

St Michael's Church of England C Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104227
Local Authority	Walsall
Inspection number	323993
Inspection dates	6–7 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Doris Bell

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	366
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	Simon Merckel
Headteacher	Anthony Orlik
Date of previous school inspection	24 May 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Maple Road Pelsall Walsall WS3 4JJ
Telephone number	01922 682309

Age group	3–11
Inspection dates	6–7 May 2009
Inspection number	323993

Fax number

01922 686839

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This popular average-sized primary school has an Early Years Foundation Stage unit. The unit caters for 52 nursery-aged children who attend on a part-time basis and 45 full-time Reception-aged children. It also has wraparound care which consists of before and after-school clubs and day care for the part-time nursery children whose parents want them to stay for the whole day. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average, as is the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Almost all pupils are White British. Pupils in Years 1 to 6 are taught in smaller single age classes for literacy and numeracy, and in mixed age groups for other subjects.

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. The good quality of education it provides enables pupils to achieve well. Pupils' attainment is as expected for their age when they start school, and they leave school having reached above average standards in English and mathematics. Evidence in school shows clearly that the 2008 test results for pupils in Year 6, did not reflect the true quality of their written work, which was in fact good. Pupils write well with a good sense of audience and purpose and using a good range of vocabulary that sustains the reader's interest. In the current Year 6 group, the overall quality of writing is above average.

Good leadership and management, including the astute deployment of teaching and support staff to meet the school's priorities, have contributed greatly to the improvement evident in writing. As a result, all groups of pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make equally good progress. Occasionally, more able pupils do not move on as quickly in lessons as they might because they have to complete the same work as other pupils before being given the more challenging work prepared for them.

Governors hold the school to account well; constantly probing whether it is doing all it can for the pupils. However, while they have identified the promotion of community cohesion as a priority in the school improvement plan, this aspect of the school's work is underdeveloped. Through themed weeks, such as the multicultural week, and their work in religious education, pupils gain a good understanding of different faiths and cultures throughout the world. However, their understanding of cultural diversity in the United Kingdom is limited. The school is tackling this, for example by organising visits to different places of worship to help them to gain a greater understanding of what affects the lives of others. However, a significant minority of pupils were withdrawn from this activity by parents and were not, therefore, able to benefit from it.

Effective care, guidance and support underpin the pupils' good personal development and well-being, ensuring that they are prepared well for life beyond school. Their good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning are fostered well by effective teaching that contributes to their overall good progress. Pupils commented very favourably about their teachers, saying that 'all teachers, every one of them, help you with your work' and 'find different ways to help you understand things when you get stuck'. They acknowledge that learning is 'hard sometimes' but that this 'helps you to learn more'. However, teachers sometimes too readily accept pupils' answers to their questions, and do not probe their thinking deeply enough to extend their learning. Additionally, they do not always move pupils on to independent work as quickly as they might to enable pupils to show what they have, or have not, understood.

Teachers keep good records of pupils' progress. Their assessments are accurate and they use the information well in their planning. Marking is of good quality in literacy and numeracy, identifying for pupils what they need to do to improve. Pupils appreciate this and are very much involved in assessing their own learning. Marking is less helpful in other subjects and teachers regularly miss opportunities to help pupils reach their writing targets faster through the detailed marking of their writing in different subjects.

Throughout the school, there is a calm, purposeful ethos, underpinned by the school's Christian values and demonstrated in the way pupils move around the school at all times. Pupils know their views are valued and parents are overwhelmingly pleased with what the school does for their children. Joint planning among staff in the mixed age classes, the rigorous checks made

on teaching and learning, and the willingness of staff to learn from each other, creates strong teamwork wholly focused on securing the best outcomes for each pupil. All of this, and the improvements evident since the previous inspection, give the school good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Mostly, children start school with the skills and experiences expected for their age. They make good progress and an above average proportion reach at least average standards at the end of Reception in all areas of learning. Standards are securely above average in writing, reflecting the emphasis the school has placed on improving this aspect of communication, language and literacy. Children's books demonstrate their good ability to form letters and spell simple words correctly, and to write in complete sentences using capital letters and full stops. They also write numbers correctly, set out calculations properly and have a secure understanding of how to add and subtract.

