

Inspection of St Michael's Church of England Primary School

Apton Road, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire CM23 3SN

Inspection dates: 10–11 December 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

What is it like to attend this school?

Eco warriors, worship ambassadors, learning superheroes and school orchestras are only a few of the opportunities open to all pupils. Pupils have an impressive understanding of mental health issues, the impact of humans on the environment, inequality that can come from personal circumstances, and how long-term health is linked to what they choose to eat now. Pupils not only know a lot about injustices worldwide, but also do what they can do to make things better. Supporting pupils in Nabikabala, recycling and reducing waste in school, and doing their best to speak kindly to one another, are just a few examples of pupils taking their responsibilities seriously.

Pupils' behaviour on the playground and in class has improved this term, and most do the right thing, most of the time. Bullying, usually relating to unkind words, is taken seriously by staff and pupils. Pupils are quick to tell staff when they experience or see things that are wrong. Staff apply the new behaviour policy fairly and openly.

Expectations for pupils' personal development and well-being are high. Expectations for academic performance are not as high. In some subjects, pupils have not achieved as highly as they should from their individual starting points.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The curriculum covers the knowledge and skills required for each subject of the national curriculum, but helping pupils build on what they know from one year to the next has not had enough attention. For English and mathematics, curriculum plans give teachers the information they need to help pupils reach the standards expected for their age. For most other subjects, the plans are too thin to do the job. The limitations of the plans, alongside some low expectations from staff, contributed to declining standards since the school was previously inspected.

Although aware of what pupils know and can do, teachers do not adapt activities enough to meet the needs of all pupils, particularly for those with special educational needs (SEND) and for those who are ready and able to extend their skills. Opportunities for pupils with SEND to apply what they know at their own level without too much support are limited. Some parents express concerns about the support for pupils with SEND.

The provision for children in the early years is much stronger than that in the rest of the school and does not require the same amount of development. Children learn quickly to get along with each other. Phonics is taught particularly well. Children read and spell confidently at an early age.

Having quickly recognised the improvements needed for the curriculum and teaching, the new headteacher put important things in place. Training and support were put in place for teachers and subject leaders. The teaching of phonics beyond early years and the decline in pupils' writing were prioritised. The work has paid off.

Not only are gaps in skills for reading, spelling and writing identified and filled, but behaviour in the classroom has also improved because the teaching meets the needs better for those who find it hard to stay focused.

Classroom staff, subject leaders and governors take on board the work that needs to be done. Initially, staff were concerned about the time available to develop the curriculum, and improve teaching and subject leadership. Senior leaders and governors listened to the concerns, and staff are now more confident that they have time and skills to do what is needed. There is now a governor responsible for overseeing the well-being of staff.

A long-term plan for developing each curriculum subject is in place. The groundwork was already in place for all subjects, and the plan focuses well on building connection from the learning from one subject to another, and across each year group. Current work on the history curriculum is paving the way for the future development of other subjects.

Some parents have concerns about pupils' safety and bullying. It is true that there has been some inappropriate behaviour, especially from older pupils over recent months. Improvements in the quality of teaching and the revised policy and procedures for managing pupils' behaviour have led to a more settled atmosphere in class and on the playground.

The curriculum for pupils' personal development is strong. Opportunities are wide ranging, no one is left out and staff are always on the lookout for things that individuals can excel at. Year 6 pupils have special responsibilities, particularly for supporting the youngest pupils. Pupils have fond, lasting memories of the Year 6 pupils who helped them and were kind to them when they were younger.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff have a strong awareness of what it means to keep children safe in school and beyond. Each month, the deputy headteacher produces a safeguarding bulletin for staff, which provide useful updates and reminders for a range of relevant information about keeping children safe.

Pupils take seriously their responsibilities to help keep one another safe and feel good about themselves. They know a lot about different forms of bullying, including how unkind actions and words can lead to inequality, unhappiness, insecurity and misunderstandings.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The transition arrangements have been taken into account when making the judgement about the quality of education. The curriculum is not yet sufficiently

planned and sequenced in some subjects. However, it is clear from the actions that leaders have already taken to plan the curriculum and train staff in how to deliver it, that they are in the process of bringing these things about.

- The curriculum for foundation subjects is not yet coherently planned and sequenced. Teachers do not have enough information to plan work that will help pupils gain high-quality knowledge, skills and understanding. Plans need to show how learning builds sequentially over time and, where appropriate, across subjects. Subject leaders need to develop the skills required to play their part in improving the quality of education.
- Teachers do not use assessment well enough to adapt their planning and help pupils apply what they know and can do at their own level. This weakness particularly applies to pupils with SEND and those with the potential to learn at greater depth. Pupils are not achieving as well as they could. Teachers need the skills and expertise to implement a curriculum that meets the needs of all pupils.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	117426
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10110335
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	224
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Mrs Margaret Jarman
Headteacher	Mrs Joanne Fradd
Website	www.stmichaelsjmi.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	3 February 2009

Information about this school

- There have been two new headteachers since the previous inspection. The current headteacher took up the post in September 2019.
- The school has a religious, Christian ethos. The most recent section 48 Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) was on 27 March 2019, when the inspector judged the religious aspects of the school's work as excellent. The next SIAMS is likely to be in 2024.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We deemed the inspection a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

- This inspection began as a section 8 inspection. Although exempt from routine inspection because previously judged as outstanding, the school was selected for inspection as a result of declining standards over time. The inspection became a section 5 inspection during the morning of the first day.
- We met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, the leaders for English, mathematics, history and special educational needs. We met all available staff at the beginning of the inspection, and talked to some staff during and after the

lesson visits.

- We met with the chair of the governing body and two other governors, and with a local authority adviser.
- We met with groups of pupils about their work and their experiences of what the school offers. We spoke to some pupils during lesson visits and playtimes.
- We met parents on the playground at the start and end of the days. We considered the 88 responses to Parent View, and the correspondence from two parents sent to Ofsted after the inspection.
- A range of documents was scrutinised and discussed, including leaders' self-evaluations and the school improvement plan.
- We did deep dives in the following subjects: reading, writing, mathematics and history. The deep dives involved discussions with subject leaders, lesson visits, looking at pupils' work, talking to pupils and talking to teachers.
- To inspect the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding arrangements, we scrutinised the single central record of employment checks with the school business manager, met with the designated leader for safeguarding (the headteacher), spoke to staff about their knowledge and understanding of the school's safeguarding arrangements, and spoke to pupils about their views and knowledge about keeping safe.

Inspection team

Heather Yaxley, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

David Milligan

Ofsted Inspector

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