

Inspection of an outstanding school: St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Maple Avenue, Braintree, Essex CM7 2NS

Inspection dates:

17 and 18 November 2021

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this initial (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a full inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a full (section 5) inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are proud of their school. They are polite and enthusiastic. Many pupils look after each other. They feel safe and cared for. Older pupils enjoy opportunities to read to younger pupils. Pupils talk respectfully to teachers, visitors and each other. When they sit at tables together at lunch, pupils wait for everyone to sit down before starting to eat.

In lessons, pupils rise to the high expectations that teachers have of them. Hands pop up frequently, as pupils volunteer to contribute to class discussions. Pupils confidently explain difficult ideas with accuracy. When they find something hard, pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), get the help that they need.

Although pupils generally play together well during social times, there is too much pushing and shoving around the school site. Pupils want teachers to put a stop to this more quickly than they do currently. When bullying occasionally happens, teachers deal with this swiftly.

There are many special traditions that are part of school life. For example, pupils serve 'French breakfast' to raise money for their trip to France. Children in Reception get involved in 'multicultural day', which celebrates the different backgrounds of children and their families.

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

Leaders' subject plans are ambitious and designed effectively. Subject leaders have identified crucial content for pupils to focus on. In geography, for instance, leaders ensure that all topics make links to compass directions. This is so that pupils are confident in

applying their knowledge of eight points of a compass by the end of key stage 2. As a result, pupils, including pupils with SEND, build knowledge rapidly. They talk about subjects with great excitement.

In lessons, teachers focus on key content that will help pupils unlock more difficult content. Teachers choose lesson activities well so that pupils focus their thinking squarely on key knowledge. For example, children in Reception move around the classroom from table to table, saying and writing accurately the sounds they have learned.

Teachers do not move on to the next topic unless pupils are secure in the knowledge they need. When pupils find something difficult, teachers explain new ideas using knowledge that pupils have already remembered. When, for instance, pupils do not understand a new idea in mathematics, teachers give clear explanations by using times tables facts that pupils already know.

Pupils' ability to read well is a priority for leaders and teachers. There is a focus on teaching phonics from the beginning of Reception. Children use tales they are told as part of their play, acting out the story with each other. Older pupils are encouraged to retell, to family and friends outside of school, the stories they have learned.

Occasionally, the books that teachers use to help pupils learn to read are not chosen well enough. When this happens, some pupils, especially pupils with SEND, struggle with some of the words they read. This slows down the rate at which some pupils learn to read fluently.

Pupils' behaviour in lessons is calm and orderly. Pupils are respectful when listening to each other's contributions. They are keen to share their own ideas. Outside lessons, pupils' behaviour is not as positive as it should be. Most pupils use their social time responsibly and are friendly to each other. However, some pupils push and pull each other. Staff do not manage this well. Governors have begun to challenge leaders to make improvements in this area of school life.

Leaders and teachers are effective at dealing with bullying. Pupils are confident that, if it happens, teachers will put a stop to it.

Pupils appreciate the range of activities that leaders put on that show pupils how different people live in society. For example, the whole school participates in 'world languages day' where pupils find out about the traditions, cultures and languages from visitors representing different countries. Pupils talk enthusiastically about the clubs and activities that they attend, as well as fund raising for good causes. The range of activities broadens pupils' horizons and prepares them well for the modern world.

Leaders do not communicate with parents clearly enough. The school has increased its provision for pupils with SEND, but many parents are unclear about the level of support pupils receive. Staff largely feel supported by leaders. Teachers are pleased that leaders have stopped requesting excessive paperwork. Teachers have turned their attention to improving the way they teach subjects. Subject leaders show other teachers how to teach subject knowledge accurately. They are effective in leading this training.

In discussion with the headteacher, the inspector agreed that reading, pupils' behaviour and communication with parents may usefully serve as a focus for the next inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There are four members of staff trained to lead safeguarding. This is to make sure that a safeguarding leader is available if and when the need arises. Leaders know the risks that there are in the local area. They make sure pupils have the right information to keep themselves safe. Staff have appropriate safeguarding training and know what to do if they have concerns. Leaders work with external agencies to support vulnerable pupils and to make sure they get the help they need.

Leaders and managers have made the necessary pre-appointment checks on staff. Governors check the single central record of these checks to make sure it is accurate and kept up to date.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The books that some pupils read are occasionally not well matched to what pupils know. This slows down the way that some pupils, including pupils with SEND, learn to read. Leaders should ensure that the books that pupils use to learn to read are closely linked to the sounds that each pupil has learned, so that all pupils can learn to read in a speedy and accurate way.
- Outside lessons, some pupils do not behave as they should towards each other. This means that behaviour outside lessons is not good enough. Leaders should ensure that pupils learn to act in responsible ways at all times.
- Leaders' communication with parents and carers is not as clear as it should be. This means that parents, including parents of pupils with SEND, are sometimes not clear about what the school's provision is and how the school is supporting pupils. Leaders should improve communication with parents, including providing them with clear information about SEND support and provision.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in December 2015.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View 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 are the school and you are 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	115157
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10199485
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	413
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Jennifer Bailey
Headteacher	Mr Andrew Cumpstey
Website	www.stmichaelsbraintree.co.uk/
Date of previous inspection	15 and 16 December 2015, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This is a larger than average sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan is above the national average.
- Since the previous inspection, the headteacher has appointed an additional special educational needs and disabilities coordinator (SENDCo). There is now a SENDCo for early years and key stage 1 and a SENDCo for key stage 2.
- This is a Church of England school which also receives denominational (section 48) inspections. The last section 48 inspection took place in July 2017. The next section 48 inspection is due within the next two years.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and has taken that into account in his evaluation.

- The lead inspector met with the headteacher, assistant headteacher and two leaders with responsibility for SEND. The lead inspector also met with members of the local governing body.
- The lead inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, geography and mathematics. For each deep dive, the lead inspector met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also looked at curriculum plans in art and design.
- The lead inspector spoke to pupils, staff, leaders, managers and governors about the school and its safeguarding arrangements. The lead inspector looked at the single central record of recruitment and vetting checks, and a range of safeguarding files and bullying logs.
- The lead inspector looked at 116 responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, which included 87 free-text responses submitted during the inspection. The lead inspector also looked at 24 responses to the staff survey. There were no responses to the pupil survey during the inspection.

Inspection team

Richard Kueh, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates:
<http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2021