

St Michael's RC Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118756
Local Authority	Medway
Inspection number	379679
Inspection dates	14–15 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Jon Carter

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	398
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father Chris Baker
Headteacher	Dominic McBride
Date of previous school inspection	19–20 May 2009
School address	Hills Terrace Chatham ME4 6PX
Telephone number	01634 337420
Fax number	01634 407445
Email address	office@st-michaels.medway.sch.uk

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed 17 lessons taught by 15 teachers and held meetings with school leaders and managers, representatives from the governing body and groups of pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at assessment information, the school's analysis of pupils' progress, curriculum plans, the governing body's minutes of meetings, records of the school leaders' lesson monitoring and many other documents. They analysed responses from the 95 questionnaires received from parents and carers, as well as those from 117 pupils and 15 staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How effectively the school provides a curriculum that excites and engages boys so that they are motivated to develop their writing skills.
- How effectively leaders and managers at all levels monitor and develop the quality of teaching and learning to ensure pupils make rapid progress.
- How effectively the Early Years Foundation Stage improves children's numeracy skills, particularly in shape, space and measure.

Information about the school

St Michael's is a primary school of larger than average size. The largest ethnic group in the school is made up of White British pupils. The school has a higher than average percentage of pupils from minority ethnic heritages. A larger than average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language, although only a few are at a very early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is slightly above average. The school has a higher than average proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. These are mainly speech, language and communication needs and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The Early Years Foundation Stage is made up of one Nursery class and two Reception classes. A period of extensive change has resulted in the majority of teaching staff, including the headteacher and those in senior positions, being appointed to the school in the period since the previous inspection.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

St Michael's is a satisfactory school. Pupils make satisfactory progress in their learning and increasingly show good improvement in their personal skills. They enjoy coming to school and feel safe because of the positive relationships they have with staff. The headteacher has successfully brought the school through a period of significant change to staffing. Parents and carers are particularly pleased about the changes they have noticed during this time. One parent, whose views echoed those of many, wrote: 'I think the school has worked hard to improve over the past year.'

Leaders and managers at all levels have an accurate understanding of where the school has strengths and the areas that need further development because self-evaluation processes are rigorous and robust. Well-targeted action by senior leaders and a shared commitment to continued school improvement amongst staff have resulted in pupils starting to make more rapid progress. However, while the success of these developments so far demonstrates that the school has satisfactory capacity to improve, these changes have not been in place for sufficient time to demonstrate more consistent impact on pupils' progress across the school.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. In a minority of lessons, where teaching is good, pupils make good progress because lesson plans are clearly focused on what pupils will learn and accurate assessment information is used well to ensure that learning activities are appropriately challenging. As a result, pupils' learning moves on swiftly. However, the quality of planning is not consistently good in all lessons. Consequently, pupils do not always have sharply-focused success criteria to help guide their independent learning and help them assess their own progress.

The satisfactory curriculum provided by the school ensures that all statutory requirements are met and that pupils engage appropriately with lessons. However, opportunities to personalise learning to the interests, strengths and preferences of individuals and classes are often missed. Consequently, pupils are not always excited by the work they do and they lack motivation to make more rapid progress. Occasionally, insufficient account is taken of the range of pupils' needs when planning the curriculum.

Senior leaders and managers have a sound understanding of where teaching is best around the school because their observations are regular, accurate and identify areas for development. However, middle leaders' involvement in school improvement is not

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yet firmly established as many are new to their positions of responsibility and have not yet received training specific to their roles and the needs of the school. Teachers are beginning to benefit from opportunities to observe their colleagues. This is helping to spread good practice but is not yet sufficiently widespread to have had significant impact on improving the quality of teaching, learning and progress.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, so that pupils make accelerated progress, by ensuring that lesson planning:
 - is strongly focused on the progress pupils will make in their learning
 - sets suitably high expectations of achievement for all pupils, clearly identifying learning objectives that provide appropriate levels of challenge based on recent and accurate assessment of what they know and can do
 - consistently identifies clear and specific success criteria that are communicated succinctly to pupils and used systematically as the basis for assessment.
- Improve the effectiveness with which the curriculum motivates and meets the needs of all pupils, so that they make more rapid progress, by ensuring that better account is taken of their individual and collective interests, strengths and preferences.
- Increase the capacity of the school to improve by enabling middle leaders to be more effective in their roles through the provision of focused training and by establishing their involvement in the school's systems for monitoring and development.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Pupils enter the school with levels of development that are slightly below age-related expectations. Overall, pupils make satisfactory progress so that, by the end of Year 6, attainment is broadly average and improving securely as school leaders implement effective systems for accelerating progress.

In lessons, pupils make at least satisfactory progress and enjoy working together while learning. In the best lessons, pupils respond well to challenging work and make good progress. For example, while exploring the blend of sounds letters make when they are written in pairs, pupils in a Year 1 class successfully applied their new knowledge to sound out unfamiliar words. Pupils' literacy and numeracy skills develop at a satisfactory pace through both the teaching of discrete skills and the use of those skills in other subjects. For example, in a Year 5 history lesson, pupils incorporated practical art and technology skills, independent research of historical facts and writing skills in presenting timelines of Tudor monarchs. Pupils' behaviour is

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almost always good in classrooms and around the school. However, where learning activities are not well-matched to pupils’ needs, behaviour in lessons is no better than satisfactory.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language make progress at similar rates to their peers because they are usually effectively supported in the classroom.

Pupils make a valuable contribution to their school community as peer mediators and active members of the school council. Their thorough understanding of how to apply the school’s values helps them to develop good spiritual, moral and social skills while playing their part in creating a safe and friendly learning environment. Pupils’ satisfactory adoption of healthy lifestyles is mainly underpinned through their understanding of healthy eating. Pupils’ attendance continues to improve and is broadly average.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils’ behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Relationships between adults and pupils are positive and staff ensure that learning environments are bright and inviting. Satisfactory use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) to engage and motivate pupils, although there are limited opportunities to use computer equipment in classrooms. Lessons are planned so that pupils’ learning is structured and usually takes account of the range of abilities, although expectations of what pupils can achieve are not always appropriate

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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for those who are more able or those who experience difficulties with learning.

Where learning and progress are good in a minority of lessons, assessment of what pupils know and can do is increasingly thorough and accurate. This detailed information is used well to ensure that planning takes good account of what pupils' prior learning. Recently established systems to review progress regularly with pupils are beginning to ensure that they have a greater understanding of what they need to do to improve their work. Consequently, pupils are motivated to learn and progress because the work they do is suitably challenging and they increasingly know how to take the next steps in their learning. However, this is not yet consistently effective as older pupils have been quicker to develop an understanding of the new systems than their younger peers. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively to ensure that the pace of learning is at least satisfactory.

The quality of written feedback is inconsistent across the school. Where good practice is seen, pupils have opportunities to put their teachers' suggestions into effect and their learning progresses well. Where these opportunities are not routinely provided, pupils' understanding develops less rapidly because some errors and misconceptions remain.

Pupils benefit from a satisfactory curriculum which is broad and balanced. Links between subjects, particularly to incorporate meaningful use of ICT, are established comprehensively. However, some parts of the curriculum are delivered without taking the opportunity to adapt the content to pupils' strengths and interests, particularly to motivate boys during writing activities. Enrichment of the curriculum, through enterprise activities, for example, ensures that pupils' future economic well-being is increasingly well supported. There is a variety of extra-curricular activities which include sporting and musical opportunities. However, only around one fifth of pupils participate in these.

The school is a caring and welcoming environment for pupils. Well-established systems for supporting the welfare needs of the school's most vulnerable pupils provide strong pastoral support. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities usually receive targeted support that ensures they make progress at the same rate as their peers. Occasionally, a few pupils with very specific needs do not receive all the support they need to progress at a more rapid rate.

Positive links with external agencies assist the school in accessing specialist support and advice in addressing potentially vulnerable pupils' needs. Well-organised transition arrangements ensure that relevant information is shared appropriately to ensure smooth transfer to the next stage of their learning.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account:	
The use of assessment to support learning	3

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The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

How effective are leadership and management?

A significant turnover of staff at all levels in the school has been well managed in order to secure steady improvement over the past 12 months. Consequently, the staff team is well focused on what the school needs to do to improve. Senior leaders communicate a consistent message about the way forward for the school. As a result, staff share an enthusiasm for improvement, and the development of the role of middle managers is recognised as a priority in accelerating pupils' progress through more consistent monitoring and development of the quality of teaching and learning. While the impact of some changes, such as those made to improve assessment systems throughout the school, can be seen in pupils' improving progress, other changes are too recent to have yet had a measureable effect. The governing body provides satisfactory support and challenge to the leadership team and governors visit the school regularly to gain an appreciation of its strengths and weaknesses.

Arrangements for ensuring that pupils are adequately safeguarded are satisfactory. Staff are trained appropriately and recruitment procedures are secure. The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion is satisfactory. School leaders have an accurate understanding of pupils' backgrounds. However, opportunities for pupils to enhance their understanding of the diversity of different heritages within the school are having limited impact in developing the depth of their cultural knowledge. The school's engagement with parents and carers is satisfactory and improving strongly. School leaders recognise that their next step is to build on the positive relationships by providing more opportunities for parents and carers to be informed about, and involved in, their children's learning.

The promotion of equality of opportunity is satisfactory in all aspects of the school's work, and it takes suitable steps to tackle discrimination. The progress of the most vulnerable groups of pupils is monitored. No group of pupils performs significantly differently to their peers. Pupils have positive attitudes towards their peers and the school operates harmoniously on a day-to-day basis.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3

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The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

From starting points that are slightly below age-related expectations, children make satisfactory progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Well-organised transition arrangements and positive links with parents and carers ensure that children settle quickly into the routines of the Nursery and Reception classes. Parents and carers particularly expressed their satisfaction with these arrangements. As one wrote: 'My child's experiences in the Nursery have really helped him to settle into the Reception class.'

Children's emerging writing skills are developed satisfactorily through regular mark-making activities and access to a range of resources, including ICT, in indoor and outdoor learning areas. Most children in the Reception classes are able, for example, to write their own names with appropriate use of upper- and lower-case letters. An increased focus on developing phonics skills (letters and the sounds they make) is particularly effective in helping children to understand the sounds letters make and in promoting their wider language skills.

Some guided learning opportunities contribute well to children's development of problem-solving and numeracy skills. For example, while trying to make play-dough less sticky, a child observed that they were 'adding more flour'. However, there are insufficient opportunities for children to develop their knowledge of shapes and space, and skills in measuring, because resources to support this development are not readily available during times when children choose their own learning activities.

The outdoor learning area provides a comprehensive range of opportunities for children to choose learning activities spontaneously and develop skills of independence, particularly in communication, language and literacy skills. However, links between learning opportunities in the classroom environment and outdoors are not as well developed. Planning does not always make sufficiently clear how learning activities are going to ensure that children's specific developmental needs are met. Consequently, it is difficult for children to have a continuous learning experience as they move between the different areas.

Children develop strong relationships with staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage. This ensures that they feel safe and have confidence in the staff to guide and

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support them. Children’s health and welfare is promoted well, for example through the provision of fruit and water, helping them to understand the importance of adopting healthy lifestyles as they grow older. Leaders responsible for the Early Years Foundation Stage have a sound understanding of the key strengths of the setting and the main priorities for its continued improvement.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

A lower-than-average proportion of parents and carers responded to the questionnaire. Most responses were very positive about the school, particularly in respect of the improvements that have been made recently and the way the school is run. Of the few parents and carers who expressed negative views about aspects of the school, most concern was indicated about how the school helps parents and carers to support their children’s learning. Inspectors found that the school’s engagement with parents and carers has improved and senior leaders recognised the need to develop these positive relationships further to increasingly involve parents and carers in their children’s education.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Michael’s RC Primary 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 95 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 398 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	67	71	26	27	1	1	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	68	72	26	27	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	53	56	37	39	3	3	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	52	55	37	39	4	4	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	51	54	39	41	2	2	1	1
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	50	53	38	40	5	5	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	54	57	38	40	2	2	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)	39	41	46	48	3	3	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	45	47	42	44	4	4	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	43	45	48	51	1	1	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	43	45	44	46	4	4	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	63	66	30	32	1	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	66	69	25	26	2	2	1	1

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 all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 pupils' 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.



16 November 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Michael's RC Primary School, Chatham ME4 6PX

Thank you for giving us a warm welcome when we visited your school recently. We were pleased to talk to so many of you in meetings and in lessons about how well you are getting on at school. You told us that you enjoy coming to school because you like learning and that you feel safe because staff look after you.

I am writing to tell you that you go to a satisfactory school. You make satisfactory progress in your lessons and you often develop good personal skills. For example, your behaviour is good in class and around school. We were impressed by how well you take part in activities that help other people in your school community. We know that some of your teachers have changed over the past year. We can see that the teachers who are now in charge of your school are making changes that are helping you to have a better understanding of what you need to do to improve your learning.

We have asked the headteacher of your school to help you make progress more quickly by:

- improving how well teachers plan lessons that help everyone learn quickly, by being very clear about what you will learn and how you will know you have been successful
- improving how teachers adapt the curriculum to match your needs and interests so that you find learning more exciting
- training those teachers who have responsibility for particular subjects so that they can help others make their lessons even better.

You can all help by talking to your teachers about what would make learning more exciting for you.

Yours sincerely

Jon Carter
Lead inspector

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