

St Michael's Church of England First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123768
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	292782
Inspection date	30 April 2007
Reporting inspector	John Carnaghan

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	146
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Carole Pearfe
Headteacher	Anna Boulton
Date of previous school inspection	10 September 2001
School address	Watery Lane Minehead TA24 5NY
Telephone number	01643 702759
Fax number	01643 703280

Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by a team of two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St. Michael's Church of England First School is smaller than average and most children come from an area where there is some economic deprivation. The school has a higher than average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities. It has no pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and none at an early stage of learning English.

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 Church of England First School provides a good standard of education. It has a number of strengths and shows a good capacity for improvement.

Many children enter the school with very low standards and are slow to adjust to school life and routines. However, good support and teaching in the Foundation Stage give them a good grounding on which to build. By the time they leave school, pupils are enthusiastic and happy about school life, they have made good progress and they have been well prepared for the next step in their schooling. One Year 4 pupil complimented the preparations for transfer, saying, 'they're making us feel comfortable about the move to our middle school'. There is no doubt that all staff care deeply for pupils and strive to give them all a positive experience. Pupils' personal development is good. In most respects, pupils are well cared for but they do not receive adequate advice about what they should do to improve their work. Links with parents are very good and they, in turn, are very supportive of the school. This constructive partnership starts with an introductory visit to the home of each new pupil and a comprehensive written guide that is given to all new parents and carers.

Pupils' achievement is good across the whole school, including the Foundation Stage. By the time they leave school, their standards of attainment are broadly average and are better than expected in reading. Teaching is good, with a number of strengths, but assessment is not thoroughly utilised to promote the best possible learning. The curriculum is good. It is relevant and interesting, with a splendid range of extra activities.

Leadership and management are good and improving. Regular monitoring and analysis are starting to give the school more complete information about its performance and that of its pupils. This feeds into improved and realistic planning. The staff are involved in the planning process and teachers share a vision for the school's future. Staff, parents and pupils collaborate very well to provide pupils with good opportunities to learn and grow.

What the school should do to improve further

- Use assessment information better, particularly by ensuring pupils know more about the standards of their work and how to improve them.
- Improve the quality of teachers' marking so that it is more informative for pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children start in the Reception class with skills that are well below those expected in nearly all areas of learning. The exception is in physical development, where their skills are closer to expectations. Children's standards on entry to the school have fallen since the previous inspection. Good teaching in the Reception class ensures that children get a good start to their education and they achieve well. By the time pupils start Year 1, standards are below average.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 2 are below average and have been for the past four years. Pupils' achievement throughout Key Stage 1 is satisfactory. Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities receive satisfactory support and guidance and so make similar progress to other pupils.

Despite considerable help from their teachers, pupils take some time to become established as independent learners. When they achieve this, as most do by Year 2, they start to make better progress so that by the end of Year 4, pupils are effective learners. Standards at this stage are at the expected levels, and better than this in reading because the school provides good opportunities for pupils to develop their reading skills. Over their time at school, pupils' achievement is good and there are no significant variations between the progress of boys and girls or between pupils' achievement in English, mathematics or science.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school is a happy and harmonious community where relationships at all levels are good. Pupils behave well and are kind and considerate towards each other. They are friendly and confident and the older ones say they will be sad to leave because they have many friends and many fond memories. They report that they feel secure at school, adopt safe practices and know how to stay safe. Pupils know the importance of daily exercise and eating well because 'exercise gives you energy'. They love eating fresh fruit because it 'keeps you healthy'. Pupils contribute fully to the school and to the local communities. For example, pupils are proud to be seen wearing their 'junior caretakers' overalls when helping with jobs on the playground and older pupils enjoy other responsibilities that help daily life at the school run smoothly. Pupils of all ages really appreciate their school, and this is shown in their good and improving attendance.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Assemblies contribute a lot to spiritual development as well as engendering a love of singing. Pupils join in and sing to a very good standard, with much feeling and passion. Pupils of all ages are encouraged to work in teams, to help each other and to share their feelings and views. Pupils are given many opportunities to display their good personal skills, such as independence and perseverance. These will stand them in good stead as they progress. The more academic skills of literacy and numeracy are developing adequately.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good. Teachers and pupils get on together very well and this promotes good learning. Questioning is perceptive, with praise and encouragement used very effectively to help motivate pupils. Lessons are well planned and learning objectives are usually explained clearly. Teachers are careful to match tasks and activities to pupils' needs and so provide the correct degree of challenge or support. Teaching assistants know what to do and are effective in their role. Where teaching is satisfactory rather than good, pupils sometimes get muddled as to the purpose of the tasks set and tend to rush their work. However, pupils have good attitudes to learning, enjoy their lessons and are invariably keen to get going.

