



# St Michael's Church of England High School

Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 119795  
**LEA** Lancashire  
**Inspection number** 280663  
**Inspection dates** 15 February 2006 to 16 February 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Mr Garry Jones

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

|                                    |                    |                           |                     |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Type of school</b>              | Secondary          | <b>School address</b>     | Astley Road         |
| <b>School category</b>             | Voluntary aided    |                           | Chorley             |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>         | 11 to 16           |                           | Lancashire, PR7 1RS |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>            | Mixed              | <b>Telephone number</b>   | 01257 264740        |
| <b>Number on roll</b>              | 1137               | <b>Fax number</b>         | 01257 224767        |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>       | The governing body | <b>Chair of governors</b> | Mrs F M Armstrong   |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b> | 1 January 2000     | <b>Headteacher</b>        | Mrs L Nicholls      |

|                              |   |                                    |
|------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| <b>Age group</b><br>11 to 16 | <b>Inspection dates</b><br>15 February 2006 -<br>16 February 2006 | <b>Inspection number</b><br>280663 |
|------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools and four additional inspectors.

## Description of the school

St Michael's Church of England High School is a larger than average comprehensive school, serving the community of Chorley and the surrounding district. The school is popular and is oversubscribed. It is a specialist college for the performing arts and, as such, has established links with local schools and the wider community. The school serves a community with below average levels of socio economic deprivation and the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below that found nationally. The pupils are predominantly white British. There are a small number of pupils from minority ethnic communities and a very few who have English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below that found nationally. The school has received external accreditation through the National Healthy Schools award, Artsmark Gold, Specialist School Trust and Investors in People.

## Key for inspection grades

|         |              |
|---------|--------------|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding  |
| Grade 2 | Good         |
| Grade 3 | Satisfactory |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate   |

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

St Michael's is a good and rapidly improving school, with a number of outstanding features. It provides good value for money. Under the outstanding leadership of the headteacher, ably supported by her senior colleagues and middle managers, a clear vision for raising achievement has been established. As a result of predominantly good, and sometimes outstanding, teaching, pupils' attainment and progress are good. However, some teaching is only satisfactory and there is scope to extend the range of opportunities for independent learning.

The curriculum is well planned to meet the needs of all pupils and provides effective preparation for their future life. The specialist performing arts college has established extensive links with the wider community, and there are well developed links with local employers and colleges of further education. Performing arts status enriches the curricular and extra curricular life of the school; provision for extra curricular activities and enrichment is outstanding. There are effective procedures in place to provide high quality care and guidance and pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. The clear focus on social, moral and spiritual development is a notable strength that creates a calm and ordered environment in which all young people are able to flourish. Pupils enjoy coming to school and their behaviour is exemplary.

The school knows its strengths and weaknesses well and, although the inspection team did not agree with all judgements in the self-evaluation, the majority were accurate. The school has a proven track record of improvement and, despite the forthcoming change of headteacher, has good capacity to become an outstanding school.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Share best practice between teachers to increase the proportion of good and better lessons.
- Provide more opportunities in lessons for pupils to develop their skills for independent learning.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

Achievement and standards overall are good. Pupils enter the school with attainment which is just above average. They make good progress as they move through the school, particularly in mathematics. Their end of Year 9 test and Year 11 examination results are significantly above average, indicating good achievement.

The end of Year 9 test results in 2005 were significantly above average in the three core subjects of English, mathematics, and science. The achievement of pupils has steadily improved over the last 3 years. Results in English showed a significant improvement on previous years, reflecting the school's recent focus on improving literacy skills.

In general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) and other examinations, results in 2005 were above average for boys but well above average for girls, indicating girls achieve very well. Lower attaining boys did not appear to do as well as other groups because a significant minority were entered for fewer than five GCSEs. The school has addressed this issue and has extended opportunities for pupils to gain accreditation in the vocational curriculum. The percentage of all pupils who achieve five or more A\* to C or equivalent grades, including English and mathematics, is well above average. Evidence from GCSE coursework assessments and target reviews indicates that current Year 11 pupils are on course to achieve very well in this summer's examinations.

