

St Michael's Primary School and Nursery, Colchester

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114817
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	357624
Inspection dates	28–29 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Mary Summers

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	166
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Patrick Baxter
Headteacher	Gail Thomas
Date of previous school inspection	6 December 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They visited 14 lessons which were taught by a total of seven teachers. Meetings were held with pupils, parents and carers, staff and governors. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at documents associated with safeguarding procedures and self-evaluation. They examined data and information about pupils' progress and looked at samples of their work. They scrutinised improvement plans also, as well as planning for lessons and the curriculum. Minutes from meetings held by the governing body and monitoring and evaluation reports written by senior leaders and the local authority were also examined. Inspectors took account of the views of pupils and of eight members of staff who had completed questionnaires, as well as the content of 21 questionnaires that had been returned by parents and carers.

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

- How well is the school engaging boys in learning and raising their attainment?
- How successfully are target setting procedures raising pupils' aspirations and their achievement?
- What is the impact of subject leaders on improving provision and pupils' achievement?

Information about the school

Most pupils who attend this smaller-than-average primary school come from the immediate area. The very large majority of pupils in the school are from White British backgrounds and few speak English as an additional language. Half of the pupils come from military families. The proportion of pupils who join or leave part way through the school year is significantly above that of most schools. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The proportion identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average, although proportions vary considerably between year groups. Many of those identified have moderate learning difficulties. The school has won a number of awards in recent years, including bronze Eco status. The headteacher and deputy headteacher are new since the last inspection. A privately run before- and after-school club operates from the school's premises and is inspected separately.

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

This is a satisfactory school. Pupils' attainment is rising rapidly as a result of the headteacher's clear drive for improvement. A good focus on teaching and learning is encouraging teachers to review and develop their practice. They are beginning to use information about pupils' progress to set individual targets for pupils, which is helping them take more responsibility for their own learning. Teaching is satisfactory. Teachers have positive relationships with pupils and this means that pupils feel secure and confident to ask for help if needed. However, sometimes, pupils spend too much time listening to teachers, rather than being actively engaged in their learning and this hinders their progress. Lesson plans are satisfactory in identifying activities to be completed, but often lack clear information about what pupils are expected to learn. This makes it difficult to assess their progress. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly, but they do not always provide useful advice about what the pupils should do to improve or involve them in assessing their own and each other's work.

Most pupils enjoy coming to school. Attendance has improved; it is now average and continues to rise in response to the school's focused work with individual pupils and families. Pupils learn about the importance of healthy lifestyles and most adopt them. They have a strong voice in school improvement through their work on the school council and support each other well in the playground through their work as play leaders. Recently, pupils worked successfully with police and governors to raise public awareness of safe driving on the road outside their school. They raise money to support local and international charities, making informed and sensitive decisions about where funds will be spent. The school goes out of its way to offer high levels of support for pupils from military families and their parents and carers. As a result, these pupils feel confident to share concerns and seek advice if necessary. Although provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory overall and children make sound progress, systems for checking pupils' progress are not sufficiently rigorous to provide a really accurate picture and the information is not always used to plan the next steps in their learning.

The headteacher has gained the good support of staff, parents and carers and there is a strong commitment towards improvement. However, improvement plans, while focusing correctly on the key priorities, lack clear targets, actions, milestones and lines of accountability in order to secure more rapid improvement. Nonetheless, improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory, especially in the way that pupils' attainment has risen and self-evaluation processes have been strengthened. These have enabled senior staff to gain an accurate picture of the school's performance and thus informed their plans for development. There is satisfactory capacity to improve.

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.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by December 2011 by:
 - ensuring that learning outcomes for pupils are clearly defined and easily measured
 - ensuring that teachers' marking provides useful advice for pupils on how to improve their work
 - involving pupils more effectively in assessing their own and each other's progress
 - ensuring that lessons engage pupils actively in their learning, rather than listening to the teacher.
- Improve provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage by December 2011 by assessing children's progress more rigorously and using the information to plan activities that help them take the next steps in their learning.
- Strengthen the quality of leadership and management by September 2011 by ensuring that improvement and action plans include measureable targets, actions, clear monitoring procedures and milestones by which to judge progress.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Boys and girls make satisfactory progress throughout the school and their attainment is broadly average by the time they leave at the end of Year 6. Pupils who transfer into the school mid-way through the year make satisfactory progress also because the school is careful to assess their attainment when they begin so they can provide appropriate support if necessary. New systems to check pupils' progress in Key Stages 1 and 2 have raised teachers' awareness of the levels at which pupils should be operating in each year and this is securely lifting attainment and ensuring satisfactory achievement. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those learning English as an additional language make satisfactory progress. One-to-one sessions with learning support assistants help them develop their confidence and skills in literacy and numeracy. Improved strategies to teach phonetics (the sounds letters make) in the Reception Year and Years 1 and 2 mean that pupils are entering Year 3 with more secure skills than in the past. The school's focus on improving writing this year has been successful. Pupils in Year 2, for example, worked well to write instructions on how to dress for a physical education lesson. They put on their shorts, T-shirts and plimsolls after removing their everyday clothes, writing their instructions and using 'bossy' verbs as they did so. All were involved and enjoyed the activity thoroughly. In some lessons, however, pupils' progress is hindered by spending too much time on the carpet listening to teachers, rather than being actively involved in learning.

The vast majority of pupils behave well, although there is a small number of pupils, usually boys, who are not so well motivated to learn. However, generally, teachers engage them effectively and, when inattention occurs, are careful to ensure that this does not affect the learning of other pupils. Pupils' average attendance and satisfactory basic skills mean they are satisfactorily prepared for the future. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Pupils have sound opportunities during assembly to reflect about their relationships with different people in school and learn about a range of different faiths and cultural practices in religious education and geography lessons.

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

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	3
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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	3

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

How effective is the provision?

Teachers have good relationships with the pupils which help to create a pleasant and encouraging learning atmosphere. Teaching assistants are generally well deployed and help pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities play a full part in lessons. Teachers use interactive whiteboards often to make lessons more interesting and illustrate different teaching points. However, there is often a lack of clarity in teachers' planning about exactly what pupils are expected to learn and this makes it difficult for pupils to know how well they are doing and for teachers to check progress accurately.

A curriculum review has been completed and senior staff are presently evaluating the new plans to ensure that pupils are being given enough opportunities to develop their skills in different subjects. They have already adapted the organisation of the curriculum in information and communications technology to ensure that pupils are able to build progressively on their computer skills as they move through the school. Work done to achieve bronze Eco status has meant that pupils are developing a satisfactory understanding of environmental issues. Effective partnerships with local organisations provide useful opportunities for gifted and talented pupils to extend their academic, creative and sporting skills. Pupils appreciate the wide variety of clubs on offer, including drama, cookery, gardening and football.

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Induction procedures are effective in helping pupils settle quickly in the Nursery and good transition arrangements help them move confidently to their secondary schools at the end of Year 6. School staff go out of their way to help less confident pupils, sometimes accompanying them to their new school on the first day to ensure they are safe and happy. Pupils who return to St Michael's after having been at other schools overseas or in different parts of the country are welcomed back warmly and settle quickly back into school life. Pupils who have been absent due to illness receive additional support to help them catch up on lessons they have missed. Very successful links with military personnel help staff to support pupils whose parents and carers are deployed in war zones. The very successful 'Bluey Club', for instance, enables pupils to send parcels, cards and letters to their loved ones overseas.

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
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The new headteacher has given a firm steer to the school's work and has brought staff on board effectively. There is a clear focus on securing improvement. Senior leaders were successful last year in implementing a number of initiatives, which have contributed well to improvements to pupils' attainment, especially in writing, as well as monitoring and evaluation procedures. Coordinators are developing their roles satisfactorily and are involved in monitoring their subjects through lesson observations and examining lesson plans and pupils' work. However, school and subject improvement plans lack explicit guidance to ensure that everyone understands their roles and responsibilities in evaluating the school's performance and driving improvement.

Parents and carers develop good levels of trust in the staff because of the strong partnerships that exist between them and the school. The Parent Teacher Association, 'Shipmates', arranges a range of social and fund raising activities. A good number of parents and carers attend the regular events that the school arranges to help them learn how to support their children at home. 'Bedtime Stories', for example, helped them learn about the value of sharing books with their children in the evenings. Good partnerships with a wide range of agencies have provided effective support for senior staff in developing their management roles and led to improvements in the curriculum, for example with writing. Governance is satisfactory. The governing body provides sound support and challenge for the school. It has strengthened its monitoring role recently and this is beginning to have a good impact on members' knowledge of the school's performance.

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There are sound arrangements to ensure that pupils are safe at school. Policies and procedures are robust and regularly reviewed and management systems are clearly defined. Staff promote equality of opportunity satisfactorily. Senior staff have begun to track the progress of different groups of pupils to identify underachievement. Racist incidents are rare and procedures are in place to ensure that any which arise are tackled promptly. The school promotes community cohesion satisfactorily. Although there is a strong feeling of community within the school and locality, links with communities and cultures outside the local area have yet to be established fully.

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	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

Children settle in quickly to the Nursery and begin to develop their confidence and independence. They make satisfactory progress through the Nursery and Reception classes. Recently, planning for Reception Year children has been strengthened to provide more opportunities for them to choose activities for themselves and this is having a positive impact on their personal development. The introduction of a new phonics programme (teaching about the sounds letters make) is contributing to a rise in their attainment in literacy.

Children work and play happily together, sharing toys and equipment. Behaviour is good in and out of classrooms. Children have a good knowledge of how to keep safe, enjoy the healthy snacks offered and use the wide range of climbing and other equipment enthusiastically. In the Nursery, children enjoyed listening to an African folk tale. They enjoyed tasting the different fruits mentioned in the story and weighing and counting pretend 'fruits' on the 'fruit stall'. Children in the Reception Year developed their knowledge and understanding of the world when they discussed maps and travel, making relevant observations about roads and tunnels. They extended their vocabulary well

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during independent activities when they were encouraged to use words such as 'under,' 'over' and 'through'.

Leadership is sound. Adults supervise children well to make sure they are safe and secure. New systems have been introduced to track children's achievements, but these are not yet firmly established in order to provide a really accurate picture of their progress in the different elements of their learning. The information is not always used well enough to plan appropriate activities to meet the children's individual needs and so help them move on in their learning.

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

The proportion of parental questionnaires returned was much lower than average. Parents and carers who did respond are positive about the school's work. They are happy about the leadership and management of the school, agree that the school keeps their children safe and that they are kept well informed about their children's progress. They are very happy that the school takes account of their suggestions and concerns. These views are similar to the findings of the inspection.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Michael's Primary School and Nursery, Colchester 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 21 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 166 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	13	62	7	33	0	0	1	5
The school keeps my child safe	14	67	7	33	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	10	48	11	52	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	12	57	8	38	0	0	1	5
The teaching is good at this school	11	52	10	48	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	14	67	6	29	1	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	12	57	8	38	1	5	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)	9	43	7	33	1	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	10	48	9	43	1	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	13	62	7	33	1	5	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	11	52	10	48	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	11	52	10	48	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	14	67	7	33	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 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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 2009 to 31 August 2010 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 2009/10 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.



30 March 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Michael's Primary School and Nursery, Colchester, Colchester, CO2 9RA

Thank you so much for welcoming us recently to your school and giving us your opinions about the school. Your views, along with everything else that we saw, helped us to get to know your school and how well it works. You go to a satisfactory school and these are some of the important things we found out about it.

You understand how to keep healthy and fit.

Adults look after you well so you are confident to ask for help if you need it.

You do lots of jobs and activities in school to help the adults and each other and raise funds to help children who are not as fortunate as yourselves.

The 'Bluey Club' helps you to keep in contact with your parents and carers when they are overseas.

The people in charge are working well with your parents and carers to make sure you are happy and healthy.

There are a few things that could be even better in your school. We have asked teachers to make sure they are very clear about what they want you to learn during lessons so that you can check your own and each other's progress. We have asked them to make sure that you spend more time actively involved in learning, rather than listening to your teachers for too long, and to give you more advice about how to improve when they mark your work. We have asked the teachers in the Nursery and Reception Year to check your progress more carefully and to use the information to plan activities that will help you take the next steps in your learning. Finally, we have asked those in charge to write more detailed plans to make sure that things improve at a faster rate. You all can play your part in helping your school become better by making sure you work hard, behave well and attend school every day unless you are ill.

Yours sincerely

Mary Summers

Lead inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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