

# Maidstone, St Michael's Church of England Junior School

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	118625
<b>Local Authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	298568
<b>Inspection dates</b>	25–26 September 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Sheila Browning

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Junior
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary controlled
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	152
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Vacant Position
<b>Headteacher</b>	Kathy Spencer
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	19 June 2006
<b>School address</b>	Douglas Road Maidstone ME16 8ER
<b>Telephone number</b>	01622 751502
<b>Fax number</b>	01622 685004

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<b>Age group</b>	7–11
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

This is a small school. Attainment on entry to Year 3 is generally a little below average but varies from year to year. The current Year 6 pupils were broadly average. Higher than average numbers of pupils leave and join the school after the start of Year 3. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is much higher than found nationally. Since the last inspection, and up until January, the school experienced significant staffing instability, including at senior level. The headteacher was appointed in September 2006, having joined the school in January 2006 as acting headteacher. When the school was last inspected, it was found to be in need of significant improvement and given a Notice to Improve. The school is part of a local authority programme of support to raise standards and holds an Investor in People award.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

In accordance with section 3 (5) of the Education Act 2001, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

The school's overall effectiveness is satisfactory. The school has overcome some significant challenges, such as previous high staff turnover, inadequacies in teaching and learning, and a legacy of underachievement. Despite these, the headteacher, staff and governors, supported well by the local authority, have secured some important improvement. Whole school self-evaluation is satisfactory and the school is now evaluating its performance closely. New systems are in place which ensure that the school runs smoothly on a day to day basis. Rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning has eradicated any that was inadequate and it is now mostly satisfactory with some that is good. Increased assessment of pupils' attainment is helping staff to identify pupils' next stages in learning. Nonetheless, recent improvements are not sufficiently well established to ensure that work is always matched well to pupils' abilities. Teachers have a more consistent approach to behaviour and are raising their expectations of what pupils can achieve. Consequently, pupils' enjoyment of school is increasing. Pupils particularly enjoy the wide range of extra-curricular clubs and enrichment opportunities available to them, which are a good feature of an otherwise satisfactory curriculum.

Although standards are still too low in writing, mathematics and science, pupils' rate of progress is increasing and pupils are achieving satisfactorily. Nonetheless, pupils' basic mathematical skills remain weak and more able pupils do not consistently reach their potential. The school recognises more work needs to be done to raise pupils' attainment, especially in mathematics, and it is systematically tackling any remaining underperformance. Good features of the satisfactory care, guidance and support are the well established links with external agencies and the work of the welfare staff. Pupils understand how to lead safe and healthy lifestyles and show improving attitudes to learning. Pupils' involvement in the community and range of responsibilities in school support their satisfactory personal development. The headteacher is committed to improving the school and she has a clear understanding of what needs to be done to take the school forward. Governors play a satisfactory role. The school has made satisfactory progress since it was last inspected and improvements clearly show its sound capacity to improve further.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure teaching in mathematics focuses on developing pupils' basic skills.
- Better match work to pupils' different capabilities.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 3

Although the legacy of previous underachievement is being eradicated, standards remain below those nationally and achievement is satisfactory. The school sets realistic and suitably challenging targets for pupils' performance. Pupils are making up for lost ground because of improved teaching and better tracking of pupil progress. Inspection evidence and school records show

marked recent progress in Years 3 to 5, especially in English. Pupils' reading and writing skills have accelerated. In the present Year 6, standards are much higher than in recent years. Any underperformance is identified earlier and is now being tackled effectively. The school has sought external advice. This has resulted in some good intervention and support for targeted pupils, which is improving achievement. Although the gap is narrowing, the difference between pupils' progress in English and in mathematics and science is still too wide. The school knows more work needs to be done to reduce this. Appropriate support for pupils with learning difficulties and learning disabilities means they achieve satisfactorily. Nonetheless, pupils' basic skills in mathematics remain weak and more able pupils are not consistently challenged.

