make sure that teaching builds precisely on pupils' prior learning, so that:
 - progress is routinely as strong in the primary phase as it already is in the secondary phase of the school
 - pupils who most need to catch up, including those with SEND, do so rapidly.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since the last full inspection in October 2017, the headteacher has risen to the challenge of improving the school. He has wisely prioritised actions that were of the greatest urgency. As a result, the school now meets all of the independent school standards, including those relating to safeguarding.
- The headteacher is supported ably by the deputy headteacher, who joined the school in April 2018. Together, they have a secure understanding of the school's relative strengths and weaknesses. Their collective work has ensured that appropriately high standards of teaching and pupils' attainment have been sustained over time, while other aspects of the school have been the focus of development work.
- Although senior leaders' work is well established, wider leadership is less consistently so. Secondary subject leaders, who took up their posts in September 2018, are suitably ambitious and are making a difference in their areas of responsibility. However, leadership of the primary phase is in a state of transition, after a member of staff left the school at Easter. Similarly, leadership of provision for pupils with SEND is in the relatively early stages of development. As such, the impact of some aspects of wider leadership, while evolving, is more embryonic than in other areas of the school's work.
- A culture of high ambition permeates through the school. Staff demonstrate their high aspirations successfully, embracing the changes in school systems and approaches over the past two years that have supported school improvement well. Staff are supported effectively through access to useful training opportunities that enhance the quality of their work. They are held to account through helpful systems that focus rightly on ensuring that teaching enables pupils to make strong progress, particularly in the secondary phase.
- Pupils experience a curriculum that equips them well for the future. Starting in Year 1, a firm foundation in English and mathematics is enhanced through access to a rich and varied range of other subjects. Once in the secondary phase of the school, the academic curriculum is complemented by a suitable range of extra-curricular activities which are available to boarders and non-boarders, and to girls and boys alike. As a result, pupils develop an appropriately broad understanding of the world around them.
- Opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are rooted in the life of the school. Their study of religious knowledge as part of the taught curriculum widens their understanding, not just of their own faith, but also that of others. Pupils demonstrate a highly developed sense of respect for each other, readily accepting those who are different to them. They have a sophisticated understanding of their place in the world and the importance of their contribution to life in modern Britain.
- Presently, the small number of girls in the secondary phase are taught separately from the boys. This arrangement is due to end when girls currently in Year 10 leave the school at the end of Year 11. Leaders take great care to make sure that boys and girls benefit equally from high-quality teaching, which enables both groups to learn successfully. Similarly, planned opportunities enable boys and girls to interact routinely with each other, such as through their visit to the chapel at the start of each day. As such, neither group is disadvantaged by the current arrangements for their education and pastoral care.

Governance

- On behalf of the Society of St Pius X, the proprietor oversees the school's work appropriately. He shares senior leaders' aspirations for pupils to develop into thoughtful, well-educated contributors to the world they live in. Since the last inspection, his strategic and practical work has supported senior leaders effectively in securing safeguarding arrangements in the school and ensuring that the independent school standards are met.
- The proprietor has a sufficiently detailed understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. He is known well by, and readily accessible to, staff and parents, enabling them to share any concerns promptly with him in the confidence that he will act on them. He maintains a useful oversight of pupils' published examination results, which justify his confidence in the quality of education provided by the school.
- The rigour with which leaders are held to account for the progress of pupils currently in the school is less well developed. Consequently, some actions to address historical questions about the quality of teaching and leadership have been slower to emerge than they might have been. Challenge to leaders around meeting the school's legal duties and making best use of funding and resources is, by comparison, more robust and effective.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have rightly prioritised improving this aspect of the school's work. Their actions have strengthened practice notably, through a comprehensive review and development of systems, structures and training. Consequently, safeguarding arrangements are rigorous and promote a culture of vigilance successfully.
- The school's safeguarding policy is fit for purpose. It is accessible to parents and carers through the school website, meeting the independent school standards around its publication. It demonstrates leaders' clear understanding of their responsibility to ensure pupils' safety and welfare. The commitment of staff and the proprietor to this cause is palpable throughout the school and valued by pupils and their parents.
- Staff now have a secure understanding of their safeguarding duties. They act promptly and appropriately where concerns arise about a pupil. They use effective systems to report and record their worries, building a picture of emerging issues. This enables leaders to act in pupils' best interests, putting useful support in place. Well-established links with the local authority contribute successfully to this vital part of the school's work.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Across the school, pupils' attitudes to learning are very positive. They expect to work hard and apply themselves diligently to the task at hand. They respond consistently well to teachers' clear expectations for their conduct in lessons. As a result, the environment across the school is highly conducive to learning.
- Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They plan learning that builds pupils' understanding and skills successfully over time and across a range of subjects. This is managed particularly carefully in the primary phase, where pupils are often taught in

mixed-age classes.

