

St Michael's Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114423
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	311595
Inspection date	21 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Gavin Jones

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	102
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Linda Lundberg
Headteacher	Sue Rogers
Date of previous school inspection	15 June 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Station Road Withyham Hartfield TN7 4BP
Telephone number	01892 770307
Fax number	01892 771099

Age group	4–11
Inspection date	21 October 2008
Inspection number	311595

© Crown copyright 2008

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 two Additional Inspectors, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school. They particularly investigated the teaching of writing and mathematics in Years 3 to 6, the progress made by children in the EYFS and the quality of monitoring by the subject leaders. Inspectors met with pupils of all ages, staff and a governor. Parts of some lessons were observed and inspectors looked at pupils' work. School information such as evidence of pupils' progress, the school development plan and records of visits by the School Improvement Partner were scrutinised. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessment, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified. These have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average primary school in a rural setting. Although it takes pupils from both a local and a wider area, these pupils tend to come from an area with very little social or economic disadvantages. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is about average, and there are very few pupils taking free school meals or from ethnic minority groups. As a result, there are no pupils who speak English as an additional language. There is Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision in the Reception class.

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 school. It has several outstanding features. 'Staff at St Michael's go out of their way to make each child feel special' is a feeling expressed by a number of parents. This results from the great care and support given to pupils. As a result, pupils' personal development and well-being are excellent. They thoroughly enjoy school, have excellent attitudes to their work and behave in an exemplary manner. In turn, this helps them make progress in their work and little time is wasted. Pupils concentrate on their tasks and grow in confidence and self-esteem. Their good attendance reflects their enjoyment of school. Strong relationships abound in the school, binding the community together very closely. The relationship between Year 6 'buddies' and their Reception partners is a joy to see. One comment from a parent – 'I have never known such a great bunch of polite, well-mannered and good humoured children' – sums up the situation well.

The excellent care pupils receive makes them feel safe and secure. Very effective links to outside agencies and to a wide range of secondary schools ensure that pupils are prepared very effectively for the next stage of their education. Older pupils are looking forward to their next schools.

The school's pursuit of pupils' personal development is not at the expense of their academic success. Pupils make good progress across the school, building on the excellent start they make in the EYFS. Results from year to year do fluctuate as numbers of pupils change rapidly and affect standards. For example, last year nearly half the pupils in Year 6 had not been in the school at Year 2. Those that had been made at least good progress, although not all pupils who were expected to get above the nationally expected levels did so, especially in writing. Those pupils with learning difficulties made the same good progress as their classmates, as their needs are identified quickly and good support is provided.

Part of the reason pupils enjoy their work and progress well is to do with the excellent curriculum developed by the school. Apart from the statutory subjects taught, all pupils go swimming, all have French language teaching, even in the Reception class, and all benefit from a wide range of enrichment activities. As a result, the school has many curriculum awards reflecting its commitment to promoting artistic, physical activity and healthy living, such as Artsmark, Activemark, Basic Skills and Healthy Schools awards. The school has addressed mathematics issues in the curriculum by concentrating on mental mathematics, and is being successful. However, the excellent provision is a little slower in translating into pupils' day-to-day writing skills, so that their achievement in English, for example, is good rather than outstanding. During the visit, an impressive huge three-dimensional display of the painting of 'The Fighting Temeraire' was under construction as part of a link to the National Gallery, which has helped enthuse pupils in their artwork. Equally good is the way that the school is developing community cohesion for its pupils. As part of a rural community, pupils' understanding of the wider world, with its ethnic diversity and cultures, could well be limited. However, the school has formed close links with a city school in Greenwich, whose pupils come from many diverse backgrounds and cultures. It has had links with European schools and now has further strong supporting links to a school in the Gambia.

Teaching is good throughout the school. The school realises that in order to improve pupils' achievement and extend teachers' abilities further, it needs to tailor support on a more individual basis and use the excellent curriculum to make individual lessons really come alive, especially

in relation to writing and for more able pupils. Through the strong leadership of the headteacher, class work is monitored over a period of a week, rather than a single lesson. This will provide the headteacher with more opportunities to identify smaller changes needed to improve both teaching and learning further. Improving writing has not been effective in all age groups and activities, as the most recent innovations such as 'Big Writing' have not had time to embed in every class and produce improvements.

The school building has been very well developed with pupils in mind and is very well used by the staff and pupils, with staff deployed well and rooms utilised fully. The partnership between the headteacher and her assistant headteacher is a strong force for improvement and innovation. They have a clear picture of what else needs to be accomplished. They have the capacity to do this, as the school ethos of teamwork is strong. Subject leaders are at different stages of development, with most effectively monitoring their subjects, creating action plans and seeking improvements. Governors support the school well and are equal partners in improvement. They take part in discussions, and track the progress of issues highlighted in the development plan, such as developments in mathematics.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children get off to an excellent start in the Reception class, with good and sometimes outstanding teaching helping them to achieve well from a starting point where some of their skills are below those expected. For example, aspects of their number, communication, language and literacy skills and knowledge of the world, in the current group of children, are less developed than they should be. By the time they start Year 1, all children have reached at least average standards, with a significant minority reaching above average standards, reflecting good progress. Although it is early in the year, the current class are said to be on track to achieve well. Very effective support from teaching assistants and helpers ensure that very full and regular assessments are made accurately and help guide children's next steps in their learning. Excellent care, guidance and welfare arrangements give them very good support so they make significant progress in their personal, social and emotional development. They are very considerate to each other, share and take turns and their behaviour and enthusiasm are excellent. Children, as part of the much-enriched curriculum, take part regularly in swimming and French lessons, together with visits in connection with their classwork. The school sets an almost perfect balance between activities children choose for themselves and those directed by adults. Staff know the children well and parents are universally complimentary about how children are introduced to school and guided through the EYFS. Children have close links with their Year 6 'buddies' with whom they are seen having lunch and joining at play times. Their good rate of progress, combined with excellent attention to children's welfare, personal development and wide range of exciting activities, leads to outstanding provision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching from good to outstanding so that any remaining weaknesses in writing can be overcome and pupils, especially the most able, can reach their full potential.

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?	2
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	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which 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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
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

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

21 October 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Michael's Primary School, Withyham TN7 4BP

Thank you for helping us when we visited your school the other day. Although we were not with you long, you helped by sharing your views and your work with us. We know that you enjoy school, as your attendance is good. This may be because the school has worked hard to make the things that you do very interesting and exciting. As a result, your behaviour and the way you work in class are extremely good. This is the case right from the Reception class to Year 6.

The standards of work across the school are good and you make good progress, although we think you may be able to do even better with your writing if your teachers can provide you with even more help and advice. Not only will this help you to make more progress, but also it would help them improve and become outstanding teachers.

The excellent care and support you get from all the adults at the school make you feel safe and secure and teachers check your work regularly, setting you targets for improvement which you know and understand.

Your school is very well led by your headteacher, who is always looking for ways to improve the school. Your teachers provide you with exciting projects. We were very impressed with the ship in the hall.

We have asked the school to help you all get even better at writing, by teachers being able to guide you further into how to improve. You can all help your school get even better by continuing your good attendance and continuing to work hard in lessons, especially at your writing. Thank you again for a very interesting day at your school.

With best wishes

Gavin Jones Lead Inspector