

# St Michael's Catholic Academy

Beamish Road, Stockton on Tees, Billingham, TS23 3DX

**Inspection dates** 9–10 June 2015

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students' achievement is not consistently good. They usually join the academy with high prior attainment. This is not always capitalised upon and their learning and progress can stall so that too many of them make mediocre rather than the good or outstanding progress of which they are capable.
- Leaders and governors' impact on the quality of teaching and students' achievement is not good. Some effective steps have been taken but key deficiencies linked to the quality of provision and students' progress are hindering further success.
- The impact of teaching on students' learning is not consistently good. There is some high-quality teaching in the academy. However, it is not yet the norm and the difference between the most and least effective practice is marked.
- Assessment data is not always used well to plan work that matches students' differing needs. This occasionally undermines their rates of progress.
- The quality of marking and feedback is variable. Many staff apply the academy's new policy well, but occasionally appropriate feedback is not provided to help students take the next steps in their learning.
- Students' attendance, and in particular the rate of persistent absence, requires improvement to be good.
- The impact of leadership is not yet good overall. Some inconsistencies in impact and the rigour of monitoring and evaluation practices at senior and middle leader level are the inhibiting factors. In addition, several leaders are new and have not been in post long enough to demonstrate a telling impact.

### The school has the following strengths

- The dogged, effective and inclusive leadership of the headteacher since his appointment is starting to pay dividends. He has secured the support of the majority of students, staff and parents, who recognise he has the interests of the students at heart.
- Consequently, they are throwing their support behind the strategies being implemented to improve the academy's effectiveness. Underpinning the improvement are some talented staff and some increasingly ambitious and responsive students.
- Behaviour and safety are good. The very large majority of students are a credit to their families and wonderful ambassadors for the academy. There are sound procedures in place to keep them safe.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted very effectively overall.
- Governors are ambitious for the academy's future. Their robust challenge and shaping of the actions senior leaders are taking is helping to improve the quality of education students receive.
- The sponsor's support and challenge has been key in securing a number of emerging improvements.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 34 parts of lessons. This allowed inspectors to observe the large majority of teachers in the academy and to see almost all of the subjects taught at the academy. Inspectors also conducted two walks around school to observe learning. One of these walks around school was to look at behaviour and attitudes to learning and the other was to investigate the progress of disadvantaged and the most able students. The academy's senior leaders opted not to undertake joint lesson observations with inspectors.
- Inspectors observed an assembly and evaluated the quality of the work in a sample of students' books. This was in addition to their widespread evaluation of work in students' books during lesson observations and discussions with students about their work.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and several senior and middle leaders including: deputy headteachers and assistant headteachers; curriculum leaders; the special educational needs coordinator; and safeguarding lead teachers. The lead inspector met with four governors, the Chief Executive Officer and the Head of Standards from the sponsor and the Chair of the Parents and Teachers Association (PTA). Inspectors also spoke to three groups of students formally and to many others during lessons and social times.
- Inspectors examined a range of academy documentation including the academy's view of how well it is doing, its development plan, evidence about the work of the governing body, data showing students' progress, records of students' behaviour and attendance and documents related to safeguarding arrangements and child protection.
- Inspectors evaluated questionnaire responses from 53 academy staff. Inspectors also took account of the 64 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) and the 129 views expressed by parents and carers who completed the academy's own parent questionnaire, and those of a very small number of parents who shared their views in writing.
- During this inspection inspectors also focused on the experiences of newly-qualified and trainee teachers.

