

St Michael's CofE (C) First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124253
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	314862
Inspection date	21 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Doris Bell

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	57
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Helen Stead
Headteacher	David Bell
Date of previous school inspection	10 March 2003
School address	Horton Leek ST13 8RU
Telephone number	01538 306278
Fax number	01538 306157

Age group	4–9
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Introduction

Two Additional Inspectors carried out the inspection.

Description of the school

This small school serves a mainly rural community where only a small number of children have had any formal pre-school experience. When children start school, their skills are below the levels expected for their age. The proportion of pupils receiving free school meals is broadly average, as is the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, these vary from time to time because of the small numbers in each year group. The range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities is greater than that found in most schools. The school has a Healthy Schools Award and an Activemark.

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 provides an excellent quality of education for its pupils. Its curriculum takes their needs and interests into account exceptionally well. It is supported by the individual attention teachers pay to the learning and personal development of each pupil. Teachers have high regard for how pupils would like to extend their learning, especially in topic work. They constantly assess pupils' learning, set challenging targets for them and show them how to reach them. This develops in the pupils a clear understanding of how to improve their own work. It contributes greatly to the pupils' excellent progress and personal development, and to their thorough enjoyment of school. It also successfully enables them to reach much higher standards than expected for their age by the time they leave the school. All of this begins with good provision and progress in the Foundation Stage.

The school's data show that pupils' attainment varies slightly when writing in different styles for different purposes. This is because they do not always transfer the skills they have learned in one style of writing when they move to another. In mathematics, each teacher records pupils' progress well in each unit of work. Pupil's progress is recorded once a year in contrast to progress in writing, which is recorded each term. This makes it more difficult for senior managers to gain an immediate overview of how well each pupil is doing in mathematics at given points during the year. The school is fully aware of both of these issues and it is working hard to find ways to resolve them.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and relationships are excellent throughout the school. Pupils fully appreciate the high quality care, support and guidance they receive. They trust the staff implicitly and know what to do should any untoward behaviour occur. Pupils find learning 'lots of fun'. They try hard to do their best at all times and they support each other very well. They have taken fully on board the importance of healthy living, eating healthily and participating enthusiastically in the wide range of sporting activities on offer. Pupils have a very good understanding of different cultures around the world. However, their understanding of cultural diversity in Britain is less well developed. The school knows this and it has fostered good links with a multi-ethnic school not too far away to improve the situation.

The school knows itself well. The huge improvement since the previous inspection is the result of the very clear educational direction that comes from the headteacher and governors. Together, they successfully ensure that the school does everything possible to meet the challenging targets it sets itself. The joint planning, joint working practices and joint monitoring with other schools contribute greatly to this. The school's ethos is summed up in the words of one parent, echoed by many, namely, that there is 'dignity and wholeness in each classroom' because 'every child is valued for their uniqueness and everyone belongs'. All of this gives the school excellent capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Good induction procedures ensure children settle quickly into school routines, as do the excellent relationships between school and home. Staff ensure children have many well planned opportunities for play, practical exploration and problem solving. They use the outdoor area well for learning. For example, children were able successfully to link sounds and letters in a lively outdoor search for cards bearing the names of bugs. Planning also takes account of each

child's needs and successfully promotes their independence. However, staff sometimes miss opportunities to extend learning and language development by not being as involved as they might be with the children during play activities.

Promotion of children's personal, social and emotional development is particularly good.. Children listen carefully and co-operate with adults and with each other. They very much appreciate the way older pupils look after them, especially at lunchtimes. They make good progress and reach the nationally expected early learning goals by the end of their Reception Year.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure consistency in pupils' progress across all types of writing and make it easier to track their overall progress in mathematics at different times of the year.
- Bring pupils' understanding of cultural diversity in Britain today up to the same standard as their understanding of different cultures across the world.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

High levels of mobility and a wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities within the year group caused a drop in the standards reached by pupils in Year 2 in 2007. However, the school is back on track to reach the significantly above average standards seen in the three years prior to 2007. Pupils have very good reading and writing skills. Their writing is imaginative and well constructed and it grabs the reader's attention. Data held by the school show that attainment sometimes varies when pupils write in different styles for different purposes. They also sometimes forget to spell as accurately as they show they can do in their spelling tests. Nevertheless, a good proportion of writing in Year 4 is well above the standard expected for pupils' ages.

Pupils' progress in mathematics has rapidly improved because of the work the school has done in that subject. Pupils very much enjoy the strong focus on practical, investigative work, and their good recall of number facts results in high levels of participation in mathematics lessons. By Year 4, they very confidently investigate number facts and question whether their answers are reasonable and consistent, and they usually set their work out well. Pupils readily take the opportunities presented to them to pursue their learning in different ways in different subjects, for example, by selecting particular avenues to explore, and by using computers. This contributes to their all-round excellent progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils have a very strong voice in the school, including in their learning. They contribute exceedingly well to the school and local community. As school and eco councillors, they successfully manage their own budgets, buying play equipment and contributing to the solar powered equipment for the pond pump. Their behaviour is exemplary. They are concerned at the thought there might be any bullying or bad behaviour, pointing to the rules that 'are there for our protection'. They play a large part in determining what to reward in school, why and how. They have an exceptionally well-developed understanding of healthy living. This is very evident in the increasing take-up of the healthy school meals, in their healthy lunch boxes and in the high rates of participation in sporting and exercise activities.

