



St Michael's Church of England First School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 122280
Local Authority Northumberland
Inspection number 292357
Inspection dates 1–2 February 2007
Reporting inspector David Earley

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

Type of school	First	School address	Howling Lane
School category	Voluntary aided		Alnwick, Northumberland
Age range of pupils	3–9		NE66 1DJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01665 602850
Number on roll (school)	238	Fax number	01665 606991
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Cate Sims
		Headteacher	Mrs Sally Lamb
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2001		

Age group 3–9	Inspection dates 1–2 February 2007	Inspection number 292357
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Most pupils come from an area with high levels of social deprivation. The proportion of pupils who claim free school meals is above average. Most pupils are of White British origin. A few are from ethnic minority families, a small number of whom speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is above average. A small number of looked after children attend the school.

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 and improving school with some outstanding features. It gives good value for money. The excellent leadership of the headteacher, well supported by staff and governors is a significant factor in the improving standards and provision.

Children enter the Foundation Stage with standards that are below those typical for their age. They are taught and provided for well and make good progress. By the end of the Foundation Stage, standards meet expectations. Good teaching and progress continue so that pupils achieve well. By the end of Years 2 and 4 standards are usually above average. In the national tests for seven year olds in 2006, standards were significantly above average in reading, writing and mathematics.

An important element in the improving standards is the outstanding personal development of pupils. Children settle into the Foundation Stage very quickly and make a good start. Pupils behave extremely well and have very positive attitudes to their work. They understand about the importance of healthy lifestyles, enjoy coming to school and say that they feel safe and well cared for. They make an excellent contribution to the community and are very well prepared for their future economic well being. Attendance is good and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.

Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are generally lively and interesting so that pupils want to learn. Teachers ensure that pupils have a good understanding of their learning and make good use of assessment so that work is well suited to different abilities and styles of learning. Work is marked regularly but pupils are not always given clear advice on how they might improve. The curriculum is good. The strong focus on literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) is extended well by opportunities for pupils to use their skills in other subjects.

Pastoral care, guidance and support are excellent and there is a very strong family and community feel to the school. Arrangements for ensuring health and safety and for safeguarding pupils are good. There are close links with parents and they appreciate the care shown to their children. A parent commented, "I am overjoyed that my children attend St Michael's; a wonderful school." Academic support and guidance are good. There are effective systems for the assessment and tracking of progress. Provision for cared for pupils, those with learning difficulties and disabilities and those who learn English as an additional language is good so that these pupils make good progress.

Leadership and management are good. Leadership by the headteacher is outstanding, leading to a shared commitment to raising standards and improving provision. Governors know the school well and are supportive. However, there are not enough opportunities for subject co-ordinators to check teaching and learning in order to make improvements. Self evaluation is accurate and leads to clear and effective planning for improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide more opportunities for subject co-ordinators to check teaching and learning in order to make improvements.
- Improve the consistency of marking so that pupils have a clear understanding of what they need to do in order to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good and standards above average. In the Foundation Stage, children achieve well and make good progress from standards on entry which are below those expected for their ages, particularly in communication, language and literacy and mathematics. Because provision is good, by the end of the Foundation Stage standards are in line with those typical for their age.

In the 2006 tests at the end of Year 2, standards in reading, writing and mathematics were significantly above average. School data and inspection evidence indicate that pupils in the current Year 2 achieve well and reach average standards. There is a high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities in this group and these standards represent good progress.

Year 4 pupils achieve well and make good progress so that they reach levels of attainment in English, mathematics and science higher than would be expected for their age. Standards are rising because teaching is improving and the school is making effective use of assessment to set challenging targets. The standards of boys and higher ability pupils are improving as a result of the strategies the school has put in place. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, looked after children and those who learn English as an additional language make good progress and achieve well because provision is good.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development and well being are excellent. Children make good progress in their personal and social skills in the Foundation Stage, learning routines and how to share. Pupils say they enjoy coming to school and this is seen in their good attendance. Behaviour is outstanding and they have very positive attitudes to learning and this leads to good achievement. Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of healthy eating and exercise. Because relationships are excellent and pupils know that they are valued, self-esteem is high and pupils are confident. Excellent spiritual, moral and social development stem from the school's Christian ethos. Cultural development is good overall and the school is aware of the need to further extend opportunities to learn about the cultural diversity of society. There are excellent links with the local parish church and the wider community and pupils help those less fortunate than themselves by fundraising. The school council plays an important role in the life of the school and is proud of the refurbished toilet areas, which they requested. Daily