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

### **Grade: 3**

Pupils express a satisfactory interest in their learning and enjoy socialising with others. Attendance is around the national average. Pupils behave well when at play. In lessons, however, some pupils have difficulty in sustaining concentration. Pupils generally feel safe in school. They have a good understanding of healthy living, for example knowing about the importance of eating fruit and vegetables and healthy exercise. Pupils enjoy sporting activities and physical education. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. They respond well to the many opportunities they have to take on school and class responsibilities. The school council raised money for playground equipment through its own efforts. Pupils have a genuine concern for others. They raise funds for several charities and distribute harvest produce to the needy. They engage well in community activities and occasionally entertain the elderly. They are prepared satisfactorily for their future economic well-being.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Staff have good relationships with pupils and usually manage them well. The pace of lessons is usually steady. Teachers plan lessons satisfactorily but do not always match work well enough to pupils' needs, especially in mathematics. Consequently, on occasions, pupils sometimes do not make as much progress as they could. Teaching assistants usually play a satisfactory part in lessons and occasionally their contributions are really stimulating. In a Year 3 lesson, the teacher and assistant modelled most effectively a conversation to support pupils' understanding of speech marks. Pupils followed this up successfully in replicating a conversation with a partner and this helped their understanding. The focused opportunities to develop pupils' speaking and listening are a strength in English lessons, contributing to the progress in this subject.

Marking is variable in quality. Most work is marked up to date but teachers' written comments do not consistently give pupils enough guidance on how they can improve their work. Furthermore, staff do not always ensure that all pupils present their work neatly and pupils do not always take enough pride in what they do.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 3**

Strong features are the many popular clubs and enrichment activities. Good links with external agencies and local schools, and the supportive Christian environment contribute well to pupils' personal development. A sound personal, social and health education programme examines

important issues such as bullying. Improved resources, teacher training and support have led to more effective use of information and communication technology (ICT). Planning in science is better than at the time of the last inspection and, consequently, pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills are improving. Links are being made between subjects to make learning more relevant and interesting but this is at an early stage. The whole school focus on reading activities has accelerated pupils' achievement in both reading and writing. Opportunities to develop numeracy skills in other subjects are not as well developed as those for literacy. In mathematics, pupils are taught in ability sets, but not all teachers are using assessment information effectively enough to focus on pupils' basic mathematical skills to secure more rapid progress.

## Care, guidance and support

### Grade: 3

Risk assessments and safeguarding procedures are secure. The care and support of pupils are good. This is reflected in the commitment of staff and the well established links with a range of external agencies, including social services, which benefit pupils and their families. Vulnerable pupils are helped to develop their social skills through the lunchtime nurture club. Following action taken by the school, pupils confirm that the playground has become much calmer and behaviour has improved. Breakfast, lunchtime and after school clubs also have a positive impact on pupils' well-being. A minority of parents would like to see improvements in communication with the school and the school recognises this. Systems to track pupils' progress have improved since the last inspection and teachers have become more accountable for monitoring pupils' progress. Targets are shared with pupils, who are developing a better understanding of how they might improve their work. However, targets for mathematics are not always focused sharply enough on developing pupils' basic mathematical skills.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 3

The school has been keen to learn and take on advice. This has resulted in improvements, particularly in English. Subject leaders have become more effective in monitoring provision and taking action on what they find. For example, variable approaches in staff's response to the newly acquired science scheme were noted. Immediate and effective action was taken to ensure that there is now more a consistent approach to teaching the subject and that pupils are able to build more steadily on what they learnt before.

Governors are led well by the chairman whose incisive questioning keeps him well informed. Several governors have links with individual classes, which give them a working knowledge of different year groups. Nevertheless, the governing body relies largely on the headteacher's viewpoint to know about teaching, learning and curriculum matters. A recent self-review and ongoing training are helping governors to develop their skills so that they can contribute more effectively to the school improvement plan. The school improvement plan contains the correct priorities for development and simple success criteria but it does not detail how the school will evaluate its success in meeting them.

The headteacher's monitoring of teaching and learning is accurate. She identifies clearly both the strengths and areas for development following her regular monitoring visits to lessons. Staff are improving in their understanding of the data on their pupils' performance. They are

using it more effectively to find out if pupils are not making sufficient progress and are being held to account for all pupils' future progress.

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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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

### Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
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

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

26 September 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Michael's Church of England School, Maidstone ME16 8ER

Thank you for helping us when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking with you, looking at your work and seeing your lessons. We think St Michael's is a satisfactory and improving school and teaching is satisfactory.

Here are some things we found out.

- There are lots of interesting and exciting activities for all of you to experience, enjoy and take part in, especially clubs, including at breakfast and lunchtime.
- The way the school looks after you is good.
- Everyone is working hard to make St Michael's even better than it is now.
- You told us you know how to lead safe and healthy lifestyles.

Here are the things we would like to see improved.

- We would like to see teachers give you more help to improve your basic skills in mathematics.
- We have asked teachers to make sure that the work is not too easy or too hard for you.

You can help too to by trying hard to improve the presentation of your work and to learn your multiplication tables. You could also tell teachers if the work you are doing is too easy or too hard.

Yours sincerely

Sheila Browning Lead inspector

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Sheila Browning  
Lead inspector