

St. Michael's VA Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121146
Local Authority	NORFOLK LA
Inspection number	313896
Inspection dates	17–18 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Helen Ranger

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	297
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr O Reeve
Headteacher	Mrs H Newell
Date of previous school inspection	24 November 2003
School address	Astley Road Chapel Break Bowthorpe Norwich NR5 9LA
Telephone number	01603 745812
Fax number	01603 748315

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is larger than average. It serves the Bowthorpe area of Norwich, which has been identified as an area with some considerable social and economic disadvantages. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is high. The percentage of pupils who are identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or who need social or emotional support is over twice the national average. Pupils with these special needs make up the majority in some classes. Approximately 15% of pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds and about half of these are at an early stage of learning to speak English. Pupils transfer at the start of Year 3 from several infant schools. Quite a high number of pupils are also admitted part way through the key stage. The school's assessment of overall attainment on entry is that standards are often well below average. As part of local authority (LA) reorganisation, the school, which was formerly a middle school, became a junior school from September 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Michael's Junior is a good school. The high quality care, guidance and support it offers its pupils helps them to overcome any barriers to learning and pupils achieve well as a result. Parents are very positive about the school. A comment from one parent summed up the views of many, 'A lovely environment for children and the teachers work hard for the children and parents.'

The headteacher has an outstanding impact on the school. She has successfully led the transition to junior school status and has motivated and energised staff. The atmosphere in the school is lively and purposeful. Teaching is good and pupils learn efficiently. Their needs are regularly assessed and supported in all year groups. A wide range of activities is available to provide appropriate additional help or challenge to individuals. By Year 6, standards are below the national average but the school's very detailed assessment systems demonstrate that pupils of all capabilities make good progress. Pupils' achievements are now rigorously tracked and analysed and the information is used to address any weaknesses. These systems have been one of the biggest improvements in recent years and there is convincing evidence that they are raising standards, for example, in mathematics. There have been similar efforts to improve writing standards but these have yet to show as positive an impact on achievement. Pupils' writing skills continue to be an area for further improvement.

Pupils are very happy about the increase in opportunities to practise their skills in reading, writing and mathematics in practical and problem-solving situations. To support such activities further, teachers are forging strong links between subjects; they rightly wish to continue to do this, so that learning can be as exciting and relevant to pupils as possible. Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in their good personal development. The great majority behave very well and this ensures they are in a good position to take full advantage of their lessons. They know that their views are valued by the staff and that, if needed, there is someone who can help with any problems.

Staff and governors work well together. Responsibilities are shared widely and effectively. A strong spirit of teamwork is evident. The staff and governors know the school well because self-evaluation exercises are regular and well focused. Good close links with the parish and the wider community provide pupils with opportunities that, otherwise, they would probably not experience. The school has improved well since its last inspection. The current team of staff and governors, the enthusiasm of the pupils and the support of the parents mean it is well placed to continue to thrive in future.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the improved systems for tracking attainment in writing have a consistently positive impact on raising standards.
- Develop pupils' skills in reading, writing and mathematics through providing further opportunities to apply these key skills in practical situations in all subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress in lessons. The overall results achieved in the Year 6 tests since the last inspection have more than kept pace with the rising national trend. This is in spite of some

weaknesses in mathematics and writing. Year 6 pupils are well on course to meet the challenging target sets for them this year, which are higher than those of 2007. The many pupils who need extra help with their learning receive it and do well. Pupils learning to speak English do well, reaching standards in 2007 that were higher than those of similar pupils nationally. Quite a high number of pupils join the school part way through the key stage, and often with low standards in key skills. They quickly receive teaching that focuses well on their needs and make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils develop their personal qualities well because of the excellent care, guidance and support they receive from adults. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They show interest in the cultures present within the school and in wider society, reflecting quite maturely on the beliefs and feelings of others. The number of recorded racist comments is low and these are taken seriously by staff. Pupils willingly take on responsibilities within the school community, for example, as school councillors and prefects, and as mediators who help staff to resolve any conflicts that arise between pupils. Pupils say that if any bullying occurs, it is dealt with well. Attendance rates are in line with the national average, enabling pupils to take advantage of all the school offers. Pupils are keen learners. They are developing a good understanding of healthy lifestyles. This was confirmed by a Year 6 pupil who commented, 'You eat healthy things at school, so you get to like them and eat them at other times.' They are very active physically, during playtimes and when taking part in the various clubs and sports activities. Although there is still room for improvement in pupils' basic academic skills, their good social awareness and positive attitudes to learning provide a sound foundation for the next stage of education and for their later lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils learn well because they feel secure and well supported in class. Behaviour is managed well so that very good relationships underpin learning. Lessons are planned to cater for the full range of individual need. The systems for assessing, tracking and analysing pupils' progress are developing well and beginning to have an impact on the quality of learning, most obviously in mathematics. Teachers are becoming increasingly skilled at using these systems to inform lesson planning for all individuals. They use the assessment information rigorously to work closely with teaching assistants in providing as much help as possible to individuals through the extensive 'intervention' programme. Improved arrangements for marking and pupil self-assessment are rapidly being established. The consistency of good teaching is encouraged by regular, effective monitoring and support for staff from the headteacher and senior team.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

