

Inspection of a good school: St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, St Albans

St Michael's Street, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL3 4SJ

Inspection dates:

16 and 17 May 2023

Outcome

St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, St Albans continues to be a good school. There is enough evidence of improved performance to suggest that the school could be judged outstanding if we were to carry out a graded (section 5) inspection now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy attending St Michael's Primary. It is a friendly, welcoming school where learning is exciting. Pupils arrive smiling, as they enjoy coming to school. The school's vision of pupils experiencing 'Life in All Its Fullness' successfully creates a caring and nurturing environment for them.

Pupils study a broad and interesting curriculum. Leaders are highly ambitious about what pupils can achieve. Pupils learn what is special about where they live. Pupils, including those who join part way through the year, achieve very well.

Pupils are happy and safe here. Some pupils describe the school as being like a 'big family' where everyone is cared for. They are enthusiastic about the great experiences that adults provide for them. Sports, cooking, arts, computing and gardening are just some of the many clubs pupils can enjoy.

Staff have high expectations for all pupils. Pupils behave very well. The rules are clear and help them to treat everyone with respect. The older pupils enjoy helping younger pupils as their buddies.

Pupils understand what bullying means. Bullying is extremely rare. Pupils are confident that adults would deal with any unkindness well.

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

Leaders have thought carefully about what they want pupils to learn and when. They have set out the content and vocabulary that pupils should learn in each subject. This

begins from the early years. This ensures all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, gain the useful knowledge and skills they need to be successful learners. Leaders are ambitious in their thinking about the curriculum. They have skilfully blended the rich local heritage of St Michael's and the Roman Verulamium into the content pupils learn.

Teachers provide opportunities for pupils to recall and practise using what they have learned before. They routinely check pupils' understanding during lessons with skilful questioning. Pupils have lots of opportunities to practise new knowledge. Teachers explain new knowledge clearly and link this to what pupils already know and can do. This helps to remind pupils of the knowledge they will need to be successful in their new learning. During lessons, teachers notice if pupils have not understood. They then explain again or reteach when pupils are unsure. This ensures pupils can keep up and be successful with their learning. Teachers provide 'Maths Meetings' as a time when pupils can practise what they have learned. This helps pupils to become more fluent in solving problems.

All staff and pupils understand the importance of reading. Children are introduced to reading from the start of Reception. Phonics is taught consistently well. Teachers quickly spot pupils who have gaps in their reading knowledge. Staff support them to catch up effectively. This enables almost all pupils to become confident and fluent readers. Teachers read books to pupils every day from a range of texts. This helps pupils to develop a love of reading and extends their knowledge of the world. Pupils are enthusiastic about the many books they can choose from in the school and class libraries.

Pupils take responsibility for their behaviour. They are enthusiastic and highly motivated learners. They listen well to their teachers' explanations and instructions. As a result, the learning flows seamlessly in lessons. This allows pupils to complete their learning tasks to a high standard.

Leaders and teachers accurately identify the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) in a timely manner. This includes children in the early years. Leaders ensure that pupils with SEND receive clear and detailed support. They review this support regularly to make sure it is effective. There are links to specialist support agencies, such as speech and language therapists and educational psychologists. Consequently, pupils with SEND make strong progress through the curriculum.

Leaders provide many opportunities for pupils to learn how to be good citizens. Pupils learn about and experience democracy. For example, voting is used in school to choose pupils to represent others. Pupils can be house captains or representatives on the collective worship, eco, school and library councils. Pupils gain strong values. They treat everyone equally and with great respect.

Staff feel well supported by leaders. Leaders prioritise pupils' well-being and academic achievement as one. They have effective systems in place to check on the work of others. As a result, pupils thrive at St Michael's.

Governors have the knowledge and expertise to be very effective in their role. They ensure that they are kept well informed so that they can hold leaders to account for the quality of the provision.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure all staff receive safeguarding training regularly. Staff spot when a pupil is at risk of harm. Leaders act on welfare concerns promptly. They work with external agencies to make sure that vulnerable pupils get the support that they need.

Leaders and staff take extra care to ensure pupils are safe when they move between the school's two sites.

Pupils know who to talk to if they have a worry. They learn to stay safe in public places and online.

Leaders and governors prioritise safeguarding when recruiting new staff. They carry out and record the required pre-employment checks thoroughly.

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 March 2013.

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	117451
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10241624
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	178
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Alex Sage
Headteacher	Alison Rafferty
Website	www.stmichaelsprimaryherts.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	28 March 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school is a Church of England school in the Diocese of St Albans.
- An inspection to evaluate the distinctiveness and effectiveness of the school's denominational education and worship, under section 48 of the Education Act 2005, took place in January 2020. The next section 48 inspection will take place within eight years of this date.
- The school is expanding. The number of pupils has increased since the last inspection from 147 to 178. Increasing numbers of pupils join after Reception.
- The school operates a breakfast club and an after-school club.
- The school operates on two sites. The postcode of the second site is AL3 4SG.

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 met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, the early years leader, subject leaders, and teaching and support staff.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The inspector also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in some other subjects.
- The inspector met with members of the governing body, including the chair of governors, and a representative from the local authority.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead to discuss the systems and processes in place to keep pupils safe in school. The inspector reviewed the single central record, staff training and recruitment procedures, and records of concern. The inspector also spoke to teachers, support staff, pupils and governors about how well pupils are kept safe.
- The inspector reviewed the records of attendance, behaviour and bullying incidents. They spoke with pupils to seek their views and experiences of the school. The inspector observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and during playtimes.
- The 73 responses to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, were considered, including free-text responses. The inspector considered 13 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and 62 responses to the pupil survey.

Inspection team

Rod Warsap, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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