Assessments are regular and accurate. Data is collected and used to set targets for improvement and to identify what went well. However, pupils are not sufficiently involved in their own learning through knowing their own targets and reviewing their own work. Marking is regular but often does not give enough helpful advice.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum has been revised in recent months and is both interesting and relevant to pupils' needs. The Foundation Stage curriculum is stimulating and well planned. It is well focused to develop the language and creative areas, which are particular needs of these children.

There is good provision for literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. The school uses the varied and stimulating local environment as a focus for much of what is undertaken and pupils enjoy this emphasis. They benefit greatly from the various trips offered and from a wide range of visitors from near and far, many of whom are very helpful in developing pupils' understanding of the wider world. Year 4 pupils are all looking forward to a residential trip.

The school provides an impressive range of additional activities, which pupils really enjoy. They speak warmly of opportunities in areas as diverse as French, dance and gardening, and attendance at these sessions is high.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Regularly reviewed policies and arrangements underpin good quality pastoral care and support for all children. A strength of the school is the warm and caring ethos in which the well-being of each pupil is a high priority. Safeguarding procedures are good and meet the very latest guidelines. A family link worker works effectively to support families who may be in need of extra guidance and advice. The headteacher is always available for pupils who may need extra help and advice.

Pupils are not yet given good enough academic guidance, for example through a well established system of target-setting. Marking does not make it sufficiently clear to pupils what they have achieved and why and how they could improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has a good grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses. She and other staff monitor the school's provision regularly and accurately. The improved use of assessment data has enabled the school's development planning to be refined. The plans now provide a practical, manageable template to move the school forward. The school's self-evaluation is good and has led to some important improvements, such as more effective teaching. These developments and pupils' good achievement demonstrate that the school has a good capacity for improvement.

All staff at the school, including teaching assistants, work effectively as a team and have a common goal in seeking to improve the school. They reflect carefully on their work and are keen to improve their own practice and seek to provide the best possible education for all pupils. All staff work hard to ensure that every pupil enjoys equal opportunities to learn and grow. The leadership and management of the Foundation Stage are good.

Governors are very supportive of the school and discharge their responsibilities satisfactorily. They are aware that they have not monitored the school well in the past and are keen to rectify

this. Each governor is linked to a year group and this provides a focus for their visits to school. Their improving knowledge is encouraging governors to be more rigorous in challenging the school. Resources are suitable and used well and the school provides good value for money.

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Annex A

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	3
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

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?	3

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.

Annex A

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	3
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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

1 May 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St. Michael's Church of England First School, Minehead, TA24 5NY

Thank you very much for being so helpful and polite when we visited your school recently. You told us how much you enjoyed coming to school at St. Michael's and it was easy to see why.

There is no doubt that it is a good school. These are what we think are the best things:

- teachers and children work very well together so that you make good progress
- you told us lessons are fun and we agree, because teaching is good
- the headteacher and staff run the school well and work closely together to give you every chance to succeed
- the range of topics you study and activities you do is interesting
- you are well looked after and behave well.

Even good schools can improve. We think that there are two main areas that need attention:

- you do not get enough information about the quality of your work
- this would also be helped if teachers gave you better advice when books are marked.

Once again, thank you very much for your help. It was a great pleasure meeting you.

With best wishes for the future,

John Carnaghan Lead Inspector