## Inspection team

John Young, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Nick Whittaker	Her Majesty's Inspector
Bernard Clarke	Additional Inspector
Frank Cain	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- St Michael's Catholic Academy opened in September 2013. It is sponsored by the Carmel Education Trust. The academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The vast majority of students are of White British heritage. The remaining very small numbers of students originate from mixed heritage backgrounds, Asian or British Asian backgrounds, African and other White backgrounds. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is low.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students, those supported by the pupil premium, is broadly average. The pupil premium is additional government funding to support students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is lower than in most schools nationally. Their needs are varied including: speech, language and communication needs; hearing, visual and physical disability; autistic spectrum disorder and behaviour, emotional and social difficulties.
- Nine students are educated off-site, at two provisions commissioned through the local authority. These are Redhill and Aspire. They offer courses such as construction, hair and beauty, life skills and social and emotional development. The majority of students attend these provisions on a full-time basis.
- The academy meets the current government floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The academy is a member of the Hexham and Newcastle Diocese which incorporates the Catholic schools in the region. The principal support provided to the school via this arrangement is by Carmel College, Darlington, which is a teaching school and the sponsor of the academy.
- In April 2016, the academy will relocate to a new building currently being constructed on the same site.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least consistently good and students make good or better progress in all subjects and in all year groups by:
  - using assessment data more effectively to plan activities which match students' differing needs and abilities and enables them to make accelerated progress in all of their subjects
  - narrowing the gap between the least and most effective teaching and learning in the academy so that all students receive a consistent diet of good or better teaching and any inadequacy is eliminated
  - ensuring marking and feedback strategies are consistently evaluative and effective in signposting to students precisely what they need to do to improve their learning and progress in all subjects
  - reinforcing the awareness among all staff of the very high expectations they should have of what all students are capable of, given that usually they have high prior attainment on entry to the school.
- Increase the effectiveness of some aspects of senior and middle leadership in driving improvements in all that the academy provides and the impact their strategic actions have on the academic outcomes students attain by:
  - embedding the newly introduced systematic tracking and evaluation of students' progress in every subject so that curriculum leaders have a common and secure understanding of students' achievement
  - ensuring all subject leaders exercise rigour in discerning accurately all students' learning and progress
  - ensuring that all senior leaders are effective in monitoring and evaluating the impact of educational provision and using the data collected to challenge and develop staff to further improve their work
  - increasing the effectiveness of strategies to improve students' attendance so that it is consistently good across all groups, and reduce rates of persistent absence, particularly among disadvantaged students.
  - ensuring provision for students educated off-site is high quality and facilitates their good achievement.
  - embedding the effective leadership developments already established by the Head of School.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management

### require improvement

- The overall impact of leadership requires improvement to be good. The headteacher has provided some resolute and effective leadership of the academy during a time of transition and considerable turbulence, which has seen a fifty percent turnover of staff since the academy opened. He has developed a shared ambition and optimism for the future among staff which in turn is creating an aspirational ethos and culture. So while remaining inconsistent overall, clear improvements are apparent in teaching quality, students' achievements, curriculum provision and students' personal development.
- Several senior and middle leaders are new. They show promise but have not been in post long enough to produce a sustained impact. Elsewhere, leadership is mixed with some excellent practice counter-balanced by less effective elements. The lesser elements need uplifting if the academy is to continue developing.
- The leadership of teaching is evolving. More curriculum leaders are confidently monitoring and evaluating their faculties and robustly holding teachers to account for students' progress. However, all senior leaders must ensure that they become more effective in monitoring and evaluating the impact of educational provision. They must then use the data collected to more effectively challenge and develop staff to improve the impact of their work and refine provision where necessary to support students' rapid learning and progress.
- Academy self-evaluation is largely accurate but is overly-optimistic about how fast it is improving.
- Pupil premium funding has been used effectively to: support interventions to boost targeted students' progress in mathematics and English; extend the curriculum opportunities available; aid their well-being; and support their attendance and behaviour. However, there is room for sizeable further improvement.
- The academy engages well with parents and the majority who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire said they would recommend the academy to other parents. An active Parent and Teachers Association, regular newsletters and updates on their children's progress as well as invitations to celebration events have all helped to secure parents' satisfaction. A small minority doubt the school's leadership.
- Performance management is rigorous and there is evidence that leaders and governors know and reward the 'high flyers' but also hold to account robustly those who are underperforming. On occasion, this has included stopping staff from progressing up the pay ladder and/or disciplinary action.
- The curriculum is still evolving. It has been reviewed and adapted to ensure it is better matched to the differing needs and interests of students. A traditional range of courses is offered alongside vocational opportunities and specialist and alternative provision for those in need of it. Students benefit from visits, visitors and additional experiences designed to increase awareness of life beyond Billingham, raise their aspirations and increase their independence and self-confidence. For example, one student spoke at a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation conference in Russia.
- The opportunities students have to assume leadership, take part in music, sporting and drama events, and to volunteer and fundraise for charity promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- Underpinning the curriculum is good pastoral care and guidance which students appreciate and which supports their personal development, including those deemed more vulnerable than others.
- The academy is raising awareness among students of cultures and customs that differ from their own. Staff extol the British and Catholic values of tolerance, justice, compassion, respect, the rule of law and democracy. This is helping to foster good relations, tackle discrimination and promote equality in the academy and the local community. Some very effective work has taken place to tackle extremist views and build greater community cohesion.
- Students receive effective advice and careers guidance as they move through and beyond the academy which helps them to make informed choices about their next steps. They benefit from work experience, careers interviews and a bespoke 'next steps support plan'. Consequently, only a tiny proportion of students who leave the academy do not go on to further education, employment or training.
- Unfortunately, the academy's provision for the small numbers of students who access off-site alternative provision is not wholly effective in ensuring these students gain qualifications in line with their capabilities.
- Newly qualified and trainee teachers feel well supported and appreciate the guidance they receive.
- Safeguarding and child protection arrangements are sound and meet requirements and systems for the safe recruitment of staff, assessing risk and site security are rigorous. Designated staff are well trained.
- The sponsor has added much-needed strategic capacity to developing teaching, behaviour, the curriculum students' achievement and leadership, which has helped to underpin the evident improvements. This was particularly vital when several senior and middle leaders left the academy. As the academy has evolved, the extent of this support has reduced as greater internal capacity outside of the headteacher emerges.

