

St Michael's Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117426
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326606
Inspection date	3 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Lynne Blakelock

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 aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	239
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	Mr Graham Willson
Headteacher	Mr Martin Willis
Date of previous school inspection	31 January 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Apton Road Bishop's Stortford Hertfordshire CM23 3SN
Telephone number	01279 652607

Age group	3–11
Inspection date	3 February 2009
Inspection number	326606

Fax number

01279 654253

Age group	3-11
Inspection date	3 February 2009
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the extent to which assessment practices help pupils to make the progress that they are capable of; how effectively the school promotes community cohesion; the impact of the governing body on the school's capacity to improve. Evidence was gathered from: lesson observations and the quality of work produced; discussions with pupils, the headteacher, governors and staff; scrutiny of school information. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors 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 is an average-sized, popular and over-subscribed school, situated close to the town centre. Many pupils travel from the outskirts of the town to attend. Children start school with levels of knowledge and skills that are in line with those expected nationally. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. A small number of pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Few speak English as an additional language but numbers are increasing. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well below average and rising steadily. A well below average percentage of pupils is eligible for free school meals.

The Early Years Foundation Stage caters for children from one or two terms following their third birthday until they are five years old. The school was awarded Healthy Schools status in 2006. It has recently achieved 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 is an outstanding school which provides pupils with an excellent quality of education and prepares them exceptionally well for secondary school. Pupils embrace the culture of high expectations and strive to be the best that they can. Together with the Christian faith, which is the basis of everything that the school does, it provides a secure framework in which pupils thrive from the time that they start. Parents are almost unanimous in their support for the school, which many describe as 'providing an excellent range and quality of opportunities and experiences for their children'.

Pupils consistently attain exceptionally high standards through the school. By the end of Year 2, a much higher percentage of pupils than found nationally reach the expected and higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics. This has been the case for the last four years. By the end of Year 6, national test results show that pupils' standards are exceptionally high in English, mathematics and science, demonstrating their outstanding progress through the school. All pupils reached the expected levels in English, mathematics and science in 2008; an above-average percentage achieved higher levels in mathematics and even more did so in English and science. Pupils exceeded their challenging targets. Those who find learning more difficult or who speak English as an additional language also achieve outstandingly well. Pupils achieve very well in other subjects, especially in information and communication technology and in music. Although there are small variations in the relative performance of boys and girls from year to year, teaching and learning methods and the curriculum provide equally well for both.

Consistently good and often outstanding teaching is significant in ensuring pupils' excellent progress through the school. Pupils find learning interesting, because lessons are well planned as part of a lively and creative curriculum. Tasks are frequently chosen to match closely the levels at which pupils are working. However, they are not always structured creatively enough to enable more able pupils to extend their learning as much as is possible. Teachers know their subjects well and use a variety of ways to maintain pupils' interest. Methods include computer-based learning and problem solving. Learning is reinforced and extended well by regular homework.

The outstanding range of learning opportunities is planned very carefully so that, for example, the starting points of many activities are pupils' life experiences and interests. Lessons broaden the world for them and extend their knowledge and understanding, often across subject areas. The new global-gardening area is an example of the constantly evolving learning activities. Pupils have a great enthusiasm for developing their knowledge, understanding and skills. Partnership work with local secondary schools, for example, broadens learning opportunities for the older pupils. School clubs are popular and varied. Visits and visitors add to classroom activities, promoting extremely well pupils' academic and personal development. The provision for music and art are strengths of the school. All pupils from Year 2 to Year 6 learn to play a musical instrument. Theme days, such as in art, enable pupils to deepen their learning. Pupils in Key Stage 2 are enjoying lessons in French, it is also a popular out of class activity for those in Year 2.

The school promotes pupils' outstanding personal development very thoughtfully. This includes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which is reinforced excellently through the curriculum and the school day. The school is working effectively to ensure that pupils have

a respect for, and an understanding of the diversity of the world in which they live. The Olympics week, for example, enabled pupils through the school to empathise with the lifestyles of other cultures. From the start of the day, pupils are busy, learning and contributing. They enjoy school greatly because they are entrusted with responsibilities, and eagerly participate in many opportunities, both in lessons and around the school, to develop a broad range of skills. There is an imaginative input to this, as seen in pupils' participation in a competition about space experiments, which led to the joint winners meeting a space astronaut at the House of Commons. Together with high standards in English, mathematics and science, these experiences result in pupils who are prepared thoroughly for the next stages of their education. Through the school council, house-captain roles and many other daily responsibilities starting from the Early Years Foundation Stage, pupils develop great confidence in working in teams, stating their opinions and leading their peers. Their behaviour is very sensible, because they are very clear about what is right and wrong. Attendance is excellent. The school provides pupils with a good range of physical activities to keep healthy and fit through timetabled lessons and out-of-school activities. They show a very clear understanding of the importance of a healthy diet, and put this into practice at break and lunchtimes. Pupils feel secure at school because relationships between pupils and with the staff are very positive. Very rare instances of unkind behaviour are resolved quickly.

