

St Michael's CofE (C) First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124275
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	340529
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2010
Reporting inspector	Derek Aitken

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	338
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Harry Brunt
Headteacher	Mrs Rachel Mary Gale
Date of previous school inspection	11 September 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. Just over half their time in school was spent observing the quality of pupils' learning and progress in lessons. They observed 18 lessons or part-lessons and saw 15 teachers. Meetings were held with staff, the chair of governors and pupils. The inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at assessment data, monitoring and evaluation documents, the school development plan, and policies and procedures. Questionnaires from 108 parents and carers were received and analysed.

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

- the progress of pupils in Key Stage 2 in mathematics
- how effectively the quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities supports their achievement
- the progress of higher ability pupils
- how sharply planning for school development is focused on raising standards and achievement
- the progress of boys in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Information about the school

St Michael's is a large school, situated near the town centre. Pupils come from a variety of social and economic backgrounds. The vast majority of pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. The school provides for the Early Years Foundation Stage through two Nursery classes and three Reception classes. There is also a before- and after-school club on site, Smart Kids, which is privately managed and subject to a separate inspection. The school holds a number of awards including Healthy Schools, Inclusion Quality Mark, Eco-Schools Green Flag and the National Sing-up Platinum Award.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

St Michael's strengths derive from the excellent quality of its pastoral provision. This ensures that pupils, including those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable, enjoy school greatly. The school's successful strategies for promoting pupils' well-being are reflected in highly positive outcomes for pupils' personal development. In particular, pupils' spiritual, moral and social growth is outstanding.

Good provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage ensures that children settle happily and reach standards broadly in line with national expectations by the end of Reception. Pupils also make good progress in Key Stage 1 and in Key Stage 2 overall to reach above-average standards by the time they transfer to middle school. Although pupils' achievement in Year 4 in mathematics improved last year, pupils in Key Stage have too few good opportunities to practise their skills in solving practical problems and so do not do as well as they could in this subject. School leaders have made accurate use of the analysis of national assessment data for Year 2 pupils in setting priorities for future development. They have not taken sufficient account of value-added information for pupils in Key Stage 2 and this has compromised the quality of strategic planning over the two key stages. This has had most impact on the progress of older pupils in mathematics, where provision is less well developed than in literacy.

The curriculum promotes pupils' personal development exceptionally well. Singing features strongly in school life and is incorporated into lessons in other subjects to enhance pupils' enjoyment of learning. Teachers make expert use of a wide range of techniques to ensure pupils learn in a lively way. They do not, however, make sufficient use of assessment information to match work in Key Stage 2 to challenge middle and higher ability pupils in mathematics. Their marking celebrates pupils' achievements, but does not routinely point out where and how pupils can improve their work. The school's exceptional commitment to pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is reflected in the consistently good progress these pupils make.

The school reviews its work accurately in most respects. Meticulous and highly detailed records are kept on the progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and for other key aspects of the school's work such as safeguarding. The school has maintained high levels of pastoral provision since the previous inspection and further improved standards in reading in Key Stage 2. Responsibilities for developing subjects and monitoring standards in detail are not yet shared to best effect across senior and middle leaders. Nonetheless, the good overall progress made by pupils demonstrates that the school's capacity for sustained improvement is good.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement in mathematics in Key Stage 2 by:
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in solving practical problems
 - ensuring that teachers make careful use of assessment information to plan lessons more sharply to extend the learning of middle and higher ability pupils
 - ensuring that teachers' marking is more closely focused on supporting pupils' progress.
- Improve the quality of strategic planning for school development by:
 - taking full account of value-added information on pupils' progress in Key Stage 2 before setting whole-school priorities
 - ensuring that leaders other than the headteacher are more accountable for implementing plans for school development and monitoring their effectiveness.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Lesson observations confirmed that all groups of pupils generally learn well throughout the school. Work in lessons and pupils' books reflected the picture of standards that have been above average for several years in Year 2 and above average overall in Year 4. Standards in Key Stage 2 have risen steadily in reading and are now well above average. For example, in a Year 3 lesson pupils were able to talk confidently about features of Dick King-Smith's books. By contrast, the achievement of older pupils in mathematics is satisfactory. Middle and higher ability pupils carry out basic calculations competently but they are not given sufficient opportunities to tackle more testing questions or apply their knowledge to practical problems.

Excellent relationships underpin the pupils' sense of community. Pupils are exceptionally welcoming and friendly towards visitors. Their exemplary spiritual awareness promotes a rapid growth in their maturity and self-esteem. In a Year 2 worship assembly pupils spoke in a highly reflective way about the metaphorical meaning of religious symbols. They also volunteered their help in the expert management of the service and experienced a wondrous moment when one pupil spontaneously delivered a beautiful dance routine to music from *Les Miserables*. Pupils' outstanding behaviour contributes significantly to their strong sense of security and happiness in school. They are proud of their school and proactive in taking on responsibilities and in supporting the school's eco-initiatives. These factors contribute immeasurably to pupils' learning and set them up well for the future.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Teachers set the tone for an excellent climate for learning by maintaining a constant dialogue with pupils. Pupils know their responses are valued and this encourages them to be active listeners, curious to develop their learning. Lessons invariably get off to a good start, but teachers' questioning does not consistently build on pupils' answers to extend their learning. Teachers use a wide variety of imaginative methods to cater very effectively for the different ways their pupils learn. For example, pupils practise memorising mathematics facts through singing. However, lesson planning for mathematics in Key Stage 2 does not ensure pupils have good opportunities to apply their knowledge to practical problems or enable middle and higher ability pupils to move on to more challenging work. Teachers' marking is not sharply focused on helping pupils improve their work.