■ The Hexham and Newcastle Diocesan Department for Education acted as the broker for the sponsorship of the academy by Carmel Education Trust school and maintains a watching brief over the academy.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors discharge their duties assiduously and know the school's strengths and weaknesses well.
- They have a range of suitable expertise and backgrounds that enable them to monitor, evaluate and strategically hold the academy's leaders to account for the current quality of education provided to students. They have the skills to scratch beneath the surface of the information they are presented with and to assess more shrewdly the extent to which the academy's key priorities are being achieved. To facilitate this they are each linked to key areas of the academy's work and report to other governors.
- They check students' progress rigorously, including the impact of pupil premium spending. On occasion, they have commissioned consultant inspectors to inform their view of the quality of teaching and its impact on students' learning. They are conversant with student progress data having accessed training.
- Governing body minutes indicate that governors ask searching questions about the impact of the strategic actions taken by the academy's leaders. The management of financial resources is sound.

**The behaviour and safety of pupils** are good

**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of students is good overall. The academy has created a positive climate for learning and established a cooperative ethos between staff and students and among the different groups of students
- There is an orderly, welcoming, inclusive and mutually supportive ethos which permeates this Catholic academy. This helps to ensure that students, including those deemed more vulnerable, feel safe, well supported and cared for by staff who they believe really care about their well-being.
- Students are courteous and take pride in their appearance. They are well prepared for lessons with the right equipment and good attitudes to learning. They usually behave impeccably in classrooms and at social times. However, standards of behaviour can deteriorate where teaching is less effective.
- Students' behaviour has improved over time. The higher expectations being placed upon them has initially led to more behaviour referrals. However, the Emmaus Centre and its use of restorative justice practices is proving effective in tackling some entrenched student behaviours. Consequently, fewer students are now serial offenders. The ratio of fixed term exclusions is average. No specific group of students is disproportionately excluded.

**Safety**

- The academy's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Students can identify potential risks to their well-being and can explain how they would stay safe in a range of situations, including when using the internet, mobile technologies and social media. Inspectors saw students keeping themselves and others safe around the academy and during physical education and science lessons.
- Students say racist, homophobic, cyber-bullying or derogatory language is rare and nipped in the bud when it occurs. This was supported by inspectors' own findings and echoed by most parents and staff in their responses to the Ofsted questionnaire.
- Students are punctual. Attendance is rising and persistent absence is falling. The number of students with 100% attendance has doubled over the past year. However, both aspects are still only broadly average. Students' attendance, behaviour and safety at off-site provision are satisfactory.

**The quality of teaching** requires improvement

- The impact of teaching is not yet good overall. Staff work hard and embrace the training and support they have had to improve their effectiveness. They know there is room for more improvement, although a few are already outstanding practitioners.
- Actions taken to improve the quality of teaching are resulting in strengthening practice in classrooms that is benefiting students, but the impact of teaching over time has not been consistently strong enough to ensure all students make good progress. Ongoing variability and weaknesses are stalling further progress.
- The impact of better teaching in all subjects but particularly English and mathematics is reflected in the much-improved progress students currently in the school are making. In Year 11 for example, students' progress has been rapid over the past year. This has enabled them to regain much of the lost ground in

their learning caused by slower progress in previous years. This picture is mirrored across year groups and for the most and least-able students, disadvantaged students, and those with special educational needs.

- Work on reinforcing the development of literacy across the curriculum is evolving and the full impact is not yet evident. However, a reading programme funded by the Year 7 catch-up funding has had incredible success in boosting the attainment of some less-able students in Year 7.
- Typically, lessons are suitably planned with clear learning aims and suitable challenges. Questioning enables students to demonstrate or deepen their knowledge, skills and understanding. This also indicates to the teacher, as a result of what students show they know, the next appropriate step in learning. Some teaching is able to expertly gauge when it is appropriate to really stretch and challenge students and when further consolidation and support is necessary to reinforce their learning. Sometimes, students just need to believe in themselves more and staff need to reassure them they are capable.
- The elements of less effective practice which exist need uplifting if students are to stand any chance of making consistently good progress. Moreover, the extent to which all staff have the highest expectations of what students are capable of, and all students recognise their great potential, requires improvement.
- The academy has introduced a new assessment framework to support students' learning and progress. However, variations in the rigour of application, some inaccuracy and misunderstanding of the methodology behind the approach have led to variable impact. The data generated is not always used effectively to plan activities that match students' specific needs and abilities or enable them to make good progress.
- The academy has introduced a new framework to improve the impact of marking and feedback, which individual curriculum areas are applying. However, in practice it is not proving consistently evaluative or effective in signposting to students precisely what they need to do to improve their learning and progress.
- The impact of teaching assistants is improving. Appropriate training ensures they provide increasingly effective support, for example in boosting students' reading skills in Year 7 and in providing in-class support for targeted students. However, there is a degree of variability in the quality of their intervention.
- Appropriate homework is set routinely throughout the academy and is supporting students' learning.

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- Students' achievements over time are only broadly average when set against their starting points. For example, they join the academy with attainment that is significantly higher than average but leave with attainment that is higher than average. Also, the ratios of students that make and exceed expected rates of progress are only broadly average. Therefore, students' achievement requires improvement to be good.
- Over the past year students have made faster progress because of the academy's effective interventions to support their academic development and their achievement is improving as a result. This is the case for all groups in the academy, including disadvantaged students and those with special educational needs.
- In some cases, this faster progress has enabled groups who were previously underachieving such as disadvantaged students, to regain the lost ground in their learning. However, there remain variations in the extent of students' attainments and progress across the academy and it is not yet consistently good.
- The latest data indicate that the gap between the GCSE attainment of disadvantaged students and other students in the school has narrowed significantly and is less than half a grade. The progress gap has not closed but this is due to equally large gains for both groups, especially in mathematics, rather than a lack of any progress. The gap between the attainment and progress of these students in relation to other students nationally is also closing. Disadvantaged students' progress in mathematics and English is in line with their peers nationally.
- Inspectors' first-hand observations of learning and scrutiny of students' work confirm this variable picture. Good and outstanding achievement was seen alongside mediocre and weak learning. The academy's leaders know they must eradicate these inconsistencies if students' achievements are to improve further.
- The achievement of some of the most-able students is good because staff have high expectations of them, set challenging work and provide effective support. This contrasts with weaker practice which results in their mediocre rather than good progress. Encouragingly, in line with other students in the academy now, the achievement of the most able students is accelerating. However, it is not yet good.
- Provision for disabled students and those who have special educational needs has been patchy and did not always meet their needs effectively. This is now improving. A minority make good progress but variations in the quality of teaching and support they receive mean that it requires improvement to be good overall.
- The achievement of students who attend alternative provision requires improvement with respect to the numbers who gain meaningful academic qualifications, especially in English and mathematics.

- The academy does not use early entry for GCSE examinations.

## What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	139656
<b>Local authority</b>	Stockton
<b>Inspection number</b>	450222

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	850
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mary Toth
<b>Headteacher</b>	Andrew Ramsey
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected as an academy
<b>Telephone number</b>	01642 870003
<b>Fax number</b>	01642 370618
<b>Email address</b>	enquiries@stmichaelsrcschool.org.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit [www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk), or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

[Piccadilly Gate](#)  
[Store St](#)  
[Manchester](#)  
[M1 2WD](#)

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

© Crown copyright 2014

