

Inspection of a good school: St Michael's VA Junior School

Astley Road, Chapel Break, Bowthorpe, Norwich, Norfolk NR5 9LA

Inspection dates:

21 and 22 February 2023

Outcome

St Michael's VA Junior School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils feel very happy and cared for at St Michael's. They are kept safe by staff and a dedicated pastoral team who know individual pupils well. Pupils are confident that they have a trusted adult to talk to if they need to. They experience very little bullying. If there is any unkind behaviour adults quickly intervene, and it stops.

Pupils enjoy learning and value their lessons. They study a broad curriculum and talk confidently about the interesting topics that they learn about, such as rivers and map-reading. Pupils' pride in their learning comes through in the high-quality presentation of their book work. All pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), benefit from adults' high expectations of what they can achieve.

Throughout the school, pupils behave well. They are respectful and polite to each other and to adults. Relationships between staff and pupils are very positive and this contributes to a warm school culture. During playtime, pupils are encouraged to be courageous and adventurous. They love to play in the well-designed playground. This includes different zones such as tepees to make dens in, a mud kitchen, swinging ropes, slides, an outdoor library and a wild area.

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

Leaders have implemented an ambitious curriculum. This has addressed the cause of the relatively weak outcomes in writing and in spelling, punctuation and grammar in 2022. Leaders have thoughtfully planned what pupils need to learn and when. This careful sequencing ensures pupils build on prior learning, which helps them to make connections between old and new knowledge.

Leaders have identified the small steps of knowledge that pupils need to know and remember before moving on to a new topic. They have ensured that lessons are well designed with appropriate resources to support learning. Teachers have received effective training which ensures that they deliver the curriculum well. They use assessment

appropriately to check pupils' understanding and adapt their teaching when needed. For example, in mathematics, all lessons start with a recall of prior learning. Teachers then adapt their lesson, or series of lessons, if any misunderstandings or gaps in understanding are identified. Regular quizzes and sufficient time for independent practice allow pupils to develop their fluency.

In a small minority of subjects, some adults are less skilled in supporting pupils to get better. Sometimes, teachers move on to a new task before all pupils have had sufficient opportunities to learn or practise key knowledge. This means that some pupils can struggle to recall prior learning as well as they should.

Reading is given high priority in the school. Many pupils join with relatively weak reading skills. Leaders ensure that these pupils receive targeted support to enable them to quickly gain fluency in their reading.

Leaders are skilled in making sure that pupils with SEND have their needs identified quickly and accurately. They secure appropriate help for pupils. This ensures that pupils are integrated well into the school and fully supported to achieve as well as they should.

Leaders provide pupils with high-quality opportunities to develop their interests and leadership skills. This includes sports clubs which are well attended. Leaders ensure that pupils celebrate differences in society and are well prepared for life in modern Britain. The culture society is a particularly popular club, and pupils are rightly proud about their knowledge and understanding of different cultures.

Leaders, including governors, are fulfilling their duties effectively. They ensure that decisions are made in the pupils' best interests. Staff are proud to work at the school and parents are equally positive about their experiences.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding have ensured that staff are confident at identifying and reporting on any pupil who may require further help. Safeguarding leaders are skilled at supporting pupils who may be at risk of harm. They follow up any concerns in a timely and appropriate manner, liaising with external agencies where necessary. Pupils have a good, age appropriate, understanding of how to stay safe.

Leaders carry out the appropriate safeguarding checks on adults before they start work in school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Teachers do not consistently ensure that pupils are given sufficient opportunities to learn and practise smaller component knowledge and skills before moving on to a new

topic or assessment. This means that some pupils have gaps in their knowledge or understanding which are not identified and addressed quickly enough. Leaders need to ensure that, across all subjects, teachers give pupils sufficient opportunities to master the smaller curriculum components and check their understanding before moving on.

Background

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

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in December 2012.

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 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.

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	121146
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	10255233
Type of school	Junior
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	7 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	401
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Rosemary Games
Headteacher	Helen McCarney
Website	www.stmichaelsjuniorschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	21 September 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school does not currently use any alternative providers.
- The school has a Christian religious character. The school's most recent section 48 inspection took place in February 2016. The school's next section 48 inspection will be within eight school 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 leaders and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics and geography. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspector also scrutinised the writing curriculum and scrutinised pupils' English books.

- The inspector met with staff responsible for the administration of the single central record of recruitment and vetting checks. She also met with the designated safeguarding lead to discuss the arrangements that are in place to safeguard pupils. The inspector scrutinised the school’s safeguarding records and spoke to governors regarding safeguarding.
- The inspector met with pupils to discuss their experience of school, including clubs, behaviour and bullying.
- The inspector met with leaders to discuss pupils’ personal development and enrichment opportunities, as well as behaviour and attendance.
- The inspector met with the school’s special educational needs coordinators.
- The inspector met with governors and scrutinised a range of documents relating to school improvement.
- The inspector considered 40 responses to Ofsted’s online pupil survey. The inspector took account of 19 responses to Ofsted Parent View, including 17 free-text responses. The inspector also considered 42 staff responses to Ofsted’s staff survey.

Inspection team

Bessie Owen, lead inspector

His Majesty’s Inspector

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