

# St Michael's Church of England Infant School Maidstone

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	118626
<b>Local Authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	313020
<b>Inspection date</b>	13 February 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Eileen Chadwick

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>	Infant
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4-7
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	104
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Dorothy Roth
<b>Headteacher</b>	Lorna Priddle
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	19 January 2004
<b>School address</b>	Douglas Road Maidstone ME16 8ER
<b>Telephone number</b>	01622 751398
<b>Fax number</b>	01622 693 540

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<b>Age group</b>	4-7
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

the progress children make in the Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2

the achievement of Year 2 pupils in 2007 and the effect of pupil mobility on the overall standards they reached in that year

the impact of leadership and management, particularly through school initiatives for improving standards.

Evidence was gathered from lesson observations, discussions with pupils and staff, reviewing the assessment data the school uses to track the progress the pupils make, and analysis of pupils' work. 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, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

## Description of the school

This school is smaller than most infant schools and serves a mixed area that includes the local community and further afield. Most children are of White British heritage, although the proportions from ethnic backgrounds and of those who speak English as an additional language are above average. The number known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The percentage of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also above average. The proportion of pupils joining the school other than at the usual time is higher than in most schools. Children start school with a range of abilities but overall they are below the level expected, especially in communication and personal skills. The school has gained the Healthy School and Investors in People awards. Substantial building improvement work has occurred during this school year and is now nearing completion.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

This school is outstanding. Children's academic achievement is exceptional and from the minute they set foot in the school they are nurtured in every way. They receive exceptional levels of care and this is a significant reason why their personal development, including their behaviour, is outstanding. Children come to love learning and the school fully lives out its motto, 'Be the best you can be'. All children, regardless of their starting point, are given superb experiences for learning basic skills and rich opportunities for developing their creative, practical and sporting talents. Parents are delighted with their children's progress and one expressed their views with the comment that 'St Michael's Infant School provides a unique family atmosphere and I have been delighted with my child's progress'. Children are given a flying start in Reception and make excellent progress. This continues in Key Stage 1 and, by the time they reach Year 2, their standards are well above average in reading, writing and science. This represents exceptional achievement because many begin school with basic skills which are below expectations. Standards are still rising and are higher for the current Year 2 than in 2007. In 2007, Year 2 standards were only average, despite children's exceptional achievement, because there was a high mobility rate in this cohort and a significant proportion of children entered late into Key Stage 1, including some with learning difficulties. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are extremely well supported and, by the time they leave, many have reached the nationally expected standards. Those children with English as an additional language flourish too and by Year 2 reach standards that are similar to their peers.

The sustained and highly successful leadership of the headteacher is central to ensuring that focusing on accelerating children's progress is always a priority. During her five years as leader she has earned the respect of teachers, parents and children. Other school leaders are also highly effective and teaching and non-teaching staff are a strong team and make sure all children are given the best possible start to their education. Governors play a very important part in challenging and supporting the school.

The arrangements for the school to evaluate itself are exceptionally strong and well embedded and involve all staff. Rigorous concentration on monitoring and evaluating the impact of teaching on children's progress has led to consistently high quality teaching throughout the school. Teachers' planning and teaching skills are thoroughly evaluated and areas for improvement are linked to clear performance targets and professional development. Staff take on many responsibilities in this smaller school and, in their subject leader capacity, observe each other teach. They are open and honest in their evaluations and share expertise. Teachers are very skilled in the way they match children's work to their learning needs and it is to everyone's credit that standards are rising.

Rigorous assessment of children's performance is a major reason for rising standards. Demanding but realistic targets are set and staff systematically evaluate children's progress, adjusting both provision and targets to ensure progress is rapid. Relationships with parents are excellent and they are encouraged to be true partners in their children's learning. An example of this is the way in which they are given training so they can work closely with the school in educating their children. This is having a particularly good impact on raising standards in reading.

Strong links with the church and community help to promote the school's family atmosphere and children's excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Children feel very safe and it is due to the staff and governors' determination and organisation that the major

building programme has not disrupted the children's education. Children make excellent contributions to the school and wider community. The buddy system and thriving school council are very good vehicles for enabling them to develop their expertise in leadership. Children make excellent progress in developing problem-solving and teamwork skills, for example, through mathematics and design and technology. They develop good awareness of the world of work through visitors from public service or caring occupations such as the police or nursing. However, the children's awareness of jobs in business and industry is limited and this is recognised by the school as an area for development. The school rigorously promotes good attendance.

The curriculum is excellent; it is broad, rich and practical. There is an exceptional focus on systematically developing language, literacy and numeracy skills. There is strong provision in science, information and communication technology, the creative arts and sport. The Year 1 curriculum builds superbly on children's wonderful experiences in Reception. High quality curriculum links between science, design and technology, art and writing bring learning alive as children solve real problems. Children are very enthusiastic about taking part in the extra-curricular activities, including their allotment and organic gardening activities.

## **Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 1**

Children make fantastic progress in the Foundation Stage. The focus upon exploration and play, both indoors and outside, does not detract from the very strong teaching of basic skills. Children greatly enjoy being in Reception because there is an excellent range of learning activities and a lively and practical curriculum. Children arrive with skills that are significantly below expectations, especially in communication, language and literacy, and a significant minority also have limited personal skills. Transition from home to school is very well managed and children readily settle into Reception. Their speaking, literacy and numeracy skills are strongly promoted and all areas of learning are superbly matched to their learning needs. By the time children begin Year 1, standards are average in reading, writing and mathematics. Very high standards of care and safety help children to feel secure and happy. Teaching and assessment systems are of a high quality. Assessments are rigorously checked to make sure all children are making the progress of which they are capable. The school has developed very close links with parents and pre-school settings. The leadership of the Foundation Stage and teamwork between staff are excellent.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- Broaden children's awareness of the wider range of opportunities in the world of work.

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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 <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2
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

<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>	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**

12 February 2008

Dear Children

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

Thank you for the very warm welcome you gave me when I visited. You certainly seem to be very happy. I really enjoyed seeing you at work and play and talking to you. Now I want to tell you what I found out about your school.

I think you go to a really good school so I have judged it to be outstanding. Here are some brilliant things about it:

- Your headteacher, the school staff and governors are fantastic. They think very carefully about what is best for you.
- You make excellent progress in reading, writing, mathematics and science.
- Those of you in Reception get off to a wonderful start.
- You have some really good chances to use computers and to do art, design and technology and sport.
- Your school is happy one, because you are very helpful and behave extremely well.
- Teachers look after you all very well indeed and really help you with your learning.

This is what I am asking the school to do now:

- Make sure you have more chances to learn more about what adults do in their work.

I hope you will continue to enjoy school and continue to try hard in all you do. Always remember your school motto 'Be the best you can be'.

Best wishes

Eileen Chadwick Lead inspector