

# St Michael's Church of England High School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	119795
<b>Local Authority</b>	Lancashire
<b>Inspection number</b>	327133
<b>Inspection date</b>	9 July 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Susan Wareing HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	1140
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Freda Armstrong
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Chris Bagguley
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 February 2006
<b>School address</b>	Astley Road Chorley Lancashire PR7 1RS
<b>Telephone number</b>	01257 264740
<b>Fax number</b>	01257 224767

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector.

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards; teaching and learning and aspects of the curriculum; aspects of leadership and management. Inspectors collected evidence from lesson observations, assessment data, documentation and discussions with key staff, the chair of governors, and pupils. 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

St Michael's Church of England High School is a larger than average sized comprehensive school in Chorley, near Preston. Most pupils are of White British heritage and come from relatively advantaged social and economic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below that found nationally.

The school is very popular within the community: there are more applications for places than the school can provide. The school acquired specialist status as a specialist college for the performing arts in 2002 and was redesignated in 2007. Through its specialist status the school has established a wide range of local and international partnerships. The school also has the Artsmark Gold award, and Healthy School Status.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

St Michael's Church of England High School is an outstanding school that lives out, in a practical way, its aim of 'pursuing excellence and celebrating the uniqueness of each individual.' Since its last inspection in 2006, when it was deemed good, the school has further improved the achievement and standards reached by its pupils, the quality of the curriculum and the leadership and management of the school. Although a few parents told us that they would like improvements in communication with the school, the great majority of parents are overwhelmingly delighted with the school's relentless commitment to the academic, social and emotional needs of their children. One parent's comment is typical of many received by inspectors during the inspection: 'It is a joy to see my daughter enjoy school so much. St Michael's is a well run and welcoming place where children are encouraged to succeed.'

Pupils' achievement is outstanding. They enter the school with standards that are above average and, by the end of their five years in the school, reach standards that are consistently and exceptionally high and make outstanding progress. The gap between girls' and boys' achievement is much narrower than that found nationally and there is no significant difference in the achievement of those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities or of the very few pupils who speak English as an additional language.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. The school's very strong moral and spiritual ethos gives pupils many opportunities for reflection. This contributes greatly to their outstanding personal development and, in particular, to a well developed sense of right and wrong. Service to its immediate community is an integral part of the school's mission, shared by the whole staff and pupils. Pupils are rightly very proud of their school, seeing themselves as its representatives in their local community, to which they contribute much. For example, they participate in musical performances and charity fundraising. Pupils relish the wide range of opportunities that the school provides for them to take responsibility for others; for example as prefects, members of the school council and mentors, and as junior sports leaders working with local primary school pupils.

Pupils' excellent cultural awareness is enhanced by their work in the arts, which provides opportunities to visit music schools in Sweden and Hungary. Links with the wider, more diverse local community include visits to a local mosque and synagogue and 'shopping trails' that help pupils' understanding of the lives of local people from other cultures. They are well taught about the wider national and global community, although the school recognises that there is scope for more work to ensure that what the pupils have learned has more impact on their daily lives.

Pupils are very well-informed about how to lead safe and healthy lives. They feel safe in school and say that bullying and racist incidents are very rare. They are confident that these are dealt with rapidly when they occur. In this happy learning environment, all students are helped to develop into exceptionally mature, confident and articulate young people. Their exemplary behaviour and attendance demonstrate their great enjoyment of all that the school offers.

The school is highly inclusive and pupils say that there is always an adult to whom they can turn if they have a problem. The wide range of professionals in school, both teaching and non-teaching staff, work very effectively with a wide range of outside agencies, to provide pupils with outstanding care, guidance and support. The IMPACT unit and Personal Guidance and Flexible Learning Centres provide calming and supportive spaces for the most vulnerable

pupils. The very small proportion of pupils who do not progress to further education, training or employment after Year 11 demonstrates the quality of the advice and guidance that pupils receive throughout their time in school.

Excellent transition arrangements between Year 6 and 7 ensure that vulnerable pupils are identified early in primary school, so that very effective strategies to meet their particular academic and emotional needs are quickly put in place. All child protection and safeguarding arrangements are in place and meet current requirements.

