

St Michael's Church of England First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122280
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	340114
Inspection dates	2–3 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Susan Waugh

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	209
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Kate Sims
Headteacher	Mrs Sally Lamb
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. About 60% of the time was spent on direct observations of pupils' learning. The inspectors visited 10 lessons and observed all eight class teachers and also tutors delivering tuition to individual pupils. They held meetings with governors, staff, groups of pupils and key partners of the school. They looked at questionnaires from staff and pupils and analysed 48 questionnaire responses from parents and carers. The team also looked at data on pupils' progress, documents relating to the safeguarding of pupils, school policies and procedures, scrutinised pupils' current work and spoke to the School Improvement Partner to discuss her reports.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the current achievement, progress and attainment of all groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- the quality of teaching and how well teachers assess pupils' learning in lessons and in their written work
- the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels in driving up pupils' achievement.

Information about the school

The school serves the immediate local community and families from surrounding areas who choose the school for its faith status. Nearly all pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average as is the proportion of those with a statement of special educational needs. The school is on the same site as a special school and the children's centre which includes childcare provision. The school holds a number of awards including National Healthy Schools Status and Artsmark.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This is an outstanding school. A family atmosphere underpinned by Christian values ensures that each pupil is known very well so they receive excellent care, guidance and support. This allows their personal development to flourish and enables all to achieve highly. At the heart of the school's successful improvement over the past three years are the vision, passion and ambition of the headteacher. She has nurtured all staff to believe in themselves and to use their skills and talents so that pupils experience a rich, enjoyable and memorable time. Parents' and carers' views are reflected very well in the remark, 'Without exception, I consider every member of staff at St Michael's gives 100% in terms of encouragement, support and professionalism.' Staff ensure that the school radiates an ethos of happiness, calm and purpose in which pupils of all backgrounds can thrive.

Children usually begin Nursery with skills at levels below those expected for their age. Because they are exceptionally well taught they make rapid progress so that by the time they leave in Year 4 they have reached standards above those expected for their age.

Pupils enjoy learning so much because they are provided with an outstanding range of distinctive and unforgettable experiences and are actively involved in exciting and interesting lessons. They have a good understanding of the local area and other parts of the world but are much less knowledgeable about the range of communities in their own country.

Pupils are considerate and kind and they cooperate well with each other. Behaviour is exemplary and the attendance of the large majority of pupils is good, so they can take full advantage of all the school has to offer.

The school is constantly reviewing how well it is doing and how it can improve. It has an accurate view of what it does very well and what needs to improve. Subject and senior leadership have been progressively strengthened and have been a significant influence on recent improvements. Partnerships with other local schools, support agencies and the local community enhance pupils' achievement and personal development. Recent improvements to the school have been significant and, as a result, the school demonstrates excellent capacity to continue improving.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Provide more opportunities for pupils to learn about other cultures reflecting the ethnic diversity in the United Kingdom, by building links with contrasting schools which have ethnically diverse communities.

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Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Learning is fun because lessons are practical and imaginative; understandably, pupils engage fully in them. All groups of pupils do equally well and make excellent progress. The dip in standards experienced in 2009 had been predicted as many of the pupils had lower starting points than usual. Evidence from observations, work scrutiny and tracking of pupils confirms that attainment is on course to rise again this year.

Parents and carers, and pupils, agree that the school gives pupils an excellent understanding of how to stay safe. For example, pupils in one class created their own safety plan. Behaviour at all times is thoughtful and considerate. Social and moral development is excellent. Spiritual development is particularly strong and is underpinned by regular worship in which children are always full, active participants; they lead worship weekly. Pupils are extensively involved in the local community; they fundraise, sing and support at church. Their understanding of other communities and cultures in the United Kingdom is less developed. Pupils are prepared exceptionally well for the next stage of learning. Their use of information and communication technology (ICT) is excellent; they cooperate when working together. A few pupils have poor attendance but the vast majority attend well.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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How effective is the provision?

Teaching is outstanding because all staff make learning enjoyable, have high expectations and know each individual pupil very well. They tailor tasks and activities exceptionally well and step in quickly to correct misunderstandings. Skilled use of technology adds to interest and the pace of learning, such as the use of an etherpad to check understanding of multiplication tables. Through questioning, pupils are encouraged to discuss and develop language of a high standard. Support provided by teaching assistants is excellent.