The school sets challenging targets for pupils and shares them with both parents and pupils. The challenging targets for Key Stage 3 and for GCSE were achieved in 2005. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well because they are effectively taught and receive good support.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Pupils enjoy being at school and attendance is very good. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent. There is very effective provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. A very strong Christian ethos pervades the life of the school and pupils speak perceptively of their spiritual beliefs. Enrichment days, assemblies, attractive displays and visits enhance the cultural development within subject areas. Pupils willingly participate in community activities and make substantial efforts to raise funds for local and international charities.

The relationships between staff and pupils are very good. The pupils are aware of the wide range of people they can approach if they need help. Pupils feel safe and secure and rare incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively. Pupils appreciate being rewarded for good achievement and making positive contributions to the school community.

Pupils' views are well represented through the school council and the area youth council. They contribute to decision making; for example, recently pupils were involved in the appointment of the new headteacher. Pupils know how to maintain a healthy lifestyle and a high proportion take part in additional sport related activities. Pupils benefit from a wide range of extra curricular activities.

Pupils gain substantial experience in enterprise activities and develop work skills in tutor time, enrichment days and through work experience placements.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and some is outstanding.

In the most effective lessons, teachers share clear learning objectives with the pupils and ensure that activities are well matched to their abilities. Pupils are engaged by a good range of interesting and challenging tasks which maintain the pace of learning. Teachers use questions effectively to extend pupils' understanding and develop their thinking skills. They give clear guidance to pupils on how to improve their attainment and as a result pupils make good progress in lessons. Overall, however, pupils have too few opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning and the use of self and peer assessment is inconsistent. There remains some satisfactory teaching. In these lessons, the purpose of the learning is not made sufficiently clear to pupils and there is too much reliance on teacher led activities. The pace of lessons is too slow and the range of activities too limited to fully engage pupils. In some lessons, a weakness was a failure to establish a link between the silent activity at the start of the lesson and the learning objectives.

Pupils listen attentively to teachers and are eager to learn; they enjoy their lessons and speak enthusiastically about their work. Pupils recognise and value the extra support given by teachers outside of lesson times especially prior to external examinations.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The school's curriculum is good and it fulfils statutory requirements. It is well planned to meet individual needs. Gifted and talented pupils benefit from additional challenging activities in and beyond lessons. The grouping arrangements allow lower attaining pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to be taught in smaller groups and they receive very good support. The curriculum prepares pupils well for the next stage of their education and future employment. Basic skills are taught successfully and all pupils benefit from a well planned programme of work related education, personal, social and health education and careers education. Innovative use of single events, when the normal school day is abandoned, enhances provision in these areas. Pupils can choose from a wide range of courses in Years 10 and 11 and specialist school status has helped to provide good opportunities in the performing arts. A successful alternative work related programme is offered to increasing numbers of pupils, some of whom are at risk of exclusion or of losing interest in their education. However, citizenship is not yet fully embedded across all subjects and pupils' progress is not closely tracked across all activities. The recommended time for physical activity is not provided for all pupils in Key Stage 4. Pupils find the short length of lessons in personal and social education, physical education and dance frustrating when lessons they are enjoying have to be curtailed.

Pupils appreciate the excellent range of extra curricular and enrichment activities, particularly in sport, music and the performing arts.

## Care, guidance and support

### Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support of the pupils are outstanding and are greatly valued by pupils and their parents and carers. Pupils are well supported by their tutors and by the pupil managers who oversee each year group. Individual pupils are well known to staff and value the good relationships that are established. Pupils appreciate the three personal interviews they have each year that focus on all aspects of their personal and academic development. Most pupils benefit from the effective monitoring of their progress and the setting of challenging targets to increase their motivation; all pupils would benefit from being made aware of what they must do to improve their standards and achievement.

There are excellent arrangements to support pupils moving from primary school into Year 7. There is a thorough review to ensure early identification of pupils' strengths and weaknesses, which allows for personalised learning support. Pupils receive good advice when choosing options in Year 9 and when progressing to college or employment in Year 11.

