



St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, St Albans

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117451
Local Authority HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 290839
Inspection dates 5–6 December 2006
Reporting inspector Alison Pangbourne

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	St Michael's Street
School category	Voluntary aided		St. Albans
Age range of pupils	4–11		Hertfordshire AL3 4SJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01727854866
Number on roll (school)	134	Fax number	01727765715
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Rev John Hayton
		Headteacher	Mr John Doran
Date of previous school inspection	12 February 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
4–11	5–6 December 2006	290839

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This smaller than average school is situated on the site of Roman Verulamium, on the affluent edge of the city. It is housed on two separate sites about 150 metres apart. Most pupils come from White British families with a few from minority ethnic backgrounds. None is at an early stage of learning English. The attainment of most children on entry to the school is above average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is well below average, as also is the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. Parents are very positive about it. One wrote, 'It is a friendly school where children flourish; whatever talents they have are celebrated and nurtured.' The pupils endorse this saying 'We love our school and the variety of things we do.'

Pupils enjoy the good curriculum with its wide range of visits, visitors and out of school activities. The school's proximity to Verulamium means that they take advantage of much that it has to offer. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is being improved and is not yet fully utilised. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those with specific talents is a strength and contributes positively to their good progress.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. They become confident to take on a wide range of responsibilities because they receive such good support, care and guidance. Their behaviour is outstanding. They are a credit to the school when they move between the two sites. The older pupils play an excellent part in the running of the school, taking on many responsibilities and helping the younger ones. The excellent emphasis on healthy lifestyles means that they know the importance of a balanced diet.

Pupils are set very challenging targets and achieve well. One said 'We definitely take our targets on board and do our best to meet them!' Variation in standards occurs because the year groups are small and a few pupils with learning difficulties can seem to pull down overall standards. However, children get off to a good start in the Reception class and most of them exceed the expected standards by the beginning of Year 1. By the end of Year 2, standards are above average. Standards have been rising steadily with almost all pupils reaching the expected levels, and a high proportion exceeding them. In some years, standards have been well above average.

Pupils continue to achieve well as they move through the school and, by the end of Year 6, standards are well above average. In 2006, standards were exceptionally high with almost three-quarters of the pupils exceeding the expected level in English and science and over half doing so in mathematics. There has been significant improvement in standards in mathematics throughout the school because staff identified that pupils did not do as well in that subject as they did in English and science and successfully introduced strategies to raise standards and close the gap.

Pupils achieve well because the quality of teaching and learning is good and activities are well matched to their needs in the mixed age classes. Support staff give effective help and are valued members of the team. Progress is very closely monitored and programmes are put in place to help all pupils to do well.

The school's success is due to good leadership and management. Governance is good. The headteacher and his deputy provide very good leadership, thoroughly monitoring progress and striving for excellence in all the school's work. They have an accurate view of how well the school is doing and work well together to bring about improvement. Although subject leaders fulfil their roles well, there is no common and

consistent approach to using information to identify areas for development. Value for money is good and the way that standards in mathematics have risen so significantly shows that the school has good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Strengthen the roles of the subject leaders in improving the school by developing consistency in their use of the data to evaluate its work.
- Embed and make full use of the new computer equipment to further improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children make good progress in the Reception class because they are taught well. There are interesting things to do that encourage them to learn. They exceed the expected standards by the beginning of Year 1.