Effective leadership and management and good links with parents ensure that good attention is paid to children's health, welfare and well-being. Children enjoy coming to school, feel safe and secure and form good relationships with staff and with each other. They play and work happily on their own or in groups, developing good independent skills. There is an effective balance between adult-directed activities and those that the children select themselves. Good use is made of the outdoor area for learning although here, and in some whole-class sessions indoors, support staff do not always interact with the children as effectively as they might, to move learning on. Nevertheless, procedures for tracking children's individual progress are good and staff use the information well in planning. Children are also successfully encouraged to comment on their own progress.

The provision for Nursery children who stay for the whole day is also good. Effective communication between school staff, parents and those who manage the wraparound care, ensure that children's learning continues in that setting. However, records of children's progress here are relatively limited.

What the school should do to improve further

- Challenge pupils' thinking skills more in lessons and encourage them to give fuller answers to questions.
- Extend the good practice in marking, evident in literacy books, to writing in all subjects to help pupils reach their targets faster.
- Improve pupils' understanding of the range and diversity of culture in the United Kingdom.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

All pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, achieve well. Standards are above average in Year 2 and Year 6. The school works hard to ensure that all groups of pupils make equally good progress.

By Year 2, pupils use punctuation correctly and make good attempts at spelling new words. They have a good grasp of the need to include a range of vocabulary to engage the reader and many write well at length. Pupils in Year 6 also use a wide range of vocabulary and hold the reader's attention well. The quality of their writing is further enhanced by careful planning and

thoughtful discussion prior to the final draft. Good quality marking of written work in literacy informs pupils well, although this is not always the case in other subjects. As a consequence, pupils do not always grasp the opportunities available to them to reach their targets as quickly as they could. Additionally, their handwriting is sometimes difficult to read.

In mathematics, pupils learn from an early age to calculate quickly and to set written calculations out correctly. Occasionally, however, more able pupils have to complete work that they find too easy before moving on to the more challenging work of which they are capable.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school and attendance is above average. They care for and respect others, behave well and know and abide by a strong moral code. They acknowledge that bullying does occasionally happen. They know to tell someone if it does and are very confident that staff deal with it, as pupils agreed, 'just like that', snapping their fingers. Pupils described racism as 'really a form of bullying' and therefore equally wrong, and that they should avoid even mild taunting of anyone because of the hurt and anxiety it can cause. They work well together, supporting and helping each other in class and in the playground. Parents commented favourably on how well older pupils help younger ones. Overall, pupils feel safe, secure and happy in school.

Pupils have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles. Large numbers take part in extra-curricular sporting activities and they try to eat healthily. They praise school dinners, saying 'dinners are not just grub now'. Pupils understand their role in improving the school, for example securing a private area for older girls to change for physical education, and improving the range of play equipment available. They make a good contribution to the local community, and have close links with the church. Their knowledge of different cultures, however, is largely limited to their study of different world faiths. They have a good understanding of how following a particular faith can affect the way a person lives but their knowledge of the range and diversity of culture in Britain today is less well developed. Nevertheless, their good progress in basic skills and their well-developed personal skills mean they leave school well prepared for their future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good relationships and high expectations underpin the sometimes excellent attitudes and behaviour of the vast majority of pupils. This contributes greatly to their good progress, as do the teachers' good subject knowledge and mostly accurate pinpointing of pupils' individual learning needs. Teachers ensure pupils are clear about what they are to learn and they use success criteria well to enable pupils to evaluate their own learning. Teachers mark pupils' work well in English and mathematics and provide them with 'handy hints' on how to improve. This good quality marking does not extend to writing in other subjects and therefore teachers miss opportunities to help pupils see how to reach their targets even faster.