The curriculum uses innovative themes such as 'Inspirational India' and 'One snowy night' to link subjects successfully and give children the opportunity to practise the skills they have learned in literacy, numeracy and in using technology. Visits, for example to Ford Castle, are used to boost academic achievement and to support pupils' personal development. Pupils in all year groups learn Spanish, which is delivered in an exciting way. The curriculum is carefully adapted to meet the needs of groups of pupils, such as the small classes of Year 1 pupils, and to address any weaknesses. For example, boys' writing skills have been successfully improved by adapting what is taught and making effective cross-curricular links.

Support for the most vulnerable children and their families is especially strong because the school is proactive in involving, and working with, other support agencies. Very close links with the co-located special school ensure that transition for dual placement pupils is highly successful. Close links with other schools ensure that transition to middle school is smooth both academically and socially. Procedures to support good attendance are excellent and the school does all it can to improve the attendance of the very small minority of pupils with above average absence levels.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Central to recent improvements in the school has been the empowerment of staff by the headteacher. Aided by very successful performance management systems, she has enabled staff to have a positive impact on all aspects of school life. Most notably these include improvements to teaching through the better use of assessment and to the curriculum through linking subjects together and ensuring that pupils become active learners. A high priority is placed on communicating with parents and carers. They are

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extremely well informed about how to support their children's learning and about what is happening in school.

Governors make an excellent contribution to the work of the school. They check the performance of the school regularly to ensure that achievement is sustained. They place a very high priority on checking the safety and well-being of pupils. Procedures to safeguard children are excellent, characterised by children being fully involved in helping to understand and maintain their own safety. There is a good commitment to promoting community cohesion and the school knows and meets the needs of its own community well. The fact that all pupils are valued, given the same opportunities and all achieve highly illustrates the school's commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children's progress is outstanding in the Nursery and Reception classes because excellent teaching makes learning exciting and relevant, much of it based on children's own ideas and interests. The classrooms and outdoor learning areas provide a vibrant range of activities to engage children and develop their confidence and independence. For example, a group of girls became absorbed in solving the problem of how to move a boat down a piece of guttering using water. They cooperated with each other, with the skilful guidance of an adult, until they had found a solution. Rapid progress is made in the development of basic skills because adults provide learning in a well-structured but imaginative way. Children learn the sequence of a story through role play, for example. Routines help children to understand how to stay healthy. They know they have to wash

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hands before drinking milk and do so without being asked by an adult. Partnerships with parents and carers are highly effective and play a positive part in children's achievement. Leadership and management are excellent. Safeguarding procedures are rigorous and self-evaluation ensures that there is a clear picture of strengths and areas for development.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Views of parents and carers

In response to the questionnaire, an overwhelming majority of parents and carers were extremely positive about the school. All parents and carers expressed high praise for the leadership of the school, the way their children are prepared for the future and with their children's experience at the school. Parents and carers express confidence that their children are kept safe and that any concerns are listened to carefully and acted upon appropriately by the headteacher. Parents and carers may find it helpful to know that in relation to the few concerns received, inspectors found that the issues were being effectively addressed by the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Michael's Church of England First School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 48 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 209 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	31	65	13	27	3	6	1	2
The school keeps my child safe	37	77	10	21	1	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	27	56	17	35	4	8	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	31	65	14	29	3	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	34	71	13	27	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	25	52	21	44	1	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	29	60	19	40	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	30	63	16	33	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	29	60	17	35	2	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	30	63	17	35	1	2	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	27	56	20	42	1	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	36	75	12	25	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	33	69	14	29	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



05 March 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Michael's Church of England First School, Alnwick, NE66 1DJ

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful when we visited your school. We really enjoyed our time and being able to talk to so many of you. Your school is outstanding. I would like to tell you about some of the excellent things your school does. There are so many that I cannot list them all but here are the main ones.

- Everyone cares for you very well and makes sure you feel safe at all times.
- Your behaviour is excellent. You are very helpful, kind and considerate to each other.
- You make outstanding progress in your lessons because teachers make them fun and interesting. They make sure you do lots of talking, thinking and doing. They help you quickly if you become a little confused and do not understand something.
- Your headteacher, the staff and governors are always looking for ways of improving your school even more for you and your families.

To help your school become even better, we have asked teachers to help you understand more about the many different people, religions and communities who live in the United Kingdom, possibly by linking with another school.

You can help by continuing to work as hard as you can and using your excellent computer skills to find out more. Thank you for helping with this inspection.

I wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Ms Susan Waugh

Lead Inspector

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