- Pupils are supported effectively by useful resources which help them to structure their learning. At times, this risks stifling opportunities for pupils to practise what they have learned, for instance by using their grammatical skills to write more freely in key stages 1 and 2. Pupils demonstrate pride in their work, presenting it with care.
- Where teaching is most effective, such as in English in the secondary phase, teachers match learning activities closely to pupils' emerging learning needs, facilitating strong progress. Pupils engage thoughtfully in their work and think deeply about what they are learning. Some pupils' books, such as in Year 8 physics, show pupils learning challenging concepts relative to their age.
- Teachers know their pupils very well. This enables them to provide pupils with timely and specific extra help that supports their progress. Pupils value how teachers work closely with them, both in and beyond lessons, to address misconceptions and revisit areas of learning they have not grasped securely. As a result, pupils develop their knowledge, skills and understanding securely.
- In the primary phase, pupils develop their early writing and mathematics successfully. For instance, inspectors saw Year 1 pupils' books containing simple sentences written neatly with accurate spellings and punctuation. Standards of early reading seen during the inspection were less secure, with pupils not routinely using their phonics skills to decode unfamiliar words. However, over time, pupils develop secure reading skills that enable them to access the curriculum successfully.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are supported well. Their peers act as buddies, helping pupils to settle in and learn routines, so that they can access learning successfully. Useful extra help ensures that EAL pupils make strong progress over time, both in English and across the wider curriculum.
- Teaching and learning in the sixth form is equally strong. Students approach their work with maturity, tackling challenging content with determination and careful thought. They demonstrate their understanding through their articulate engagement in discussions with their teachers, within and beyond the classroom.
- Pupils' learning in lessons is complemented usefully by regular homework, which boarders complete during dedicated preparation time outside of the school day. Leaders make careful checks to ensure that homework benefits boarders and day pupils equally. Parents are largely positive about homework and how it contributes to their children's learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Throughout the day and in all parts of the school, pupils thrive because they are so well cared for. Consequently, they develop successfully as mature and sensitive contributors to their school community.
- Staff clearly care about pupils' well-being and are keen to provide for their needs. Improvements to safeguarding arrangements since the last inspection have contributed notably to developments in this aspect of the school's work. Pupils' understanding of how

to keep themselves safe is sophisticated relative to their age. Pupils describe feeling very safe. They are unanimous in their confidence that adults will listen to and help them with issues that may cause them anxiety or distress.

- The school is a harmonious place. Bullying rarely occurs, because relationships between pupils are so well developed. Pupils are highly supportive of each other.
- Older pupils benefit from useful and impartial advice that helps them to make considered choices about their next steps at the end of key stages 4 and 5. They have a clear understanding of the range of options open to them, such as apprenticeships and university courses. This helps them to make mature and appropriate decisions about their future employment, education or training.
- Pupils benefit from rich opportunities to contribute to their school and local community. Older pupils play an important role in helping the school to run smoothly, for example by supervising younger pupils playing football during their recreation time. Sporting fixtures and whole-school events, such as quizzes and masses, bring pupils of all ages together around a common purpose.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Adults' high expectations are realised consistently well. Pupils conduct themselves impeccably, speaking respectfully to those around them. Derogatory and aggressive language does not occur.
- Pupils' enthusiasm for school is demonstrated by their very high attendance rates. Absence is extremely rare. In the unusual event of a pupil not coming to school, prompt checks are made to ensure that the pupil is safe and to bring them swiftly back to school.
- Leaders keep careful records of the small number of instances of misbehaviour that happen. They look for patterns that help them to identify where specific needs are emerging, addressing them effectively. As a result, pupils respond well to appropriate consequences, returning to the high standards of behaviour seen routinely around the school.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- From broadly average starting points, pupils attain well in reading, writing and mathematics during the primary phase of the school and in a broad range of academic subjects by the end of Year 11. This prepares them successfully to move on to further education or employment, either at St Michael's or at another post-16 provider.
- Outcomes in the sixth form are similarly positive. Over time, the proportions of pupils attaining at least a C grade in the mathematics and science A levels they study compare favourably with national averages. This equips students well to pursue routes into education, employment or training.
- Across key stages 3 and 4, leaders keep a careful check on the progress pupils make towards their suitably aspirational targets. This enables leaders to deploy extra help in a purposeful way, so that those pupils who fall behind catch up swiftly with their peers in school. This work is less well established in the primary phase and for pupils with SEND, although progress and attainment are, nevertheless, good over time. In particular, pupils

in Year 8 are making excellent progress.