Pupils feel safe in school, with procedures in place to ensure their health, safety and protection. They include up-to-date child-protection training for staff and vetting procedures of new appointments. The school's 'values' programme and circle time give pupils' opportunities to share their thoughts, and for staff to provide good moral and behavioural guidance within a very caring environment. While the school continues to refine assessment procedures, academic guidance is of a high standard. Pupils work to challenging targets, which they know how to achieve. Marking regularly relates to how pupils can move further forward in their learning. The robust tracking of pupils' progress ensures that prompt action can be taken if any pupil starts to fall behind. Very effective support for pupils who find learning more difficult enables them to make excellent progress through the school. Those with specific talents are guided towards additional activities out of lessons, often with partnership schools.

The outstanding leadership and management of the headteacher, senior team and all staff with management responsibilities ensure the school continues to move forward. Impressive leadership confirms the school's excellent capacity for further improvement. The headteacher has well thought out plans to move the school forward. The starting point is the good use of the information and assessment data that the school holds about every pupil, which are used to promote all aspects of their development very well. Monitoring of the school's work results in any potential underachievement being identified and swiftly resolved. Subject leaders play an important role in school improvement, through consistent practice in assessing pupils' learning, and through action plans that are compiled following yearly reviews of pupils' progress. Consistent practices in place to assess learning show good improvement since the last inspection. Governors are forward thinking and keep abreast of new developments. They are greatly involved in daily school life, strengthening their ability to evaluate the impact of its work and to move it further forward. Community cohesion is a good and developing aspect of the school's work. It has extensive involvement in the local community, including strong partnership work with other schools. International links are an area for development.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

A carefully planned induction process, including home visits, ensures the youngest children get off to an excellent start, settling quickly to school life in Nursery and Reception. As one parent wrote; 'When our daughter started at the school the teaching staff went out of their way to help her to integrate and feel accepted.' The majority of children enter the Nursery with knowledge and skills that are broadly those expected nationally. By the end of the Reception, many have exceeded the goals expected of them. The outstanding progress that the children make is due to the highly effective teaching and support of a range of adults. Assessment procedures are also robust and used very well to plan the next steps in learning. The children receive good attention, often in very small groups. Tasks are very closely matched to the children's needs and there is a strong emphasis on social skills. For example, issues related to 'thinking of others' are regular features of class discussions. The children thrive in a relaxed environment where they are encouraged to develop their skills through both teacher-led and child-initiated activities. The outdoor areas have been significantly improved recently and help the children to become confident, active and independent learners. Their behaviour is excellent because adults make expectations clear and all make firm friends. Excellent leadership of Early Years Foundation Stage ensures that the curriculum is well planned and that all the necessary welfare requirements are met.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make sure that those pupils who are working towards higher levels have tasks that are more creatively structured in order to extend their learning as broadly as possible.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

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

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?	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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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

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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

4 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Michael's Church of England VA Primary School, Bishops Stortford, CM23 3SN

I am writing to tell you the judgements we have made about your school following the recent inspection. We enjoyed our day with you. Thank you for your warm welcome and for sharing with us your thoughts about the education that you receive.

Your school is outstanding. You reach exceptionally high standards by the end of Year 6 in English, mathematics and science. Your results continue to improve, with all of you reaching the expected levels in 2009, demonstrating the excellent progress you make through the school. The results you achieve are down to teaching that is good and often outstanding, and by you knowing how to improve your work through helpful and very relevant targets. Your school is led excellently by the headteacher and senior staff, who are always trying to improve it. With this in mind, we have asked your headteacher to make sure that those of you who are working towards higher levels have tasks that are more creatively thought out, in order to extend your learning as much as possible.

You enjoy school and are happy, from the day that you start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. You feel safe in the friendly and caring environment. Lessons are interesting and planned well so that you get lots of chances to learn new skills. These are strengthened by visits and by visitors to your school, which brings learning alive and is one reason why the curriculum is outstanding. From the time that you start school, you learn important social and leadership skills, through being given responsibilities and roles. You are all busy and involved. We were pleased that you work hard to keep healthy and fit.

I send you our best wishes for the future and hope that you will continue to make the most of all the opportunities that your school gives you.

Lynne Blakelock

Lead inspector