

# **Inspection report**

## **St Michael's School**

**Independent school**

**DfES ref no: 850/6062**

**Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002**

**Dates of inspection: 23 - 25 January 2006**

## **INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY**

### **Purpose and scope of the inspection**

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002 in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

### **Information about the school**

St Michael's School is run by the International Priestly Society of St Pius X for the children of devotees of the Tridentine Mass. Its mission is to *'provide children of traditional Catholic families with a thorough education founded upon traditional principles.'* Day boys and girls are accepted between the ages of 4 and 16; boys have boarding options. Much of the education is directed by priests and oblate sisters. The prospectus notes that *'pupils are prepared for the reception of the Sacraments, the boys are taught to serve Mass and all pupils are taught to sing the hymns and prayers of the Mass.'*

### **Summary of main findings**

The school very successfully achieves its aims. The clear purposes and values set out in the mission statement are evident in the pupils' personal and social achievements. Staff and pupils form a strong community where all are committed to shared values. Teaching is of good quality, enabling pupils to make progress, particularly in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Lesson intentions in other subjects should be more explicitly planned. The curriculum is satisfactory in outline but lacks sufficient planned detail for the continuous development of different academic skills. Good and effective provision for pupils' welfare is given a high priority and a calm and purposeful atmosphere prevails throughout the school.

### **What the school does well:**

- it fosters spiritual development and clear moral values;
- it promotes personal development effectively through its ethos and the experience of belonging to a caring community;
- it provides good teaching which enables pupils to make progress; and
- it is successful in promoting respectful behaviour and relationships.

### **What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations:**

- attend to the curriculum and teaching issues for senior pupils noted in section 1 of this report;
- improve the teaching of cultural diversity noted in section 2;

- undertake the staff training required for section 3;
- publish examination results as noted in section 6; and
- introduce a panel hearing into the complaints procedure noted in section 7.

# **COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION**

## **1. The quality of education provided by the school**

### **The quality of the curriculum**

The curriculum is satisfactory except in definition and continuity in Key Stage 3. Staff have devised schemes of work in broad outline for all key stages. All subjects of the National Curriculum are taught except information and communication technology, although there is controlled access to computers in the school. Latin is taught from Year 5 to Year 8. High importance is given to personal development through a planned programme in the lower school and through religious education (RE) in the senior school.

The Key Stage 1 and 2 curriculum meets the needs of the pupils and includes a sufficiently broad range of subjects. National guidance is used to good effect to plan some lessons and especially to promote the pupils' literacy, numeracy, and speaking and listening skills. The curriculum appeals to the pupils' interests, encouraging engagement in their work.

In the senior school the curriculum plans are less well defined, particularly in Key Stage 3. Pupils in Key Stage 4 mainly follow the GCSE exam syllabus in a limited range of subjects. The lack of detail in coverage means that pupils' learning needs are not always being met. With age groups being taught together there is a lack of distinction between one year and another. Consequently work overlaps and is sometimes repeated unnecessarily.

An interesting range of educational visits enhances pupils' learning. These have recently included local museums, places of antiquity such as Stonehenge and chemistry demonstrations at Reading University. Pupils' learning opportunities are extended by the provision of homework from Year 1. The school gives individual support to senior pupils for the next stage of their education, but does not provide any formal careers guidance or work experience.

### **The quality of teaching and assessment**

In the vast majority of lessons seen during the inspection the teaching was good. Teachers generally ask searching questions which encourage pupils to apply intellectual effort and show their interest in the subject being studied. Sufficient time is given for pupils to consider their answers and to show that they are making progress with their understanding. In the best lessons, the main points are reviewed at the end and pupils are given time to reflect on what they have learnt. In the lessons which were judged to be less than good there was not enough involvement of the pupils in the work and too few opportunities were given for them to discuss the issues or explain their understanding. Teaching resources are generally adequate but not plentiful. They are used effectively although some are in need of replacement with more up-to-date materials.

Lessons for the younger pupils are interesting and engaging. They are well planned and ensure that all pupils have the opportunity to make progress. The work matches

their needs and is sufficiently challenging. Senior boys and girls are taught in separate classes often from more than one year group; clear lesson planning is not always used, consequently there is some repetition of work and sometimes an inappropriate match of task to ability. The school has recognized the need to be more flexible in the organization of lesson time to ensure that the needs of the wide ability range are fully met.

A range of assessment techniques is used throughout the school. The results of tests are used broadly to indicate areas of strength and weakness for younger pupils. For the Key Stage 4 pupils the marking of past exam papers is often very rigorous, providing helpful and constructive comments to guide improvement. Generally there is not enough marking of senior pupils' work to ensure that progress is properly monitored or that lessons are planned according to pupils' learning needs.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

*The school meets most of the requirements.*

***What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?***

- *set out in writing appropriate plans and schemes of work and implement them effectively, especially for Key Stage 3 (paragraph 1(2));*
- *provide appropriate careers guidance for secondary age pupils (paragraph 1(2)(g));*
- *plan lessons well, use effective teaching methods and manage senior school class time wisely (paragraph 1(3)(c));*
- *show a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensure these are taken into account in the planning of lessons (paragraph 1(3)(d)); and*
- *assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly to plan teaching so that pupils can make progress (paragraph 1(3)(g)).*

## **2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

The provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is a significant strength of the school. Each of these strands has an important impact on pupils' work, attitudes and behaviour. The emphasis given to the pupils' spiritual development is the basis of the school's foundation and is woven through the curriculum. Daily prayers, regular RE lessons, school assemblies and regular Mass in the school chapel, help the pupils develop religious commitment and respect for themselves and others. Through work in art, RE and history pupils gain an understanding of their own culture but there are insufficient opportunities to appreciate diversity and other cultural traditions.

