

St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 115157 |
| Local Authority | Essex |
| Inspection number | 326139 |
| Inspection dates | 18–19 June 2009 |
| Reporting inspector | Ann Taylor |

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.

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 4–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 414 |
| 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 | Mrs J Bailey |
| Headteacher | Mr A Jones |
| Date of previous school inspection | 25 May 2006 |
| Date of previous funded early education inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Date of previous childcare inspection | Not previously inspected |
| School address | Maple Avenue Braintree Essex CM7 2NS |
| Telephone number | 01376 344866 |
| Fax number | 01376 550842 |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large primary school. The admission policy reserves up to one third of places for those children of families who attend a local church. Currently less than one third of families occupy these places. Pupils come from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are provided for in the Reception classes. Their attainment on entry is broadly average overall, although there is a wide range of abilities. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. There are a higher number of pupils with a statement of special educational need than seen nationally. These are for a range of complex and severe learning needs. Most children come from White British backgrounds with a small number from various minority ethnic groups. The school has the following awards; Healthy School, Active Mark, Foundation and Intermediate Levels for Developing Internationalism, Eco School bronze award. It is part of the 'Making Good Progress' national pilot programme.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school providing a satisfactory education for its pupils whilst also having a number of considerable strengths in its pastoral care. Excellent moral and social guidance are characteristics of this popular school. Parents are pleased and supportive and consequently it is regularly oversubscribed. The headteacher is the catalyst to creating a strong Christian ethos. It is a place where all are encouraged, welcomed and valued, and where everyone has a strong commitment to giving each child the very best. The school's priority is to raise academic standards so that pupils are making consistently good progress. It is well placed in this because important factors such as outstanding personal development, strong care for pupils and a good curriculum are already present.

Pupils make sound progress in their learning and leadership and management are satisfactory. Whilst some pupils make good progress in some year groups, including those who are receiving extra targeted support to help them catch up, this is not a consistent picture. Leaders, managers and governors lack a clear, objective view of how well pupils are doing and how their school compares to others. For the last three years, standards at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 have been consistently average, with pupils making satisfactory progress from broadly average starting points. This trend is set to continue as shown by Key Stage 1 assessments and current levels being achieved by Year 6 pupils. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, although not consistently good enough to ensure all pupils make good progress. The best teaching is lively, active and purposeful and really engages pupils' interest. Here, information about how well pupils are doing is carefully used to plan and tailor lessons to meet their individual needs. However, in other lessons and classes, teachers do not always have high enough expectations of what pupils should be achieving. Similarly, activities are not finely tuned for the differing levels of ability in the class.

Pupils' personal development, including their behaviour, attitudes and desire to learn is exemplary. This is because pupils are very well looked after and supported and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive a highly effective individual care and guidance. However, the academic guidance pupils receive, helping them to aim higher, is better in some classes than in others, slowing overall progress. Consequently, care, support and guidance is good overall. The good curriculum has been thoughtfully adapted so that subjects are linked together well. It is now being further developed to ensure the skills pupils develop are built on year by year. Taking into account the improvements since the last inspection and the stable standards, the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress because of good teaching and effective leadership. These have both improved this academic year. Learning is carefully planned and exciting because teachers respond well to what children are interested in. Children's behaviour is good overall. Restless and sometimes challenging behaviour from a few is handled very well. In general, good use is made of learning outside. Occasional glitches in classroom management can mean time is wasted on outside supervision issues. Teaching assistants support learning very well. There is excellent provision for those who need extra time, care and understanding for their learning or medical needs. A particular strength is the involvement in 'Forest School' learning and staff have recently gained their full accreditation. Children learn

by visiting the forest regularly to explore and enjoy nature, for example, by measuring puddles, climbing trees and building an end of term campfire. It is having a positive effect on how well children are learning, especially in their personal and social development and their knowledge and understanding about our world.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve by better planning for those of differing abilities.
- Develop the role of leaders, managers and governors in using, analysing and interpreting data to check, compare and challenge the schools' performance.
- Ensure all teachers are consistent in helping pupils to understand what they are learning about, how they can be successful and how to improve their work.

A small proportion of 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: 3

Children have made good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage this year to reach age-related expectations. This is despite the fact that many children have summer birthdays and only started full time school at Easter. Since the last inspection, pupils have consistently made satisfactory progress at both key stages, reaching average standards. Current 2009 national assessments for Key Stage 1 show standards are broadly average. The school's own reliable 2009 end of Key Stage 2 data shows pupils on track to reach broadly average standards. It is an improving picture with an increase in the numbers gaining the higher levels, especially in English. Here, numbers gaining the average level in writing increased to be more in line with reading. Narrowing this gap was an issue from the previous inspection. Improvements and a tightening of systems during this academic year have seen a much sharper focus on identifying early those at risk of slipping behind. A good range and quality of support is in place to overcome this. As a result, these pupils are now making good progress. In addition, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress towards achieving the personal targets in their individual educational plans. Generally they make the same rate of academic progress as others.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. A particular strength is the way in which pupils adopt and interpret the school's four values of Love, Integrity, Resilience and Creativity. They see and understand the relevance of these values and apply them to their own lives. For example, when acting as mentors to welcome new pupils or as play leaders. This strong school ethos creates an environment where pupils thoroughly enjoy learning and attendance is very high. Pupils are easy to talk to, polite and helpful. They have an excellent understanding of the need for a healthy diet, regular exercise and how to lead safe lives. This is demonstrated in their sensible yet often energetic behaviour at lunchtimes and in their enthusiasm for the wide range of opportunities for sporting activities. Their keen spirituality develops in lessons and assemblies and is seen in their real enjoyment of art, music and drama. They are very proud of their school, accept responsibility