- Pupils who speak English as an additional language do well as a result of their time at St Michael's. Often, they are at the school for a relatively short period of time or join the school during the secondary phase. They swiftly develop their English skills, which enables them to achieve well across the wider curriculum.
- Primary-age pupils develop a secure understanding of mathematics and English grammar, demonstrating standards that are at least in line with what might be expected for their age. Opportunities for them to transfer their learning into the wider curriculum, such as through writing at length and with precision about their learning in other subjects, are less routinely evident. Similarly, although pupils read with sufficient fluency, their use of phonics to decipher unfamiliar words during early reading appeared less well established from the evidence gathered during the inspection.
- Different groups of learners make equally good progress. Broadly, girls and boys attain similarly, as do boarders and day pupils. A very small minority of pupils in the primary phase attain below their peers, because their progress has not currently been sufficient to help them to catch up from their very low starting points.

School details

Unique reference number	116594
DfE registration number	850/6062
Inspection number	10091636

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	4 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	78
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Society of St Pius X
Chair	Reverend Robert Brucciani
Headteacher	Reverend John Brucciani
Annual fees (day pupils)	£5,700 (primary), £6,900 (secondary), £7,500 (sixth form)
Telephone number	01635 278 137
Website	https://fsspx.uk/en/st-michaels-school-homepage
Email address	secretary@sanctusmichael.com
Date of previous inspection	10–12 October 2017

Information about this school

- St Michael's is an independent Catholic school for pupils aged four to 18. Presently, there are no pupils in the early years and Year 12. There are currently five male students in Year 13 who are close to completing their courses. There is boarding provision for boys aged 11 and above, which is registered and inspected separately by social care inspectors.
- Each year, a number of pupils join the school from overseas, some for a relatively short time. Typically, the boys are accommodated in the boarding provision on site while girls

stay locally, sometimes with families of other pupils who attend the school.

- Pupils in the primary phase are taught in three classes: Year 1, Year 2/3 and Year 3/4/5/6. In the secondary phase, pupils are taught in single year-group classes, with boys and girls taught separately. There are currently boys in Years 7, 8, 9 and 11, and girls in Years 8, 10 and 11.
- The school's proprietary body is the Society of Saint Pius X (SSPX), a global organisation whose main purpose is the formation and support of Catholic priests. St Michael's is the only school connected with SSPX in the United Kingdom. A named proprietor represents the proprietary body and has responsibility for governance of the school.
- In October 2017, the school and boarding provision were inspected simultaneously, and were judged to be inadequate. Progress monitoring inspections subsequently took place in June 2018 and October 2018. At the most recent monitoring inspection, the independent school standards and national minimum standards for boarding provision were judged to be met.
- Since the last full inspection in October 2017, the proprietor and headteacher remain in their posts. A deputy headteacher joined the school in April 2018. Another deputy headteacher, who had responsibility for the primary phase, left the school in April 2019.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors met with leaders to discuss a range of issues, including standards of teaching and learning, curriculum provision, and pupils' behaviour and attendance. The lead inspector toured the site with the headteacher and deputy headteacher to check compliance with the independent standards in relation to premises.
- Alongside school leaders, inspectors visited lessons across the school, to observe learning, talk to pupils, and look at their work. They also reviewed a sample of pupils' work from across the school and considered information from school leaders about pupils' academic outcomes.
- Inspectors scrutinised safeguarding arrangements, including staff training and records of recruitment checks carried out on adults working in the school.
- Survey responses from 21 parents, 44 pupils and 10 members of staff were taken into account. Inspectors also met a small number of parents informally at the start of the day, and met with groups of pupils from the primary and secondary phases of the school.

Inspection team

Kathryn Moles, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Martin Bragg

Ofsted Inspector

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Manchester
M1 2WD

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