Teaching is consistently good, with a significant proportion of outstanding teaching that has increased considerably since the last inspection. This reflects the considerable investment the school has made in the improvement of teaching and learning, through extra appointments to the teaching staff and high quality professional development, including the establishment of a very clear, agreed understanding about the features of a good lesson. The specialist performing arts departments have taken a lead in fostering more creative teaching. These factors, together with the pupils' outstanding attitudes to learning, contribute to their very high academic standards and achievement.

Strengths seen in lessons during the inspection were the excellent relationships between teachers and pupils, the clear structure of the lessons, the teachers' specialist subject knowledge; high levels of challenge and frequent opportunities for pupils to assess their own work and that of other pupils. However, in some lessons there was too much direction from the teachers. Pupils generally know their targets and how to improve their work but there is some inconsistency in marking across departments.

The curriculum is of outstanding quality and caters exceptionally well for the needs of all the learners. The school draws very well on local partnerships to provide college and employment-based elements where appropriate. All pupils study a modern language at both key stages and music, dance and drama at Key Stage 3. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 can opt for three performing arts courses. The rich variety of extra-curricular activities, including provision for the gifted and talented, is a strength greatly appreciated by students, who say that there is always something to do at lunchtimes and after school. The take-up of sports and musical activities is extensive.

The leadership and management of the school are outstanding in the impact that they have on students' achievement and personal development. The headteacher and senior leaders have a very clear, shared sense of purpose, together with a drive and energy that foster continuous improvement. Middle managers are well informed and confident about their role and contribute well to the school's very clear understanding of its strengths and of where improvements are needed. They are very effectively held to account and supported by senior leaders.

The school's self-evaluation is incisive and very accurate and this has contributed much to its current outstanding effectiveness. It is informed by the school's highly sophisticated systems for the monitoring and evaluation of everything that it does. School development planning is sharply focused on the improvement of teaching, learning and achievement. The school's understanding and analysis of assessment information allow it to intervene swiftly on any pockets of underperformance, so that there are no barriers to learning for any pupil. Some targets in performing arts subjects were narrowly missed in 2008, but overall the process of setting targets is exemplary in its rigour and results in well judged, very challenging targets which drive the school forward. The specialist status in performing arts supports a wide range of partnerships; for example all departmental staff work with 15 partner primary schools to

provide professional development for teachers and arts activities for pupils. School development planning is very firmly focused on the improvement of teaching, learning and achievement.

Governance is good. Governors are well involved in the life of the school and support and challenge the school management when necessary. They have shown particular commitment to the process of staff recruitment and to the development of very rigorous health and safety procedures. The school manages its finances very astutely and thoughtfully to provide outstanding value for money. The excellence of leadership and management and the continued improvements since the last inspection demonstrate the school's outstanding capacity to improve still further.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Ensure that marking across all departments meets the school's very clear guidance.

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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

**Achievement and standards**

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup>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.



## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	2
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

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	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**

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Michael's Church of England High School, Lancashire,

PR7 1RS

I would like to thank you, on behalf of my colleague and me, for the very warm welcome you all gave us when we visited your school during its recent inspection. We would particularly like to thank all those of you who gave up part of your lunchtime to tell us how you feel about your school. We very much enjoyed meeting you and other students whom we met in lessons and around the school.

You are right to be proud of your school. We found it to be outstanding. The headteacher and his senior colleagues lead the school very well and we were pleased to hear how hard the staff work to support you. We know, because of your excellent attendance and behaviour, how much you enjoy all that the school offers, including lunchtime and after-school activities. You also have excellent opportunities to take part in visits and exchanges.

We saw the great confidence and maturity that you develop, which helps you to achieve excellent standards and make outstanding progress in your work. You are also helped to do this by good and sometimes outstanding teaching.

You have a real sense of responsibility towards each other. It was a pleasure to see how keen you are to look after each other, especially younger students, for example, by being prefects or mentors. We were also very pleased to hear of your work for yourselves and your fellow students through the school sports and performing arts councils; for example, changes to uniform, concerts for the community and charity fundraising. You also work hard for your local primary schools by helping with sports activities.

Although the school was judged to be a good one in the last inspection, we think it has improved even further since then. We have asked the school to work on just one thing.

- Make sure that your teachers' marking in all subjects gives you very precise information about your written work.

Yours sincerely

Susan Wareing, HMI