readily and are clearly aware of their place in the school, local and global communities. With their mature personal and social skills and sound basic skills, they are well prepared for the next stage in their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Although satisfactory overall, teaching contributes very effectively to pupils' outstanding personal development. This is because relationships are very good and the content of lessons reflects the religious nature of the school. However, the quality of teaching and learning is inconsistent, mainly because expectations of work are not always high enough. Whilst all lessons have objectives that are shared, often these are what the pupils are going to do, not what they are going to learn. Similarly, lessons always give pupils the criteria for success. Pupils may sometimes decide these themselves. This helps them to remember what they have learned before or think about what they need to do to produce a good piece of work. However, these are not used consistently well enough to raise achievement further. Teachers are currently reviewing their planning of lessons as part of a new approach to the curriculum. Planning often does not take enough account of different levels of ability, especially for those who need a greater challenge. Presentation of work in some classes is untidy. Teaching assistants support pupils well, especially those with particular learning or medical needs.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Recent re-structuring has led to more systematic links between subjects. There is now an emphasis on developing the essential skills required by pupils to support their learning, as well as the development of their personal and social skills. Good progress has been made to identify key skills across all subjects as well as aspects such as relationships and citizenship. This is in line with the school's commitment and success in developing well-rounded and responsible young people. School leaders have identified their next priority, which is to ensure that these skills are tackled progressively as pupils move through the school. There is a very good range of additional activities including sports, music, drama and the arts. In addition, there are some interesting enrichment activities for those who show a particular gift or talent, such as the 'Masterchef' competition held during the inspection. The successful teaching of French is well established and thoroughly enjoyed by all.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The personal care for pupils is of a very high quality. As a result they flourish and develop as mature and caring young adults who understand extremely well how to live a healthy and safe life. Robust procedures for their safety are well established and administration and organisation is rigorous. Vulnerable pupils, including those with emotional or learning difficulties, are very effectively supported by the excellent care they receive. This includes effectively drawing in a good range of expertise to support their education. The care extends to preparing pupils thoroughly for their next school to ensure they transfer successfully. Academic guidance has improved since the last inspection and all pupils now receive help in understanding how they can improve their work. However, there is inconsistency between classes and year groups about

the quality of this advice, based on the success criteria and marking. Consequently, it does not always show pupils how they can achieve as highly as possible.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher is well supported by a relatively new and energetic senior management team. Systems for checking how well pupils are doing have improved since the last inspection. They are used effectively to identify those who are underachieving and to support them through intervention groups. These pupils are achieving well as a result. However, the analysis and use of data does not take a broad view of the levels of pupils' progress over time to judge if this is good enough. Neither does the school compare sufficiently, how well they are doing with other schools nationally. As a result, the school's view of the rate of pupils' progress is more generous than that of inspectors. In all other respects, the school has a well informed view of its strengths and areas for development. Targets set have been moderately challenging which has ensured stability in standards. Targets for the number of pupils reaching the highest levels have increased and this has met with some success. Governors, many of whom are relatively new, are supportive of the school. Whilst their role in being a 'critical friend' is developing, there is less rigour in the way they challenge the school to improve the rate of pupils' academic progress. The school's work to promote community cohesion is good and is effectively promoted through valuable links with the church and the local community. This includes a developing international dimension through pupils' links with schools in Peru, India and Tanzania. The school has good relationships with a range of organisations and specialists, which are very effective in helping to support pupils' outstanding welfare and pastoral care.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

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| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 3 |
| 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 | 3 |

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

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|---|---|
| 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? | 1 |
| How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed? | 2 |

Achievement and standards

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|--|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 3 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 3 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 3 |
| 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

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|---|---|
| How good are 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 |
| The extent to which learners enjoy their education | 1 |
| The attendance of learners | 1 |
| 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 | 2 |

The quality of provision

| | |
|--|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs? | 3 |
| 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

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 3 |
| 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 |
| 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 |
| 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**

22 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Michael's VA Primary School, Braintree, CM7 2NS

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited you recently. You were very polite and well behaved and we were impressed with you all. I am writing this letter to let you know what we found out.

Yours is a satisfactory school with some important strengths. Your behaviour, approach to lessons, the way you enjoy learning and your confident and mature approach is excellent. You are a credit to your school, so very well done! The reason for this is the way Mr Jones and everyone makes sure the four values you all believe in - Love, Integrity, Resilience and Creativity - run right through everything you do. Everyone works very hard to make sure you are happy and well cared for, which is important too. The things you learn about, including the sports, clubs and extra activities, such as the Year 6 visit to France, are good. The youngest of you get off to a good start to your education in the Reception classes and make good progress. Those of you who need extra help to catch up get a good deal too.

We have asked Mr Jones and everyone in your school to work hard to help you all make good progress. This is so that when you leave in Year 6, the standards you reach are above average. In order to do this we have asked them to do three things:

- Make the teaching even better so that more lessons are good and you receive work that is just at the right level for you - not too hard and not too easy either.
- Involve all the adults who are in charge of different areas of the school in taking a closer look at how you are getting on to make sure you are doing as well as you possibly can.
- Help you to know just what you need to do to make your work even better.

We know everyone is capable of doing these things as there are lots of good and outstanding areas to your school already. You can do your bit by carrying on working hard and behaving so well. We all hope you have a lovely summer in your work and play.

With best wishes

Ann Taylor

Lead Inspector