

St Michael's RC School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100858
Local Authority	Southwark
Inspection number	307512
Inspection dates	9–10 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Michael Lynes HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	694
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs S Northam
Headteacher	Mrs G Grabowski
Date of previous school inspection	12 May 2003
School address	John Felton Road Bermondsey London SE16 4UN
Telephone number	020 7237 6432
Fax number	020 7252 2411

Age group	11-16
Inspection dates	9–10 October 2007
Inspection number	307512

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Michael's is an over-subscribed comprehensive school catering for students who come from a wide range of backgrounds; some from areas of significant social deprivation. There are significantly fewer girls than boys. About one third of students speak English as an additional language (EAL), although very few are at the early stages of acquisition. The numbers of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are similar to those found nationally. The school has been a Business and Enterprise College since 2003 and was awarded a second specialism in modern foreign languages (MFL) earlier this year. It has been a Training school since 2003, has Healthy Schools status and was awarded Investors in People status in 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Michael's is a satisfactory school with some good features. It is a very caring community founded on good relationships between both students and staff, and students themselves. The curriculum is also good as it offers a wide range of opportunities that students really value. It is not yet a good school because the academic achievement of students is not as secure as their personal development. This is because the quality of teaching is too variable, and the senior leadership team does not yet have a secure grasp of how to set targets for student progress that will lead to sustained improvement.

The school has suffered some turbulence due to significant changes in staffing during the past two years. This has been a difficult period, but the school is now beginning to recover. The school's capacity to make further improvements is satisfactory. This is demonstrated by the maintenance of a strong community, continued outstanding achievement in English, improving attendance and better provision for information and communication technology (ICT). The school acknowledges that it must now focus its energies on improving: the quality of teaching, the effectiveness of systems to track student progress, and standards in mathematics and science. The restructuring of the senior leadership team by the headteacher and the recent appointment of a deputy headteacher leave it well placed to undertake these challenges.

Specialist status has had a positive impact on both the provision for ICT and on broadening the type of courses on offer. However, it is yet to contribute to raising standards and achievement. A high number of comments were received from parents during the inspection, most of which were overwhelmingly positive. A significant number would like the school to take more account of both parents' and children's views. The school acknowledges this and has recently established a parents' forum.

What the school should do to improve further

- Monitor teaching more rigorously so that it focuses on improving the quality of students' learning.
- Use the target-setting process more robustly to secure improvement.
- Raise achievement and standards in mathematics and science, particularly at Key Stage 4.

A small proportion of the 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

Examination results in both Year 9 and Year 11 are broadly in line with standards nationally. As students start at St Michael's with standards that are broadly average, this is satisfactory achievement. Those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar progress to other students.

In 2006, standards in English, maths and science at the end of Year 9 were broadly in line with national results, but provisional data from the 2007 tests indicate a slight fall. This means that from their starting point in Year 7 students make satisfactory progress during Key Stage 3.

At the end of Year 11 in 2006 standards in GCSE examinations were above the national average. This was good achievement. However, the numbers of students achieving 5 A* to C grades fell in 2007 and both mathematics and science have shown a declining trend at GCSE over the past two years. The number of students achieving 5 A* - Cs including English and mathematics declined significantly in 2007 and is now below the national average. In 2007 standards were, therefore, broadly average and progress was satisfactory. The school was unable to provide convincing evidence that the progress of the current Year 11 would be any better.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students enjoy coming to school. They are keen to learn and, as a result, their behaviour both around the school and in most lessons is good. There is a very strong sense of community and students feel safe. They are adamant that the school is inclusive and that incidents of bullying and racism are very rare. When they do occur staff deal with them quickly and effectively. Attendance is good and improving due, in part, to the recent procedures put in place to chase up first day absences.

Students' spiritual, cultural and social understandings are very well developed. For example, a group of Year 9 students were able to talk with both understanding and empathy about rural poverty in Ghana, and other groups have taken the initiative to raise money for charities. Students have a good understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle and the school has recently received the Healthy Schools award. Many students are keen to accept responsibilities and make a good contribution to the school community. The School Council provides an effective forum for students to express their views, but students would welcome more opportunities to influence school policy. The development of student's workplace and other skills are satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The effectiveness of teaching and learning is satisfactory with some notably good features. There are some good, and occasionally outstanding, lessons but students experience a wide range of teaching including some that is inadequate. The students themselves confirm this. Behaviour in lessons is very good and students relate very well to their teachers. This contributes positively to the quality of teaching and learning. However, there are insufficient opportunities for students to extend their speaking and listening skills or to work independently.