A varied and interesting curriculum contributes well to pupils' good achievement. There is a strong focus on the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). The very wide range of intervention programmes ensures that pupils receive the help they need to develop these skills. A programme for pupils with particular gifts or

talents is being developed to a high standard. Staff have started to make sure that effective cross-curricular links are made between subjects and that pupils have opportunities to consolidate and apply their basic skills in purposeful activities. Pupils say that this is already aiding their learning. It remains an aspect for further improvement in the school's drive to improve areas such as pupils' writing skills. Pupils' academic achievements are complemented by good personal development through a strong programme of personal, social and health education. Among other skills, this develops strong teamwork between pupils and the ability to make a contribution to the school community. French and Spanish are taught and aid pupils' cultural understanding. In addition to the requirements of the National Curriculum, there is a wide range of additional activities, clubs, visits and visitors to the school. These are highly valued by pupils and their parents.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The arrangements to care for, guide and support pupils are a significant strength in this school. The role of the special needs coordinator and senior learning mentor are pivotal in these aspects of the school's work. The support for vulnerable pupils and their families is exemplary. The provision for pupils who need extra help of any kind is managed very well. Very effective relationships have been built up with external agencies such as the YMCA so that, where possible, 'wrap around' care can be provided. Good systems are in place to safeguard pupils and to protect their health and safety. The improved arrangements for tracking individual academic progress ensure that pupils receive accurate feedback on their work. Targets are being used effectively to set pupils challenges. They know their targets well, are very clear about the levels they are working at, and what they need to do to improve. This is raising their self-esteem and confidence.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has secured considerable improvements since the last inspection. Governance, which was unsatisfactory then, is now good. Governors are active in school and monitor its work well. A good example of their work has been the recent monitoring of ICT expenditure. Governors insisted that the staff must prove that the funding had achieved a measurable improvement in pupils' learning. The headteacher works closely with the capable deputy headteacher in efficient strategic management and to provide a strong professional development programme. As a result, subject leaders and staff with other major responsibilities are rapidly developing their skills of monitoring and evaluation. There are productive partnerships with many organisations, such as the diocese, other schools, the LA and agencies who support pupils with special needs. The school also works hard to involve parents more in their children's learning. Many parents value this greatly although, for some, full involvement is 'work in progress'.

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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?	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

Achievement and standards

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

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	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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
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?	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?	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 tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

21 April 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Michael's VA Junior School, Norwich NR5 9LA

I am writing to thank you all for your friendly welcome and your help during the inspection team's recent visit to your school. A lot of your parents wrote to tell us that they think your school is really good and many of you said the same. We agree! Your school helps you to become sensible young people who really enjoy learning. Your behaviour is good and you generally get on very well together. You told us that, if any disagreements arise, your friends and the adults in school do all they can to sort out any problems.

We saw that you are doing well in your work. In particular, it was good to see the improvements that many of you are making in mathematics and how much you enjoy the subject. We think that you could do even better now in writing too and we have asked your teachers to keep working on this. You can help them by paying careful attention in lessons and taking time to think about any advice you are given on how to improve your writing. One of the things that really impressed us in your school was how well you already know the levels you are working at. You also know what you need to do to reach your next learning target. Well done! This is helping you to make good progress. We have also asked the staff to keep giving you lots of practical work that links subjects together. This will help you practise your skills in English, mathematics and ICT.

Your school is obviously helping you to lead healthy lives - all that activity we saw at playtimes was a good example. You know how to keep yourselves and others safe. We were pleased to meet your school councillors and to hear about how the adults listen and respond to your views.

Mrs Newell and Mr Whalen lead your school very well. They work closely with the staff and governors to make sure that everything runs smoothly, and to plan new projects to make your school even better. We hope that you keep enjoying all the opportunities that St Michael's offers you. Good luck in your SATs Year 6, and we send you our best wishes for your move to secondary school.

Yours sincerely

Helen Ranger

Lead inspector