Teachers assess and track pupils' progress well over time and use the information effectively in their planning. However, they do not always probe and challenge pupils' thinking by requiring them to answer questions fully, or move them on to independent work quickly enough. Teaching assistants provide good support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Well-focused withdrawal sessions provide effective boosts to learning for these pupils and contribute to their good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum promotes basic skills well and provides many good opportunities for the development of personal, social and health education. It promotes community cohesion satisfactorily but there are not yet enough opportunities built into different subjects to cover this aspect in detail. Parents report that the integrated curriculum introduced in January 2009, which links subjects through topics, has added to pupils' enjoyment of school. Pupils feel it adds fun and excitement to their learning, bringing it alive for them. Within the curriculum, links between subjects are clearer in Years 1 and 2, where themes are taught across subjects, than in Years 3 to 6 where subjects are still largely taught separately within a theme. A good range of visits, visitors and well-attended extra-curricular sporting and arts activities extends the curriculum and caters effectively for a wide range of interests and abilities. Additionally, pupils throughout the school learn to speak French.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral care is a particular strength of the school. Safeguarding procedures, including child protection, meet current requirements. There are good systems in place to tackle any form of harassment, and to promote good behaviour and attendance. Pupils therefore work and play in a secure learning environment that celebrates and contributes to their progress. Effective links with outside agencies contribute to the good provision made by pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Pupils understand their targets and how to improve their learning. They do not always make the links between what they are learning in different subjects and teachers' marking does not give them enough guidance on this, which affects in particular, their ability to reach their writing targets as quickly as possible.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The clear educational direction emanating from senior leaders results in a clear focus on helping pupils make better progress throughout the school. Teaching is regularly checked for its impact on pupils' learning. Development points are followed up, where appropriate with professional development opportunities, to improve specific skills. The deployment of staff has been carefully considered to maximise their strengths. This is particularly effective in improving pupils' progress in English and mathematics in Years 3 to 6.

Governance is good. Governors set challenging targets for the school, underpinning their high expectations that pupils will make better than expected progress. They check regularly that this is the case. The school's own evaluation of its performance is accurate and well founded, and is used effectively to focus the priorities in the school improvement plan. The plan also includes a focus on promoting community cohesion more effectively by building it into the new curriculum. However, this work is relatively new and is just beginning to emerge within some topics.

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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

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
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?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

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?	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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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**

8 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Michael's C of E Primary School, Walsall WS3 4JJ

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. Talking to you was a real pleasure and we were particularly pleased to note how much you enjoy school and appreciate what your teachers do for you. We very much enjoyed hearing the choir sing and recognising the quality of the singing that helped you to win the choir competition. You and your parents are right in thinking you go to a good school where the staff care deeply for you and want you to do your best.

We found that you make good progress in your learning because your teachers think carefully about what each one of you needs to do to make progress. You usually help them well in this, but we noticed that sometimes when you are asked questions in class, you are not always encouraged to think really hard and explain more about what you mean. We have asked the staff to think about how they can do this better.

Teachers mark your writing well in English, giving you many 'handy hints' on how to improve it. We think it would be a good idea for them to do this for your writing in other subjects, and this should help you to reach your targets faster. You can help by remembering what your targets are every time you do any piece of writing.

It was good to see how well behaved most of you are in lessons and around the school. You are very polite and well mannered and show good levels of respect for each other and for adults. This will stand you in good stead as you get older. You make a good contribution to the school community and appreciate the way the school listens to and acts on your suggestions. It is clear, also, that you contribute well to the local community and work with the church to which the school is attached. You have a good understanding of different religious faiths and this is starting to develop in you a better understanding of different cultures around the world. You are much less secure, however, about the range of cultures in Britain today. You can help by being open-minded and finding out as much as you can about them, and we have asked the school to help you do this.

We hope you will continue to enjoy learning for the rest of your lives as much as you do now and we wish you well for the future.

Yours faithfully

Doris Bell

Lead inspector