Procedures to ensure health and safety and child protection are in place and widely understood. Vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very well supported and closely monitored and there is close

liaison with parents and carers. One good example of this was the highly effective support reported by the carer of a looked after child.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 2

The leadership and management of the school are good. However, the leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. She has established a clear vision for the school and has brought about sustained improvement to all aspects of provision. She is well supported by a committed senior leadership team and has the support of staff and governors. There is a strong commitment to improving the attainment and progress of all pupils, with a focus on the quality of teaching and learning, and this is beginning to impact. An innovative school improvement team has been established to support less effective teachers. The school improvement plan is a clear and concise document, but some success criteria in departmental plans lack sufficient precision

The school self-evaluation is analytical and presents a clear picture of the strengths and areas for development of the school. However, the judgements of overall effectiveness, curriculum and leadership and management were too generous. There is a well developed programme of self-evaluation with a clear focus on the quality of teaching and its impact on attainment. There are regular reviews of departmental progress by the curriculum manager and their link within the senior management team. Well established systems are in place to gather the views of pupils and these inform developments. The views of parents are also gathered but a small proportion feels that their views are not given sufficient attention.

The supportive governing body has a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the school. It fulfils its statutory responsibilities with diligence and has recently appointed a new headteacher after careful deliberation. An experienced chair and vice chair of governors meet regularly with the headteacher and, together with individual governors, they provide appropriate challenge. However there is scope for the governors as a group to extend their role as a critical friend.

The school has used its available resources wisely to improve the accommodation and to establish extensive provision for information and communication technology to support learning. The school provides good value for money.



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## Inspection judgements

|  |                       |              |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|
| <i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i> | <b>School Overall</b> | <b>16-19</b> |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|

### Overall effectiveness

|  |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| <b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b> | 2   | NA |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?  | 1   | NA |
| The quality and standards in foundation stage  | NA  | NA |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation  | 2   | NA |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements  | Yes | NA |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection   | Yes | NA |

### Achievement and standards

|  |   |    |
|--|---|----|
| <b>How well do learners achieve?</b>   | 2 | NA |
| The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners   | 2 | NA |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 2 | NA |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress                              | 2 | NA |

### Personal development and well-being

|   |   |    |
|---|---|----|
| <b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>                           | 1 | NA |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development                                     | 1 | NA |
| The behaviour of learners   | 1 | NA |
| The attendance of learners  | 1 | NA |
| How well learners enjoy their education   | 1 | NA |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices   | 1 | NA |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles   | 2 | NA |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community                                    | 2 | NA |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 2 | NA |

### The quality of provision

|   |   |    |
|---|---|----|
| <b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>          | 2 | NA |
| <b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b> | 2 | NA |
| <b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>   | 1 | NA |

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

**Leadership and management**

|  |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| <b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>                                       | 2   | NA |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 1   | NA |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review      | 2   | NA |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can                     | 1   | NA |
| How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money  | 2   | NA |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities  | 2   | NA |
| The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected  | Yes | NA |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>  |     |
| Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily  | Yes |
| Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise  | Yes |
| Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse   | Yes |
| Learners are educated about sexual health   | Yes |
| <b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>   |     |
| Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements                                   | Yes |
| Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place  | Yes |
| Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism                                | Yes |
| Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them   | Yes |
| <b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>  |     |
| Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships   | Yes |
| Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them                   | Yes |
| Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community | Yes |
| <b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>                           |     |
| There is provision to promote learners' basic skills  | Yes |
| Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams                                  | Yes |
| Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form          | Yes |
| Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy               | Yes |

## Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

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The Pupils

St Michael's Church of England High School

Astley Road

Chorley

Lancashire

PR7 1RS

17 Feb 2006

Dear Pupils,

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. We thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to talk with you about your work and interests and to listen to your views on your school. We judged St. Michael's Church of England High School to be a good and improving school and recognise that you help to make it the way it is.

What we liked most about your school

Your excellent behaviour and positive approach in lessons.

The strong Christian ethos of the school.

The good standards that you achieve.

The outstanding leadership of the headteacher.

The majority of teaching that is good or better and challenges you to do your best.

The excellent care, guidance and support you receive.

The wide range of activities at lunchtime and after school.

What we have asked your school to do now

Work to ensure that all lessons are as good as the very best.

Provide more opportunities in lessons for you to develop the skills of learning independently.

Ensure that you all know what you have to do to improve your work in each subject.

Best Wishes

Garry Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools