

St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115197
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	338532
Inspection dates	20–21 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Graham Preston

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	182
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jane Cregan-Bird
Headteacher	Mrs Sonia Strickland
Date of previous school inspection	10 January 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed six teachers in 16 lessons. Meetings were held with governors, groups of pupils and staff. Different aspects of the school's work were observed and documentation scrutinised, including that relating to safeguarding practices, the school's self-evaluation and development planning, as well as 81 returned parental questionnaires. Staff and pupil questionnaires were also analysed

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

- the progress the school has made in addressing the significant downturn in end of Year 6 attainment in 2009
- the effectiveness of teaching, particularly in mixed age groups, in ensuring that pupils learn appropriately in their lessons
- The progress the school is making in improving its assessment practice
- the effectiveness of recent changes in curriculum in supporting pupils' learning
- the extent to which the school's ethos has had a positive impact on its care systems and promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Information about the school

St Michael's is average in size for a junior school. It draws its pupils from a mixed housing area in south Chelmsford. The great majority are of White British heritage and none speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is increasing and is above average. The proportion of those known to be eligible for free school meals is average. The school is currently led by the deputy headteacher until the new headteacher takes up his post in September. The school has National Healthy Schools status and Activemark.

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

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

This is a satisfactory and improving school. The acting headteacher, well supported by staff, has worked hard to sustain the positive features of the school and made a good start in improving aspects of teaching, assessment and curriculum that have hindered efforts to raise standards.

Over their four years in the junior school pupils make sufficient progress to reach standards in line with the national average. Pupils did less well than expected in last year's end of Year 6 results but their current school efforts have succeeded in improving pupils' standards and progress particularly in mathematics. Reading standards are secure for both boys and girls, but boys' writing is noticeably weaker particularly in Year 5. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are carefully tracked and make satisfactory progress.

Pupils are positive about school, which is reflected in their good attendance and readiness to participate in lessons and school activities. The great majority feel very safe in school and value the support teachers and staff give them. In conversation, many show a maturity and concern for others and this is similarly reflected in their good behaviour around the school. Most fully support the healthy eating initiatives in the school and a large majority pursue the ten different sports and other physical activities. Assemblies play a large part in pupils' spiritual development including much appreciated contributions from the local church and opportunities for pupils to celebrate each other's success in 'achievers assemblies'. Pupils develop well in other ways through their involvement in the school council and take on responsibility as for example, peer mentors, play leaders and house captains. Awareness of different cultures is developed through the curriculum and occasional local visits but is not as strong.

The staff are a mix of experienced and recently appointed teachers and this is reflected in the range of good to developing practice that is satisfactory overall. Lessons are generally purposeful and reflect the school's drive for more varied and engaging learning. While teaching is at least satisfactory some lessons are not as well planned as others in ensuring good use of different activities and support staff to provide sufficient challenge and pace for all pupils. Teachers are using their assessments well to check pupil progress and so plan future learning. The school is striving to provide better 'next steps' guidance to help pupils improve their work but does not consistently provide opportunities for pupils to do so.

The curriculum has been consistently strong in terms of its range of extra-curricular visits and activities and benefits from specialist teaching in some areas such as music, sports coaching and French. Recent efforts to move to topic based programmes have

been well received by pupils and the improved provision for mathematics has noticeably improved pupils' progress in the subject.

Effective care, guidance and support is well reflected the school's strong inclusive ethos. The school successfully enables pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities to thrive in mainstream provision where they mix well with other pupils. The impact of provision is evident in improved attendance, good behaviour and rare exclusions. The recent development of a close working relationship with the infant school and similarly positive links with the local secondary, ensure good transition arrangements.

The acting headteacher, well supported by senior colleagues, has successfully created a shared commitment to school improvement. There is considerable team work which has been necessary to support new teachers and other staff as the school improves teaching and assessment practice and introduces a new curriculum. The school's promotion of equal opportunities is evident in the now rigorous tracking of pupils' progress and readiness to address any concerns. In other respects leadership and management are satisfactory. The current senior leadership team has produced an honest and accurate self-evaluation shared and agreed with by the governing body. Senior staff and governors recently evaluated the school's local, national and international links as part of community cohesion. Relatively modest progress has been made in this area. The governing body is supportive of the improvement initiatives but is less actively involved than it used to be in the development of the school. Given current outcomes and provision, overall school effectiveness is satisfactory. While there have been positive recent developments the capacity for further improvement is also satisfactory.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and assessment by:
 - providing less experienced staff with relevant training and mentoring
 - ensuring lesson planning provides learning opportunities and support that enable all pupils to make good progress.
 - improving marking to develop pupils' learning with more opportunities for pupils to respond to guidance.
- Help pupils develop a better understanding of national and global communities by:
 - implementing proposed links with a contrasting urban school in Britain
 - forming links with overseas schools and other links.
- Enable more governors to play an active part in school development by:
 - reinstating governor links with specific areas and aspects of the school
 - participating in school evaluation and improvement at an earlier stage in the process.
 - About 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.

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

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Standards seen in lessons and pupils' books vary between years reflecting the changes in intake over time. Overall standards have fallen back a little since the last inspection when pupils' achievement was judged good, particularly in the last end of Year 6 assessments. However, the detailed school tracking shows that efforts to improve pupils' quality of learning are having effect so that current Year 6 pupils are doing better and at least in line with expectations. This is particularly noticeable in the improvement in pupils' progress in mathematics where the school has chosen to teach pupils in broad ability groups. The school recognises that boys are making slower progress than girls in their writing, particularly in Year 5 and is placing a greater focus on engaging boys and developing writing skills.

Attendance has been consistently above average and continues to improve. Pupils appreciate their teachers and like the topic based lessons and the linked outside visits, though on occasion a few comment that they find the work too easy. Behaviour is good around the school and exemplary in assemblies. Pupils recognise that occasional bullying and inconsiderate behaviour does occur but they feel very safe because they know the school has good care and support systems. Pupils eat healthily at lunchtimes and a large majority participate in the various physical and arts activities. Pupils contribute well to the local community through their involvement in the church choir and magazine, support for the elderly and active support of different charities.

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	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2

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

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	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

There are positive aspects to teaching evident in all lessons. These include consistently sound lesson planning and assessment practice as a result of the school's staff training and development. Lessons have clear purpose and pupils find the topic based learning interesting. Good use is made of the interactive whiteboards for teacher presentations and enables pupils to be involved through the touch screen technology. Teachers and support staff have good relationships with pupils and class management is effective though three of the seven teachers, including a graduate trainee, are new to teaching and are still refining their classroom practice. The best teaching is well paced and able to convey challenging ideas in interesting and understandable ways. This was evident in a science lesson where pupils worked in pairs making and testing paper helicopters in order to appreciate different forces and gain an understanding of scientific method. Good use is also made of small whiteboards by getting pupils to record and show answers and responses in order to check progress in lessons. However, teaching is mostly done in mixed age and ability classes and, while there is some good practice, lesson planning does not provide sufficiently varied learning activities and 'success criteria' targets that meet the needs of all pupils. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are generally well supported by teacher assistants though on occasions, overlong whole class presentations limit the use of support staff and result in a loss of focus by some pupils.

Teachers' assessment practice is sound. Marking is regular and often very detailed, particularly in writing tasks. Assessment grids are used to identify gaps in pupils' learning and to inform lesson planning and highlight pupils who need additional support. The school has already identified the need to develop assessment practice that helps pupils better understand how they can improve.

The curriculum has improved considerably and staff work closely to implement new approaches. There is a greater focus on helping pupils to become more effective learners and, through a more integrated, topic based curriculum, to be more interested and involved in their learning. French is taught in all years and pupils benefit from specialist sports coaching and music teaching. Good use is made of outside links and visits including the church choir, science workshops, the cooking bus, drama workshop and support from the local secondary school to enhance mathematics, humanities and physical education. The school provides a good range of extra-curricular activities. The school's care and support are successfully accommodating an increasing proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities as well as a larger than average number of pupils who find themselves in vulnerable circumstances. The school

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

works well with the different agencies and employs a pastoral care worker who works with pupils, parents and staff to support children's wellbeing. These effective links and well planned opportunities to celebrate achievement have resulted in good and improving attendance and positive and ambitious pupil attitudes. Much closer links with the adjoining infant school have helped transition arrangements and enabled staff to track more accurately pupils' progress through primary education. Similarly good transition arrangements exist with the secondary school, while curriculum links have enriched provision for the gifted and talented. Considerable emphasis is placed on helping pupils in their personal development including appropriate use of the SEAL (social and emotional aspects of learning) programme.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

Governors have appreciated the improvements made and some parents have commented on significantly improved communication and the greater visibility of the leadership team. The school engages successfully with parents through leadership of the parent-teacher association and more open access to school through parent assemblies, coffee mornings, consultation meetings and opportunities to talk with senior staff in the playground. Similarly, the strong care and support systems and improvements in curriculum reflect the good and developing partnerships the school has locally. The school is very committed to equal opportunities reflected in its careful monitoring of pupils and responding to differences in achievement, evident for example in strategies to improve boys' writing. The current temporary senior leadership team has grown into its role and staff morale has considerably improved with considerable commitment to current efforts to improve provision. While these efforts are beginning to have impact, overall standards and pupil progress are no better than satisfactory. The governing body is supportive but has not been decisive in bringing about further school improvement and some of the previous governor links with different areas of the school have lapsed. Safeguarding, including child protection, is very secure especially day to day practice, but some policies and documentation are less well organised and monitored. The school recognises that more needs to be done to promote community cohesion by developing links with an urban city school and using its position as a church school to develop overseas links.

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
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
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
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

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers are mostly positive about the school although a number felt their children could be making better progress and others expressed concern about difficulties in contacting and communicating with senior staff. Inspectors found that some lessons did lack sufficient challenge to ensure most pupils made good progress. However, considerable strides have been made recently to improve links with parents including much greater contact at the start and finish of the school day. Other parents commented positively on these improvements.

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 Voluntary Aided Junior 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 81 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 182 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	30	38	46	58	2	3	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	32	40	47	59	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	20	25	51	64	8	10	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	11	13	56	67	15	18	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	25	30	47	57	8	10	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	17	21	54	67	8	10	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	32	39	49	60	1	1	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)	22	27	53	65	5	6	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	13	16	56	68	11	13	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	13	16	54	66	10	12	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	15	18	50	60	9	11	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	18	22	53	65	8	10	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	22	27	49	60	7	9	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 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	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

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 is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 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. 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.



24 May 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Junior School, Chelmsford CM2 8RR

Thank you for making us so welcome when we came to visit your school. St Michael's is a satisfactory school with some good features. Most of you do as well as expected by the time you leave in Year 6. We were pleased to see how well behaved you were and how you took an interest in each other's success in the achievement assembly. It is especially good to see how many of you like to be actively involved in the various aspects of the school such as the school council, sport and arts activities and different school visits. We noticed too that many of you get involved in local charities and church events.

Many of your parents told us that you like school and this is reflected in your good attendance. You get on with your teachers and like the opportunities to be actively involved in discussion and group work. Your teachers are clearly working hard to plan lessons that are interesting. A number of you commented that while you enjoyed your lessons at times the work was too easy. We have therefore asked them to have more challenging work when it is needed. Teachers mark your work regularly and often tell you how you can improve your work. This is very important and we have advised them to do more of this so you can make good progress.

From lessons and assemblies it was clear that the school is keen for you to know more about the wider world. To help in this we have asked the school to develop links with schools, charities and organisations in Britain and abroad.

We know that the acting headteacher and staff are working hard to make the school even better. You can all help by maintaining your good attendance and continuing to take an active part in school affairs. Thank you again for being so friendly and helpful on our visit.

Yours sincerely

Graham Preston

Lead Inspector

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