The curriculum meets the needs of pupils well in many respects. The extensive range of extra-curricular activities, including a residential visit for pupils in Year 4, instrumental tuition and diverse musical opportunities, promotes pupils' self-confidence and contribution to the wider community exceptionally well. By contrast, there are few planned opportunities for gifted and talented pupils to extend their learning in English, mathematics and science.

Pupils' individual welfare requirements are central to the work of the school and all adults work hard to ensure these needs are fully met. All aspects of care, guidance and support are at least good and most elements are outstanding. The impact of relevant programmes on the progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is closely monitored. Next steps are clearly identified to help teaching assistants and

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parents focus sharply and effectively on individual requirements. As a result of this good support, these pupils quickly gain the confidence to play a full part in the life of this vibrant school.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher's dedication to the well-being of pupils is absolute and is shared exceptionally well by staff at all levels to ensure that outcomes for pupils' personal development are outstanding. She is ably supported by the deputy headteacher, who makes a significant contribution to pupils' joyful appreciation of music. School leaders have good expectations for pupils' academic progress and track pupils' progress in individual year groups carefully. Leaders have not analysed pupils' progress over Key Stage 2 sharply enough and this has resulted in a few gaps in strategic planning for curriculum and staff development. Arrangements for safeguarding are of high quality. The school promotes equal opportunities particularly well in ensuring, for example, that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities participate fully and make good progress in their learning alongside their classmates. The school promotes community cohesion well and has taken effective steps to widen pupils' appreciation of different cultures by establishing links with a school in Kenya and a local school with a contrasting ethnic mix. Governors support the school well and have taken effective initial steps to develop their ability to hold staff more firmly to account for standards.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

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	
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	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children's skills, knowledge and understanding when they start Nursery are slightly below the levels expected for their age. Relationships in the Nursery are excellent and children enjoy their learning greatly. By the end of Reception children have made good gains in their learning, particularly in their personal and social development. They engage readily in collaborative play and nearly all share and take turns well. Teachers' planning is highly detailed and applied consistently across all the Reception classes, and this promotes purposeful learning and good progress for all the children. A further strong feature of the provision is the deployment of additional adults, who provide very effective support to small groups or in one-to-one sessions with pupils who have severe disabilities. The curriculum provides for an effective balance of adult-directed and child-initiated learning. The outdoor environment is not yet fully adapted to provide good opportunities to develop children's creative skills. Good leadership and management are reflected in the careful use made of summer assessments to plan for improvements in provision for the next Reception intake. This has resulted in a small improvement in boys' achievement as they now have more opportunities for activities to support their learning.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

The questionnaire responses indicate an exceptional degree of satisfaction with the school's work. Highly positive comments were made with regard to the dedication of staff, and particularly the commitment of the headteacher, to the life of the school. The provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities received special praise. Inspectors found much evidence to endorse these comments.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Michael's CofE (C) 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 108 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 338 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	80	74	28	26	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	87	81	21	19	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	69	64	37	34	2	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	77	71	30	28	1	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	79	73	27	25	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	68	63	37	34	3	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	80	74	28	26	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)	69	64	33	31	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	77	71	29	27	1	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	67	62	36	33	2	2	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	65	60	42	39	1	1	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	91	84	16	15	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	89	83	18	16	1	1	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.



1 March 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Michael's CofE (C) First School, Stone, ST15 8QB

Thank you all very much for making us so welcome to your school. We enjoyed talking to you and will long remember how friendly you were, your amazing assemblies and your excellent behaviour.

St Michael's is a good school. These are the things that it does well.

You get off to a good start in Nursery and Reception and make good progress there and throughout the school. This is because teaching is good.

You enjoy coming to school and get on really well with each other and the staff.

You feel very safe in school because the headteacher and her staff care for you extremely well.

Pupils who need extra help in their learning get a lot of good support to help them keep up.

By the time you leave school your standards are above average overall and you do really well in reading. You could, however, do better in mathematics. We have asked the school to do some things to help you make even faster progress.

Improve standards in Key Stage 2 in mathematics by giving you better chances to practise problem-solving.

Make sure the teachers make good use of assessment in these lessons to plan work which stretches you more, and mark your work so that you have a clearer idea of how you can improve your work.

Make sure school leaders keep in mind pupils' progress in Key Stage 2 when they are planning improvements for the school as a whole.

Get all school leaders involved in keeping a close check on the school's work.

You can help by keeping up your good attendance and by trying extra hard in mathematics.

Yours sincerely

Derek Aitken

Lead inspector

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