

St Michael's Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114520
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	311631
Inspection date	3 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Selwyn Ward

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	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	102
Sixth form	0
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	8
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Angela Soderberg
Headteacher	John Greenway
Date of previous school inspection	23 May 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Houghton Green Lane Playden Playden Rye TN31 7PJ

Age group	5–11
Inspection date	3 October 2008
Inspection number	311631

Telephone number
Fax number

01797 280277
01797 280277

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Almost all of the pupils are White British. Children join the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) with a range of capabilities but these are mostly at least in line with expectations for their ages. Only a small number have learning difficulties. The headteacher was appointed in September 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Michaels's provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. Despite many shortcomings in the premises, including the lack of a school hall, staff do a remarkable job in ensuring that their pupils benefit from a full curriculum. In this way, the school lives up to its motto, 'Each child is important and every day offers new opportunities'. The interesting activities that pupils take part in help to motivate them to work hard. As a result, pupils' personal development is good. They behave well and they are attentive in lessons.

The headteacher and leadership team have succeeded in maintaining the positive climate for learning throughout the school that is so appreciated by parents. However parents are aware that, as one put it, 'The school is not performing as well as previous years.' Although children get off to an excellent start in their Reception Year, they do not maintain such a brisk pace of learning throughout the rest of their time at the school. After a very sharp dip in 2007, standards are now above average at the end of Year 6 but this represents only satisfactory achievement. This is because more able pupils, in particular, do not make as much progress as they should.

Teachers have good relationships with their pupils and they make good use of questioning to check pupils' understanding and to encourage them to develop their thinking. However, they do not always expect enough of more able pupils and ensure that they are challenged to the full. School leaders have a reasonably accurate picture of what goes on in lessons, but their monitoring does not focus sharply enough on how well all of the pupils are learning. This limits the precision and impact of leaders' guidance to staff on how to improve the effectiveness of their lessons.

Parents voice strong praise for the caring attitude of the headteacher and staff and the way in which 'every child is treated as an individual'. This, they correctly point out, 'gives the children a huge amount of confidence and self-reliance when they go on to secondary schools'. The academic guidance for pupils is not as strong, however. Pupils have individual targets but not all know what they are. Teachers' marking does not always point out for pupils what they need to do to improve their work.

Although some of school leaders' self-evaluation grades are overly positive, this reflects their ambitions and aspirations for the school rather than a blinkered view of the improvements needed. Many policies and procedures within the school are recent and are only just beginning to show their impact. There are clear signs, however, that the school is moving in the right direction. School leaders have been successful in reversing the decline in standards and have secured several improvements to be made this year to the premises and perimeter. These show the school's sound capacity for continued improvement over the coming year and beyond.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 9

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children get off to an excellent start in their Reception Year. They are helped to quickly settle and so they get on very well with each other and make very rapid progress. A delighted parent explained that their daughter 'is already recognising words'. Children's progress in their language skills is so good because of the way staff focus on phonics. Children are also encouraged to

have a go, so that they create their own labels and signs around the classroom. The fabulous mythical castle and collection of toy pirate ships bears the phonetically accurate label '4 peopl ownlee', which explains, in a child's own hand, the rule agreed by the children themselves. By the end of the Reception Year, children reach standards that are substantially ahead of those expected for their age.

In this very well led and managed provision, staff provide a very stimulating environment in the classroom, and even more so in the vibrant and exceptionally well equipped outdoor area. Parents describe how, even only a few weeks into the school year, already the area 'has been regularly updated with the children's work'. They rightly praise the way staff care for the children. One explained, 'My daughter is so happy at St Michael's that she wants to go at the weekends!'

What the school should do to improve further

- Set work for more able pupils that challenges them to achieve their very best.
- Focus school leaders' monitoring of teaching on the progress all pupils make in their learning so as to better guide staff on making improvements.
- Give pupils clear guidance on how they can improve their work. 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: 2

The traditionally very high standards at St Michael's have not been maintained. With several changes of teacher in 2007, including some temporary teachers, results in the Year 6 national tests fell very sharply and pupils underachieved. Results were much better in 2008, so that standards in the school are now above average. This represents satisfactory achievement. However, more able pupils are not all making the progress they should in writing, mathematics and science in the Year 2 assessments and Year 6 tests. This is because they are not set challenging enough work. Those pupils who need extra help with their learning make similar progress to others in the class because they benefit from tailored support from teaching assistants.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are positive about school, try their best in lessons and greatly enjoy their work. However, attendance, which was well above average at the time of the last inspection, has been only average in each of the years since. Pupils are very polite and treat others with the respect they would like shown to themselves: a 'golden rule' at St Michael's. Pupils take an active role in the life of the school, particularly through the school council. They feel appropriately safe and secure and know where to seek advice when they need help. Pupils respond well to the St Michael's good focus on promoting healthy lifestyles, so that they appreciate the value of a good diet and regular exercise. This has been recognised through the school's achievement of 'Healthy School' status. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils respond especially well to the way the school celebrates their personal and individual achievements, as seen on the 'Wall of Fame' and in weekly assemblies. Pupils are aware of other cultures through

