

# Inspection of St Michael's School

Harts Lane, Burghclere, Newbury, Berkshire RG20 9JW

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Inspection dates: 26 to 28 September 2023

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Outstanding**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

St Michael's religious ethos is central to the school's work and guides everything it does. Morning prayers in the school's chapel provide pupils with regular opportunities for quiet reflection, contemplation and worship. Pupils learn about the importance of values such as charity, tolerance and respect.

The school fosters a love of learning which is reflected in lessons across the school. Pupils develop an impressive commitment to hard work and a determination to do well as they move up through the school. They behave exceptionally well and work diligently in lessons, which are quiet, calm and purposeful.

Adults lead by example. They combine very high expectations with warmth, understanding and good humour so that pupils feel comfortable and secure. Pupils are impeccably polite, greeting visitors cheerfully and with interest. They enjoy school. The youngest arrive happily at the start of the school day, hanging their coats up, putting their things away quickly and settling into their classrooms ready to learn.

Pupils speak enthusiastically about subjects such as cookery, computing and art, while the older pupils appreciate activities such as rugby and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

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

Leaders share a calm determination to achieve the very best for every pupil. They have developed a strong team of staff who are proud to work in the school and are committed to doing their best for the pupils. Staff work closely with parents, who are very pleased with the school and with the progress their children are making. All those parents who completed Ofsted's survey expressed confidence in the school.

The school provides pupils with a broad, balanced and enriched curriculum which continues to develop and grow. For instance, GCSE courses in geography, statistics and Latin have been introduced this year to provide pupils with even more choice than before. Pupils achieve consistently well by the end of Year 6. Learning is enriched with a wide range of activities, including trips and visitors. The older pupils benefit from suitable careers guidance. Leaders are working hard to reinstate work experience opportunities following the pandemic.

Leaders have strengthened the school's reading culture since the previous inspection. For example, they have extended the range of reading materials available, introduced a secondary department library and established regular reading sessions. A well-established phonics programme supports the development of pupils' early reading skills well. Staff are confident about teaching phonics and do so effectively. Developments in the teaching of reading mean that pupils' reading skills at the end of Year 6 are stronger than at the time of the last inspection and continue

to improve. The secondary English curriculum builds effectively on the good start pupils make in their reading in the primary phase.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has improved since the previous inspection. Staff are now more able to identify pupils who may need extra help, including those pupils with SEND. Additional support is now provided for pupils with SEND more routinely than previously, although the quality of support in lessons is variable. This means that pupils do not always achieve as well as they could. Work to strengthen this aspect of the school's work is ongoing.

Pupils behave extremely well throughout the school. They know and follow the school rules and understand how these help to ensure that they can learn in a safe environment. The younger pupils describe everyone as 'kind and friendly', while the older pupils speak of the importance of encouraging and supporting each other. The school's extensive and attractive grounds provide pupils with plenty of opportunities for healthy exercise and fresh air. Pupils use school equipment sensibly and maturely. Consistently high attendance rates reflect pupils' positive attitudes to school.

Pupils learn about world religions during religious instruction classes, as well as in subjects such as history and geography. They are encouraged to respect different backgrounds and beliefs. Relationships and sex education is taught in the school's personal, social and health education programme and in line with statutory guidance and the independent school standards. The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Leaders are clear about priorities for improvement in the school although these are not always defined sharply enough in planning documents. They have developed a reliable system for monitoring the school's performance. The system provides a helpful overview of the school's work for the proprietor and for other members of the leadership team to enable them to hold leaders to account. The chair of the proprietor body supplements documentary evidence with activities which enable him to monitor the school's work, such as regular discussions with leaders and visits to the school. Together, the proprietor body, safeguarding governor and leadership team ensure that the independent school standards are consistently met.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and proprietor)**

- There are variations in the quality of support for pupils with SEND. Some staff lack the subject knowledge and expertise needed to support pupils' needs effectively. Sometimes pupils with SEND do not learn as well as they could

because the curriculum, and the associated tasks set in lessons, are not adapted well enough.

- School development plans do not identify the key priorities for improvement sharply enough. This means that leaders and staff are not always as clear as they could be about where they should focus improvement work. Leaders should ensure greater clarity about which specific aspects of the school's work have been prioritised for improvement.

## **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.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	116594
<b>DfE registration number</b>	850/6062
<b>Local authority</b>	Hampshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10286385
<b>Type of school</b>	Other independent school
<b>School category</b>	Independent boarding school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5 to 18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	79
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	Society of St Pius X
<b>Chair</b>	Father Robert Brucciani
<b>Headteacher</b>	Father John Brucciani
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£6,000 (primary), £7,350 (secondary), £7,800 (sixth form)
<b>Telephone number</b>	01635 278 137
<b>Website</b>	<a href="https://stmichaels-school.uk/en">https://stmichaels-school.uk/en</a>
<b>Email address</b>	secretary@sanctusmichael.com
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	14 to 16 May 2019

## Information about this school

- St Michael's is an independent Catholic school for pupils aged four to 18. Currently, there are no pupils in early years or the sixth form. The school has 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 1/2, Year 3/4 and Year 5/6. Pupils are taught in single-year-group classes in the secondary phase. Girls and boys are taught together in Years 1 to 9. There are no girls in Years 10 and 11.
- The school's proprietor 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 UK. A named proprietor represents the proprietor body and has responsibility for governance of the school.
- The last standard inspection of the school took place in May 2019. The school and boarding provision were last inspected simultaneously in October 2017.

## Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school. Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

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The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

This inspection was carried out at the same time as an inspection of the boarding provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held a wide range of meetings during the inspection. These included discussions with the headteacher, the heads of school and other senior leaders. The inspectors also spoke with a range of staff at different times during the

inspection.

- The views of pupils, parents and staff were gathered through a range of sources, including Ofsted’s surveys and discussions. Inspectors spoke with pupils in lessons and at other times of the school day. They also met formally with two groups of pupils.
- In order to evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils’ interests first.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, English, mathematics and physical education. Deep dives included visiting lessons, looking at pupils’ work and talking with subject leaders, teachers and pupils.
- Compliance with the independent school standards was checked through a wide range of activities, including a tour of the school premises, discussions with leaders and a review of relevant documentation.

### **Inspection team**

Julie Sackett, lead inspector

His Majesty’s Inspector

Maxine McDonald-Taylor

Ofsted Inspector

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