

Inspection of a good school: St Michael's Church of England Combined School

Chapel Square, Stewkley, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire LU7 0HA

Inspection dates:

6 and 7 December 2023

Outcome

St Michael's Church of England Combined School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

St Michael's is a highly supportive, nurturing and aspirational school in the heart of the village. The school's vision of 'together' encapsulates a caring and inclusive community. Staff have high expectations for pupils. The broad and balanced education stretches way beyond learning in the classroom. Right from the Reception Year, pupils are happy and inquisitive learners. As a result, they achieve highly.

Pupils work hard and are respectful of each other. There is a calm and purposeful atmosphere. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and produce high-quality work. They behave well in the classrooms and around the school. Children in Reception make friends quickly and follow the school's routines purposefully. In lessons, pupils answer teachers' questions confidently.

Pupils feel safe in school. They are sure that staff will deal with any problems they may experience. Pupils know how to stay safe, including when online. Older pupils enjoy supporting younger ones, such as through playing playground games with them and accompanying them on visits. Pupils appreciate the extensive range of wider activities, including residential, visiting the 'Secret Garden' (outdoor forest area) and performing at the Royal Albert Hall. They are welcoming to visitors, who teach them about different cultures and faiths.

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

Leaders have designed a well-planned and ambitious curriculum that begins in Reception. Children enthusiastically learn numbers and sounds through various songs and practical activities. Staff support pupils in becoming confident, articulate, and prepared well for future learning. In computing, for example, pupils enjoy and achieve well in coding to design and generate computer games.

Staff have secure subject knowledge. They use it effectively to explain learning so that pupils can understand and relate it to what they already know. Pupils are highly motivated

and keen to participate in lessons. They enjoy celebrating their successes by being specially chosen to ring the 'together bell' in the entrance hall. Teachers have a precise approach to checking pupils' knowledge and understanding of mathematics and reading. In some other subjects, where assessment is less precise, the school is working to refine how teachers check what pupils have learned so that gaps in knowledge can be identified and addressed more quickly.

Leaders promptly identify pupils with additional needs. Teachers make well-considered adjustments for pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). For example, teachers provide suitably adapted work and use specialist resources. As a result, all pupils access the same curriculum, developing the same broad body of knowledge. The well-chosen learning activities support pupils in deepening their understanding, such as in mathematics, where they use fractions and integers to solve problems. Younger pupils use their knowledge of counting to spot missing numbers in number lines effectively.

The school's approach to reading is vibrant and ambitious. A carefully planned approach to phonics and reading enables pupils to achieve highly. Well-trained staff support any pupils who are at risk of falling behind. This ensures that these pupils can quickly catch up with their peers. Pupils have access to a wide variety of high-quality texts. As such, all pupils can access reading at their level. This includes diverse books that promote pupils' cultural and social understanding of their world. Pupils appreciate the range of authors who visit the school regularly to help them learn about writing and storytelling.

Pupils' wider development is a strong feature of the school's work. Pupils benefit from an extensive and deliberate range of opportunities that develop their interests and help them understand their community and how to be a good citizen. This helps to ensure that all pupils have the opportunity to develop their skills and talents in a broad range of ways.

Pupils develop an age-appropriate understanding of healthy relationships and staying safe. Older pupils buddy up and support younger pupils, such as through reading together. Pupils take on roles of responsibility, including eco-councillors, digital leaders and school councillors. They understand their duty with regard to helping others, such as supporting a school in Africa. Pupils recycle their uniforms, and they donate unwanted books and send them to the school.

Leaders engage positively with staff. Consequently, staff enjoy working at and are proud of the school. They have access to high-quality training to develop their professional skills and expertise. Those responsible for governance and staff have an insightful understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development.

The school engages well with parents, who are immensely supportive of its work. One parent said: 'My child is positively thriving at St Michael's. He is increasingly self-assured and has full confidence that if he has a problem, his teachers will help him.'

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some foundation subjects, assessments approaches are less precise. Consequently, gaps in pupils' knowledge are not identified quickly enough, and they cannot always remember essential knowledge and make links in their learning. The school should ensure that assessment processes are consistently effective in identifying gaps in pupils' knowledge so that they can be addressed quickly and effectively.

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 July 2018.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	110414
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	10296170
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	199
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Susie Brister
Headteacher	David Morley
Website	www.st-michaels.bucks.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	4 July 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school runs breakfast and after-school clubs.
- The school does not currently use any alternative providers.
- The school is part of the Church of England Diocese of Oxford. The school's last section 48 inspection was carried out in October 2019.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector held a wide range of meetings and spoke with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, senior leaders, staff and pupils.
- The inspector spoke with members of the governing body.

- The inspector spoke with a representative from the local authority and the diocese.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, and computing. 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 discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- The inspector met with a range of pupils to discuss their views about the school and talked to pupils during playtimes and in lessons.
- Responses to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online survey for parents, including parents' free-text comments, were considered. The inspector also considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff. The pupil survey was available to the school, but there were no responses.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector: reviewed the single central record; evaluated safer recruitment practices; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; met with the designated safeguarding lead and the deputy safeguarding lead; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.

Inspection team

Darren Aisthorpe, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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