Pupils' achievement is good through Years 1 to 6. This is reflected in the national test results that show a steady rise in standards over the last two years. Teacher assessments for 2006 are above average in reading, writing and mathematics in Year 2. National tests for Year 6 in the same year were exceptionally high in English, mathematics and science. Similar standards were seen in lessons.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and they are extremely well behaved. Attendance is above average. The many opportunities for sport help to keep pupils healthy. They have an excellent understanding of healthy eating because the lunch trolley is labelled according to its nutritional content. The older pupils make an excellent contribution to the school community. For example, each week they share stories with the youngest children, and the school council makes posters to discourage wasting food at lunchtime. Pupils also raise money for charities and the weekly collection in the church assembly is donated to help underprivileged children abroad. This contributes positively towards pupils' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. The very caring family ethos and outstanding opportunities to develop social skills, such as reporting on the school's success at football from the lectern in church, mean that pupils are confident and extremely well prepared for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers use questions well to include all pupils and develop their understanding. Pupils respond well to the challenges set for them. They say 'The teachers are good and the homework is just right for you.' Teaching assistants are used effectively, particularly for pupils with learning difficulties, and they contribute positively to the high standards reached. All teachers plan lessons that meet the needs of all pupils in their mixed age classes. They make learning enjoyable and consequently pupils strive to do their best. However, some introductions to lessons are over-long and impinge on the time left for activities. Effective opportunities for pupils to share ideas with a partner develop their confidence and prepare them well for their future. The use of ICT is not fully exploited to help pupils learn because much of the equipment is new and its use is not embedded. Good assessment means that tasks are well matched to the needs of the pupils. Each pupil's progress is very closely tracked and targets are set to help them succeed, which contribute very strongly to the high standards achieved.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The wide range of visits, visitors and out of school activities encourages pupils to develop many skills. For example, there is a popular choir where pupils learn British Sign Language to accompany their singing. Music has a very high profile. Many pupils learn to play a musical instrument. There is a flourishing orchestra that has just recorded a compact disc of its music, with pupils also designing the cover. Very effective use is made of the local area and consequently pupils have a very good understanding of history. One pupil commented 'The Roman Forum is underneath our paddock!' Literacy and numeracy skills are developed well in other subjects and these contribute to the rising standards. However, the use of ICT is not as well developed because much of the equipment has just recently been improved and teachers are familiarising themselves with it. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and for the more able is a strength.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school's caring ethos means that pupils and their parents feel valued. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are robust and staff are well trained in child protection. The school takes special care to ensure safety when pupils are walking between sites and, consequently, the pupils show an outstanding awareness of road safety. Pupils' progress is well tracked and those who need help are swiftly identified. Older pupils have their own targets for English and mathematics and know what to do to improve, which contributes to their good progress. Although younger pupils have group targets, they are not as familiar with them as they might be.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The very good leadership shown by the headteacher and his deputy is fundamental to the school's success. They thoroughly monitor standards and achievement to identify areas for improvement and successfully address any areas of weakness. As a result, standards are rising. Staff also carefully monitor standards, the curriculum and personal development during 'Achievement' assemblies and keep detailed records of their observations. There is a very strong sense of team spirit amongst teachers, support staff and governors. All fulfil their management roles effectively. However, the way that subject leaders use the information available to them is inconsistent and more selective use of the data could help them identify how to improve their subjects further. The governors support the school well and have already identified that they should make parents more aware of their role in the management of the school.

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

7 December 2006

Dear Children

St Michael's CE VA Primary School, St Michael's Street, St Albans, Hertfordshire, AL3 4SJ

Thank you for helping me when I visited your school. I enjoyed talking to you and watching you learn. I would like to tell you what I liked best.

You told me that you go to a friendly school and I agree with you. I thought your behaviour was excellent and I was impressed by the way you behaved in your church assembly. I enjoyed walking to 'Bottom School' with the older children and admired how sensible you all were when crossing the roads. You have lots of exciting things to do in lessons and you make good use of the interesting things all around you in Verulamium. You are very lucky to have all those things so near! You have the chance to take part in lots of musical activities and I thought the orchestra played beautifully in the church. You told me how the older ones help the younger ones and about all the jobs you do to be helpful. All the grown ups look after you well and help you to learn. If you find learning hard you get lots of help. Your families know you go to a good school.

I have asked your teachers to help you to use the new computers more often to strengthen your learning. You can help by continuing to try as hard as you can. I have also asked your teachers to look more carefully at information on how well the school is doing so that they can make your good school even better.

I hope you carry on enjoying your time at St Michael's School and do well in your next school.

Best wishes

Alison Pangbourne (Lead inspector)