Pupils enjoy school enormously and they have excellent attitudes to learning. Attendance is above average, the absences being due largely to holidays taken during term-time. Governors have persuaded parents, strongly and successfully, to keep this to a minimum and not to take holidays in May and June when the annual assessments are under way. Parents recognise the school's strengths here. One comment summing up those of many is that pupils are 'children with bright happy faces who joyfully take part in school life and radiate confidence and pleasure'.

Pupils' understanding of local and world cultures, aided by links with schools in different countries, is very good. They are less secure about the range and diversity of culture in Britain today. The school has taken positive steps to improve this. Pupils are prepared exceptionally well for their future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teachers plan consistently well for all pupils, from the least to the most able. As often as possible, they include exciting, practical experiences that very successfully involve pupils in finding things out for themselves and determining how to take their own learning forward. This includes the very effective use of the extensive school grounds. Pupils say that 'learning is lots of fun' and parents praise staff highly for the way they help pupils to make excellent progress in their learning and personal development.

Teachers keep a very close eye on how well pupils are doing. They record and track pupils' progress really well and set up support programmes quickly should learning falter. Collation of assessment information in mathematics is less expert than in writing, making it more difficult to provide an overview of progress in mathematics at any given time. Excellent modelling by teachers and support staff contributes greatly to the way pupils conduct themselves in class and around the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The exciting curriculum provides real learning experiences both indoors and out for all age groups. Pupils' interests and needs, particularly in topic work, inform planning which very successfully promotes basic skills in different subjects. Pupil's needs in all age groups are very well met through personalised activities and pupils feel they are being challenged by this.

The school uses its excellent links really well with other schools to give pupils the opportunity to mix with a greater number of pupils of their own age. They provide a range of visits, visitors and well attended after school clubs which are outstanding. These and other activities very successfully enrich and extend pupils' learning and personal development. All of this contributes greatly to pupils' enjoyment of school. The curriculum promotes pupils' health and safety equally well and fulfils the governors' aim to produce well-rounded, mature young people with personal, social and learning skills that will remain with them throughout their lives.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school cares deeply for its pupils. Pupils of all ages responded with a resounding 'yes' when asked if they felt safe in school. The systems for ensuring their health and safety are robust,

and staff and governors check them regularly. Academic guidance is excellent. Pupils really understand their targets and know what they need to do to reach them. This is because teachers involve them in assessing their learning and help them to understand the steps they need to take to progress to the next level in the National Curriculum. Pupils very much appreciate this. Parents rightly praise the school highly for the excellent provision it makes for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These pupils are fully included in all that the school offers and support in and out of class is very effective.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

All staff are successfully involved in the management of the school, resulting in excellent teamwork because they understand fully their part in ensuring the pupils' best possible progress. The checks made on teaching and learning, including the school's own evaluation of its effectiveness, are accurate, rigorous and well focused. Governors are highly committed to fully including all pupils in everything the school offers, whatever their learning or personal needs. They keep a close eye on the progress of all pupils. Leaders and managers listen carefully to pupils and parents and make sensible decisions about how to sustain the pupils' excellent progress. A good example of this is the decision to reduce the number of part-time temporary staff, and to cover staff absences from within the school's own staff. This successfully ensures that pupils are taught consistently well by people they know, and who understand the school's ethos and how well pupils are doing. All of this contributes in great measure to the school's continued success.

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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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ 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

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

22 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Michael's CE (C) First School, Rudyard ST13 8RU

Thank you for the very warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. It was a real delight to talk to you and to find out just how much you enjoy school. You and your parents are correct when you say you go to an excellent school where the headteacher, governors and staff all care deeply for you and do their very best to help you succeed in every possible way. As a result, you make exceptionally good progress in virtually everything you do. One of the things that helps this is the way teachers find out from you what you already know and then plan your work to let you pursue some of your own interests within different themes and topics. This makes learning more exciting for you, as you said, in your own words, 'lots of fun'.

Teachers act quickly to help you whenever you seem not to be doing as well as you might, whatever the reason. They can do this because they keep a very careful record of how well you are doing at each stage of your learning, particularly in reading and writing. They set some challenging targets for you, but you know your targets well and follow the advice and guidance you are given about how to reach them. Your excellent behaviour, and the way you are ready to help each other, also contribute greatly to your learning, as does the part you play, for example, as school and eco councillors, in helping the school understand how it can keep improving how and what you learn. You have an excellent understanding of how to keep safe, fit and healthy.

We have asked the school to keep up all of this good work by

- Making sure that you make equally outstanding progress in all types of writing, and making it easier to see, at different times in the year, how well you are doing in mathematics.
- Making sure you have as good an understanding of the range of cultures in this country as you do of different cultures in different parts of the world. You can help by continuing to work as hard as you do now, by making sure your teachers know what you need to learn, and by continuing to find some things out for yourselves. We very much hope that all of this will make sure you continue to enjoy learning as much as you do now, for the rest of your lives.

Yours sincerely

Doris Bell Lead inspector

Annex B

22 February 2008



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Doris Bell
Lead inspector