

St Michael's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108849
Local Authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	309816
Inspection date	9 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Carole Cressey

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	188
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Reed
Headteacher	Mr Paul Foster
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2003
School address	Durham Road Houghton le Spring Tyne and Wear DH5 8NF
Telephone number	0191 5536535
Fax number	0191 5536537

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated: progress, achievement and standards; personal development and well being; care, guidance and support. Evidence was gathered from the school's own self-evaluation; national published assessment data; the school's own assessment records, policies and minutes; observation of the pupils at work; interviews with senior members of staff and pupils; and the parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

Most children come from White British backgrounds; a very small number are from other backgrounds and have English as an additional language. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average, as is the number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

'I am delighted with the progress my child has made. I feel there is a powerful ethos in the school with an emphasis on respect, good manners and tolerance. The children are held in high esteem and I love the way the headteacher tries to develop the whole child.' This comment from one of the parents reflects the views of the majority and is also the judgement of the inspector.

This is an outstanding school which is exceptionally well led and managed. The headteacher's passionate commitment, energy and determination to provide the very best education possible are shared by an excellent leadership team and a very effective governing body. The school exudes an ethos in which the high quality care, well-being, enjoyment and achievement of every pupil are evident in all aspects of its work. The excellent climate for learning ensures that pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, together with their academic achievements, are outstanding.

At the heart of the school is the belief that when pupils are nurtured and valued in a strong Christian community, they learn to respect themselves and others and become successful pupils who are able to confidently take their place in the twenty-first century. The school very effectively promotes pupils' love of learning, as well as their understanding of how to stay healthy, keep themselves and others safe and become responsible, caring members of their school and locality. The school sees these skills as being paramount to pupils becoming successful young citizens. The pupils say that being proud of themselves, and their school, helps them to do better in their work and reach the highest standards they can.

Leadership rigorously monitors all aspects of the school's provision. This ensures that teaching is of the highest quality, and that pupils are constantly immersed in a boundless range of rich and exciting experiences both in and out of the classroom. Classrooms and shared areas are inviting and well ordered, providing pupils with a wealth of clues and strategies to help them succeed. Assessment and recording systems provide teachers and senior managers with a detailed picture of what needs to be done to accelerate learning and ensure pupils reach high standards.

Lessons, break-times, visits and after school clubs abound with exciting, practical and challenging activities and, as a result, pupils are highly motivated, behave exceptionally well and want to do their best.

Pupils say there is so much to do in their school that everyone finds something they are talented at. This could be, being vigilant in encouraging other pupils to keep the library tidy or not dropping litter, being a member of the school council or eco group, playing a musical instrument or singing in the choir. The recent introduction of a wider variety of sporting activities has added another excellent dimension to pupils' personal and social development. Hockey, golf, running, tennis, gymnastics and Irish dancing are promoting very healthy pupils, who are not only learning to be proud winners but also generous losers and good team players. Pupils are learning to have a healthy respect for those in authority, such as their parents, teachers and the parish priest, who is much-loved by the school community. They learn to be polite and well mannered to visitors. No one at St Michael's would dare to challenge the decision of the referee in a sporting match! This pride in themselves and respect for others is providing the pupils with the excellent personal skills needed to become caring, tolerant and responsible members of their school, town and global community.

Pupils thrive in this excellent, carefully planned environment. They want to do well and they certainly do. All pupils work very hard and achieve exceptionally well, reaching standards that are significantly above average. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds are warmly welcomed into the school community and make rapid strides in their learning. The outstanding way the school nurtures those pupils with complex disabilities and/or learning difficulties is second to none and, as a result, they make excellent progress towards their targets.

Children start in the Reception class with levels of development that are typical for their ages. Most children reach the learning goals expected for their ages and abilities at the end of the Reception year. This positive start is built on well in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Progress continues to accelerate and the school's results in national assessments and tests for seven-year-olds and eleven-year-olds in 2006 showed that standards were well above average. In the 2007 tests results improved further. These high standards have been maintained and pupils in the present Year 2 and Year 6 are achieving exceptionally well. Standards are even higher than in previous years and continue to be well above average. The school is on course to meet or exceed its ambitious targets.

Parents have complete confidence in the school and greatly value the way they are kept well informed about their children's progress. The school has made excellent progress since the previous inspection; it gives excellent value for money. The school has a very accurate insight into its strengths and weaknesses and is constantly looking for new challenges to enhance the education of its pupils. It is exceptionally well placed to continue to be very successful.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage is outstanding. The exceptionally high quality of the leadership and management ensures that the Reception class is an exciting place to learn and children quickly adjust to school routines. This is evident from the number of parents who say how well their children settled into school. Staff ensure that the indoor and outdoor environments support and extend children's spontaneous play and promote their personal and social development. The basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy are given a high priority and, as a result, children are well launched into reading, writing and number by the time they move into Year 1.

What the school should do to improve further

- There are no significant areas for development.

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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?	1
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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

10 October 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Michael's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Sunderland

Thank you so much for being so friendly and welcoming when I visited your school a short while ago.

St Michael's is an outstanding school. These are the things I liked best about your school.

- It was so good to see how very well behaved and polite you are. I was especially pleased to see how much you like and respect your teachers. Your parents told me that they are also very pleased with your behaviour and good manners.
- I could see by the work in your books and displays around the school that you are all doing so well in reading, writing, mathematics and science. You work hard in lessons and are keen to answer questions. You also listen carefully to your teachers so that you know how to improve your work in order to reach the highest standards possible when you come to take your tests.
- You are all such eager learners who enjoy all the exciting things your teachers provide for you.
- You know the importance of eating sensible food and taking lots of exercise. All the new sports activities in your school are certainly helping you to keep fit. They are also helping you to become proud of yourselves and your school and are showing you how to be good team players who know the importance of obeying rules.

You go to an excellent school. Do remember to always work really hard and learn lots and lots of new and exciting things. I hope you will continue to enjoy school as much as you do now and that it will help you to become happy and successful adults.

Yours sincerely

Carole Cressey

Lead Inspector