acts of worship and the good teaching of basic skills play an integral part in preparing pupils to become caring, responsible adults.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good and this leads to good progress. Children get a good start in the Foundation Stage because the teaching is good and this continues throughout the school. Teaching is typically lively and stimulating so that pupils stay interested and listen attentively. Because teachers share lesson targets with pupils, they have a good understanding of their own learning. This is enhanced by the many opportunities provided for pupils to extend their speaking and listening skills in such activities as drama and partner discussions. Good use is made of assessment to ensure that work is well suited to different abilities and styles of learning. Teachers use good subject knowledge in providing clear explanations and asking challenging questions. This is complemented by the use of interactive whiteboards to make learning more interesting. Well-qualified teaching assistants support learning, particularly for those who have learning difficulties or disabilities or who do not speak English at home. Occasionally, the pace of lessons is slow so that pupils become less attentive and progress is less rapid. Work is marked regularly but there are inconsistencies in the way it is used to advise pupils on how they might improve and some opportunities to extend learning are missed.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It is broad and balanced and well adjusted to meet the needs of different abilities. It is enriched by a good range of visits, visitors and by extra curricular activities. When pupils visit Beamish Museum or a Hindu temple their learning is extended and when theatre groups visit, lessons become exciting and stimulating. This helps pupils to make good progress. There are close links with other schools and outside agencies to support learning and transfer to the next stage of education is usually a smooth one. A strong emphasis is placed on the promotion of healthy lifestyles and personal development. The curriculum is further enriched by the strong spiritual and moral elements, which are central features to learning throughout the school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care guidance and support are good. Pastoral care is excellent. The school provides an excellent community and family atmosphere within a very happy, safe and supportive environment based on Christian principles. The staff provide excellent role models. Parents are happy that the school cares well for their families and children feel safe and well looked after. This is recognised by parents when they say, for example, that

the school “provides a safe and stimulating environment for our children.” Pupils know that there are adults they trust if they feel sad or worried. The school carefully follows government recommendations for safeguarding children and has secure arrangements in place for child protection and health and safety. Academic support and guidance are good. An effective system of tracking enables teachers to check pupils’ individual progress and set targets for improvement. This is to be further developed to focus more consistently on the learning patterns of different groups.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides inspirational leadership. She is extremely successful in sharing her commitment and very clear vision for improvement with staff. This results in a good team spirit, which is clearly focused on raising standards and improving provision. The school strongly promotes equality of opportunity and the inclusion of all learners is central to its vision. It has an accurate picture of its strengths and weaknesses because it is self critical and takes on board the opinions of all, including parents and pupils. Performance data is carefully analysed in order to identify areas for improvement. This leads to clear and focused school improvement planning. Subject leaders know their subjects well but there are not enough opportunities for them to check teaching and learning in order to make improvements.

Parents are very supportive and have many opportunities to help with their children’s work. Governors know the school well and through the challenge they provide play a significant role in helping to shape its direction. The school has made good improvement since the last inspection and issues have been successfully addressed. The budget is well managed to support the drive to raise standards. Outstanding leadership, significant improvements to standards and learning and very clear evaluation of performance give the school good capacity to improve.

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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	2
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	2
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

St Michael's Church of England First School

Howling Lane

Alnwick

Northumberland

NE66 1DJ

03 February 2007

Dear Children,

Thank you for making us so welcome to your school. We enjoyed talking to you and were very impressed by your politeness and courtesy. We were pleased to hear that you learn about eating healthily and get plenty of exercise in order to keep fit. It is good to know that you enjoy coming to school, feel safe and well cared for and that the school council helps to make things better in school.

These are some of the things your school does well:

- Your teachers help you to do well and make lessons exciting and interesting so that you want to learn;
- We think its super the way you get on well with each other, behave well and have times to think and times to say your prayers;
- You go on lots of interesting visits and have visitors to school to help you to learn more;
- Children who find learning difficult and those whose first language is not English receive good help so that they improve their work.

These are some of the things we think the school could do better:

- When they mark your work we have asked your teachers to explain more clearly what you need to do in order to improve further;
- We would like teachers to have more opportunities to check how you learn in the different subjects so that they can help you to improve.

Thank you once again for your warm welcome and by the way, we really enjoyed your singing as much as you did.

Yours sincerely,

David Earley,

Lead Inspector.