Some lessons observed had good pace and a wide range of teaching strategies were used to keep the students engaged. Many teachers make good use of new technology to enliven their lessons. In one very effective geography class, the teacher had created a dynamic electronic presentation, using photographs and video from a recent field trip, to recap key learning points.

Where teaching was weaker, lessons failed to challenge the more able and work was pitched at the middle ability with little consideration of either lower or higher ability students. This is because planning is not always related to students' particular needs or to their prior attainment. However, teaching assistants are deployed effectively to support students with learning difficulties and to help the more able. For example, in a Year 9 Spanish class, a Spanish speaking

teaching assistant supported an individual student on an accelerated programme towards gaining a GCSE.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and the majority of learners enjoy their education. The broad and balanced curriculum is enhanced by the additional opportunities relating to specialist status. For example, volunteers from a city law firm visit the school regularly to help Year 7 pupils with their reading.

The school provides opportunities for all learners. There are accelerated learning programmes for higher performing students in some subjects. Vocational options in, for example, Business Studies and ICT are offered to students for whom a more academic curriculum is less appropriate. There are opportunities for work related learning for a small group of students, supported through links with local colleges and local authority provision.

There is good provision for out-of-school clubs, for which the school reports a high uptake by students, who say that they enjoy the variety of things on offer. ICT provision has improved throughout the school since the last inspection, partly as a result of the additional resources provided through specialist status.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Staff know their students very well and are committed to their well-being. There is a strong sense of caring for each other within the school. Support for vulnerable students is very good. Their progress is monitored regularly by an inclusion panel that calls upon a range of external agencies to provide expert support and care. The school uses its tracking data to identify those at risk of underachieving and then to target support in the form of booster sessions and the Saturday school. The guidance provided by teachers in the classroom, although variable, is satisfactory and is often based upon a good awareness of students' abilities. Appropriate procedures exist to safeguard children, but they are not reviewed regularly.

Teachers use target setting satisfactorily to help students move forward. Books are marked regularly but not all students understand the levels at which they are working or what they must do to improve. Students do not receive their target grades sufficiently early in the school year to enable them to improve rapidly. Parental participation in target setting for individual students is good and they are kept well informed about their children's progress. Students receive good guidance about future options and most go on to further education post-16.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory. The school is an orderly, caring community founded on good relationships between students and staff. This is a tribute to the hard work of many staff and good leadership in aspects of the care of students. There is yet to be the same focus and rigour applied by senior leaders to ensuring clear direction for academic improvement. As a result, systems for analysing student performance data are underdeveloped and do not provide a clear strategic direction for the school. This leaves it vulnerable to some

underachievement and the variability of performance by departments, which ranges from outstanding to inadequate. Senior leaders have yet to develop a consistently secure, shared understanding of how to accurately judge teaching. Too often they make judgements based on behaviour rather than the quality of learning.

There is good and some outstanding middle management, for example, in English where achievement is consistently good. The management of the learning support unit is also good as it supports behaviour across the school. As a result, exclusions are very low. However, there is still some variability in the quality of middle management which means that results at Key Stage 4 vary from year to year. This is particularly true in mathematics and science.

The governing body carries out its statutory responsibilities well. It does need to ensure that procedures for pre-employment checks are reviewed regularly. Governors are aware that they require further training to ensure that they are in a strong position to both support and challenge the senior leadership team on student performance. The recent appointment of a link governor to the mathematics department is a positive development in this regard.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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?	3
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?	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	4
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

19 October 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of St Michael's RC School, London, SE16 4UN

Thank you very much for talking to us so openly and honestly about your school. We were impressed by your behaviour both in classrooms and around the school, especially on the first day when the weather made things difficult. You clearly enjoy school, appreciate how hard the staff work, and the many opportunities they provide for you. However, you also know that some things could be even better.

St Michael's is a very caring school and has some good, and even outstanding, teachers. However, not enough lessons really stretch or challenge you to achieve even more than you already do. As a result, your achievement is satisfactory at the moment. We have therefore asked the school to improve in the following areas:

- Focus on improving the quality of learning across the school.
- Use target setting more effectively to help you achieve more.
- Results in mathematics and science.

It is possible that an inspector will return before the next full inspection to see how things are going. You can do your part by not only maintaining your good behaviour and attendance, but by also asking your teachers for more information about your individual progress. There might also be a role for the student council, who told us that they are keen to be even more involved in shaping the future of the school.

With very best wishes

Michael Lynes

Her Majesty's Inspector