Pupils learn to take responsibility for their own actions and distinguish right from wrong. The good relationships between staff and pupils demonstrate how the school values and respects individuals. Behaviour is exemplary in class and around the school. The lower school pupils, both boys and girls, mix well and are taught together. Senior pupils are taught separately. A strong emphasis is placed on social development, good manners and caring for others. Pupils greet adults respectfully and are always very polite. There is a strong sense of shared community with the 'crew' and 'team' systems playing an important role. Pupils learn to care for their environment and help to keep it clean each day.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

*The school meets all but one of the requirements.*

***What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?***

*In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:*

- *assist pupils to acquire an appreciation of different cultural traditions (paragraph 2(e)).*

### **3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils**

Measures taken by the school to promote the welfare, health and safety of the pupils are good. The school implements effective policies to prevent bullying and to promote excellent behaviour and attitudes. Pupils are closely supervised at all times on the school premises. Staff and the headteacher are alert to issues to safeguard pupils from inappropriate behaviour. The headteacher keeps appropriate details of the rare occasions when pupils misbehave. The child protection officer has attended initial training and has arranged further training later this term. A staff training day has been arranged but has not yet taken place.

The school has clear procedures to ensure fire safety. These include regular fire drills and fire risk assessment. The importance of pupils' welfare and safety on educational visits is given a high priority. Safety procedures are followed and the risks involved in all activities away from school are properly assessed. Several staff are trained in First Aid; well-stocked First Aid boxes are sensibly located and accidents are carefully recorded. The admission and attendance registers are kept according to current regulations. Pupils' attendance is very good.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

*The school meets all but one of the requirements.*

***What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?***

*In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:*

- *ensure that all staff receive child protection training in compliance with DfES guidance (paragraph 3(2)(b)).*

#### **4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff**

The school is owned by the Society of St Pius X which is a registered charity. Staff are recruited through a clearly defined process which ensures the necessary checks are made, including with the Criminal Records Bureau. Staff from overseas are also carefully checked. The majority of full-time staff are in religious life.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

#### **5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation**

The school occupies a very pleasant and spacious site. Most of the buildings are modern and purpose-designed providing a good standard of accommodation. The boarding house for boys is attractive and well maintained providing good facilities. There is a very large gym, a tennis court and a swimming pool. Other specialist facilities are used for science, art, music and design and technology. The school library provides a comfortable study space. A very attractive chapel is used for school and public worship. The kitchen and dining areas are new and spacious. Extensive grounds provide hard- and grass-surfaced playing and recreation space. The junior classrooms are light and airy. There is less space in the senior rooms but all teaching areas are maintained in good condition and are suitably furnished. Senior girls have some lessons in a suitable building on a large, separate site locally which is also owned by the Society.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

#### **6. The quality of information for parents and other partners**

The school provides a wide range of information for parents and other partners. There is an informative handbook and a school prospectus which contain details about the school and its mission. Parents are required to sign an agreement to support and implement, in the home, school policies on television, pop music and standards of dress. Newsletters are provided at regular intervals keeping parents up-to-date with events at the school. The parents who responded to the questionnaire sent out before the inspection expressed a high degree of satisfaction and strong support for the school.

Brief, written reports are provided each term and parents have opportunities to meet with the staff to discuss their children's progress. Particulars of academic performance, such as the results of public examinations, are sent to the parents of the pupils concerned. The school does not ensure that this information is made available to all parents and other partners.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

*The school meets all but one of the requirements.*

***What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?***

*In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:*

- *make available to parents and prospective parents particulars of academic performance during the preceding school year, including the results of any public examinations (paragraph 6(2)(i)).*

**7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints**

There is a published complaints procedure for parents and pupils. Although this is very clear there is no provision for a panel hearing and the school has been reviewing procedures in order to comply fully with the requirements.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

*No.*

***What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?***

*In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:*

- *provide for the establishment of a hearing before a panel appointed by the proprietor of at least three people who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint (paragraph 7(f));*
- *ensure that one person on the panel is independent of the management and running of the school (paragraph 7(g));*
- *allow for parents to attend the panel hearing, and, if they wish, to be accompanied (paragraph 7(h));*
- *provide for the panel to make findings and recommendations and stipulate that the complainant, proprietors and headteacher, and, where relevant, the person complained about, should be given a copy of any findings and recommendations (paragraph 7(i));*
- *provide for written records to be kept of all complaints indicating whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage, or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing (paragraph 7(j)); and*
- *provide for correspondence, statements and records of complaints to be kept confidential (paragraph 7(k)).*

## SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	St Michael's School
DfES Number:	850/6062
Type of school:	Day (mixed) and Boarding (boys)
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	4 - 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 15    Girls: 11    Total: 26
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	Boys: 0    Girls: 1    Total: 1
Number of boarders:	Boys: 9    Girls: 0    Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils):	£2,100 - £2,250
Annual fees (boarders):	£3,450 - £3,900
Address of school:	Hart's Lane Burghclere Nr Newbury Berkshire RG20 9JW
Telephone number:	01635 278137
Fax number:	01635 278601
Email address:	smsssp@aol.com
Headteacher:	Rev. Fr Frank A. Kurtz
Proprietor:	Society of St Pius X
Reporting Inspector:	Mr Peter Way HMI
Date of inspection:	23 - 25 January 2006

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