imaginative themed weeks and outside visitors. These help to broaden their awareness of and prepare them for life in multicultural Britain.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Because they get on so well with their pupils, teachers succeed in motivating them to work with effort and concentration. Teachers set out clear objectives for pupils at the start of each lesson so that the pupils know what it is that they are expected to learn. Sometimes, however, too long is allowed for some activities and so the opportunity is missed at the end of the lesson to check through with pupils and reinforce what they have learnt. Teachers make good use of teaching assistants, with clear planning to help direct their support for pupils with learning difficulties. Too often, however, more able pupils are not set work that challenges them to achieve their full potential. This means that they make uneven progress, and not all pupils are helped to fully capitalise on the excellent start they have in the EYFS.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school's good curriculum contributes to pupils' strong personal development because it motivates them to work hard. School leaders have not allowed the limitations imposed by the buildings to restrict the curriculum provided for the pupils. Despite the continued lack of a school hall, creative partnerships have been developed with other schools to fill the gaps and to broaden the pupils' experiences. The school's success in this has been recognised through its gaining of an Active Mark for sports, and pupils have shown their sporting prowess through success in local competitions, including those for tag rugby and cross country running. Where the limitations of the buildings still show their impact is in the loss of valuable teaching time, taken up in travelling to other schools for activities and in moving furniture to transform a classroom into a space where, for example, assembly can take place. Pupils benefit from the opportunities to learn Spanish and French, and the number of pupils who are learning instruments attests to the improvement since the last inspection in music. The curriculum is further enriched through a good range of stimulating themed weeks, and visits to local and national places of interest, such as the recent visit to the White Rock Theatre.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school takes good care of the pupils. As a pupil explained, 'There is always a teacher to talk to, and they listen. They really care.' Safeguarding arrangements meet government requirements. Not enough is done, however, to improve attendance to the previously high levels, by celebrating excellent attendance and chasing up on the first day any unexplained absences. Assessment has been improving, with staff readily identifying pupils who may be falling behind and who need extra support, particularly in Key Stage 2. Pupils have individual targets, but they do not all know them. Marking gives pupils encouragement and often tells them they have met the learning objectives for the work, but teachers' comments give pupils too little guidance on the next steps they need to take to move their work on.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher is popular with parents, who praise his approachability and the calm and sensitive way he sorts out any difficulties. Together with the school's leadership team, he has drawn well on local authority support to secure some recent improvements that have helped to arrest and reverse a decline since the last inspection. There is clearer direction for staff now that more formal policies and procedures are in place to ensure greater consistency so that staff changes do not cause the disruption to learning that adversely affected pupils' performance in the past. Lessons are monitored regularly, but school leaders' observations have tended to focus on checking various characteristics of 'good teaching' rather than gauging the effectiveness of lessons by checking that all pupils, including the more able, are making consistently good progress in their learning. Community cohesion is a notable strength at St Michael's, with well established links to the local community, churches and other schools, which pupils visit to share facilities. Governors are supportive of the school and have concentrated with staff on minimising the adverse effect of the limitations of the premises and on securing improvements.

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	16-19
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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	9NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	NA

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?	1	
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	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3	

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?	2	NA
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	3	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
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	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	NA

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	NA
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	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
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	NA
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

4 October 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Michael's Church of England Primary School, Playden TN31 7PJ

Thank you for making us so welcome when we came to visit your school. St Michael's provides you with a satisfactory education. Standards are not as high as they have been in the past, but we could see that they are beginning to rise again and are above average. We believe you should be making even better progress, however, especially after the excellent start that you get in the Reception Year. We have asked the school to make sure that you are all set work that stretches you. For some of you, the work is sometimes too easy.

Space is tight at your school, but your headteacher and staff do well to ensure that you do not lose out as a result. We were pleased to see that you still have the chance to do sports and physical exercise. We could see from all the trophies that you often do well in sports even against other better-equipped schools. We were pleased to see how well behaved you are and how you concentrate and work hard in lessons. Staff take good care of you, but we have asked them to give you more help through marking that tells you what you need to do to improve your work. Although you have individual targets, not all of you know what they are. You can help yourselves to make faster progress by making sure that you know your targets and do your best to achieve them.

Your headteacher and staff are checking how well you are doing and we could see that they are giving extra support to those of you who need it. We have asked them to make sure that when they come to visit lessons they look out particularly to see that you are all making as much progress as you should.

We wish you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely Selwyn Ward Lead Inspector