



St Michael's CofE High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104019
Local Authority Sandwell
Inspection number 286838
Inspection dates 10–11 January 2007
Reporting inspector Susan Morris-king HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Throne Road
School category	Voluntary controlled		Rowley Regis
Age range of pupils	11–16		B65 9LD
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0121 5595224
Number on roll (school)	987	Fax number	0121 5594203
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Bev Adams
		Headteacher	Rod Worthington
Date of previous school inspection	11 November 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–16	10–11 January 2007	286838

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Michael's C of E High School is situated in an area of above-average socio-economic disadvantage. Almost 90% of the pupils are White British; several minority ethnic groups are also represented in the school. Around 6% of the pupils have a statement of special educational needs, which is well above the national average. The school has a designated resource base for pupils with physical disabilities, which accounts for some of the pupils with statements: other pupils with a statement are visually impaired, autistic or have general learning difficulties. In September 2005, the school gained specialist business and enterprise status, and is also a full service extended school.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness of St Michael's C of E High School is satisfactory, but some aspects are good or outstanding, and the school has good capacity to improve. Leadership of the school by the very dedicated headteacher and senior team is good. The team sets a clear strategic direction for the school. Together with a committed staff, they have created a highly inclusive community in which pupils with a wide variety of talents and needs are very well supported in their personal development and, as a result, become mature and positive individuals. Pupils, parents and governors are proud of the school.

Care, guidance and support are excellent. A very wide range of support systems and structures are carefully used to help pupils to develop their social skills and to take an outstanding level of responsibility within the school community. The peer tutoring initiative, for example, enables over a third of the pupils to become involved in teaching younger pupils about aspects of healthy and safe living, with evident effect. Personal development is good. Behaviour is good; pupils have positive attitudes towards their learning and are keen to be engaged in lessons.

Teaching is satisfactory. The school has been plagued with staffing difficulties for several years, particularly in mathematics and science. The senior leadership team has worked tirelessly to recruit good quality staff to fill vacancies, recently with significant success. Where teaching is good and staffing is stable, pupils have begun to make good progress. However, gaps in staffing have led to too many classes experiencing a lack of continuity in teaching, and this has had a detrimental effect on pupils' progress. Pupils join the school with below-average standards, and standards remain below average by the time they leave. By the end of Year 11, pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall, although their achievement across subjects is uneven. However, as a result of the carefully planned support, teaching and curriculum they receive, many pupils with the most complex needs achieve particularly well.

Pupils respond well to lessons which are interesting, engaging and move at a good pace. Some lessons, though, lack the level of challenge needed to ensure pupils make enough progress. The school has introduced a good system to track pupils' progress. This is helping staff to be more aware of any gaps in the pupils' learning and to respond more effectively to any underachievement. The school has rightly identified that this system needs to be used more consistently by all staff to enable pupils to meet challenging targets. The good curriculum and enrichment activities give pupils a wide range of opportunities and choices. Particularly interesting experiences, including a very wide range of educational visits, are available through the school's full service extended schools status. The business and enterprise specialism has had a positive influence in the school. This is an outstanding feature that expands the horizons and opportunities for all. The school has excellent links with a variety of local businesses and community groups which greatly enhance the opportunities for pupils to better develop skills for their future economic well-being.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that each lesson contains sufficient challenge for all pupils to enable them to make consistently good progress.
- Ensure that all staff use the tracking system consistently well to enable pupils to meet challenging targets.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils enter the school with below-average standards of attainment. By the time they reach the end of Year 9, standards remain below the national average. In 2005 and 2006, pupils' attainment in the core subjects was variable. Pupils made better progress in English than in science and mathematics: in English, standards were in line with the national average. Inspection evidence and the school's tracking information show that standards are improving in all core subjects at Key Stage 3.

In 2005, the percentage of pupils attaining five or more GCSE passes at A* to G was in line with the national average. Fewer attained five or more passes at the higher grades A* to C when compared to the national average. This pattern of attainment was similar in 2006. There is variation between subjects in the standards reached. The GCSE grades obtained in dance are exceptionally high compared with national results; these outcomes are aided greatly by pupils' participation in their dance company Fusion.

Overall, pupils' achievement is satisfactory. The achievement of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is good. There are no significant differences in the achievement of pupils from different ethnic groups.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. The curriculum and the pastoral system ensure that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils therefore mature well. The school gives high priority to the importance of a healthy, active lifestyle, to good effect; for example, a high proportion of pupils participate in dance and sport. By the time pupils leave school they are well prepared for further education and training or for employment.

Pupils enjoy school and have good attitudes to learning. They show interest, work hard and concentrate well in lessons. They work in a responsible manner when discussing issues with their peers. Pupils are considerate to each other and behave well in lessons and around the school. The school monitors carefully any incidents of unacceptable behaviour and makes effective but sparing use of exclusion. Attendance is satisfactory. Most pupils attend school regularly and arrive on time to their lessons. The school works effectively with parents to improve the attendance of pupils who have more frequent absences.

Peer tutors make a very distinctive and valuable contribution to all aspects of each other's personal development. The school's extended provision and its business and enterprise status also offer a wide range of opportunities to which pupils respond well. The school is outstandingly successful in enabling pupils to develop the social skills needed to make a positive contribution to the community and they take a range of responsibilities within the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and of pupils' learning is satisfactory. In areas of the curriculum where there are stable staffing levels, more of the teaching is good and learning has improved. This is evident in English where sustained levels of specialist teaching over the last two years have led to good teaching and learning, with significant improvements in pupils' progress. However, in some curriculum areas, difficulties in attracting specialist teaching staff have led to inconsistent teaching and learning that has adversely affected pupils' progress.

In good lessons, teaching is challenging and lively with good use of practical activities which capture pupils' interest and enthusiasm. Other lessons are less effective, however, because teachers talk for too long and set tasks that do not challenge pupils enough. In these lessons, the pupils are not sufficiently stretched.

The school has a good marking policy. Most pupils are aware of the levels at which they are working and feedback in lessons about how to improve is good. However, the quality of marking varies. In some subjects, such as technology and English, pupils are given clear and detailed advice on how to improve. In some other subjects, particularly those where there are gaps in staffing, pupils lack consistent advice on what they need to do to improve. Teachers have been making better use of assessment information to monitor the progress of pupils and to set appropriate goals for pupils to reach. The school is aware that this area of its work needs further development to have the desired impact on the progress which pupils make.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school offers a good, broad and balanced curriculum which has developed in response to the varying needs of pupils. Successful vocational and work-based courses are offered to pupils, who benefit from alternative provision. Pupils' education is enhanced by the well-managed programme of business and enterprise activities which is successfully incorporated across the curriculum. Pupils with physical disabilities and other complex learning needs have good access to the general curriculum as well as being given additional support such as physiotherapy, hydrotherapy and mobility training. The school provides good opportunities for pupils to progress to further education through strong links with local colleges. The contribution of agencies, for

example, The Prince's Trust, are used very effectively. The integration of ethical issues such as fair trading and community support is exemplary and furthers the school's Christian principles.

Popular, wide-ranging and extensive enrichment activities are available to all pupils. The school has achieved outstanding success by winning a local award for Young Enterprise education for the last six years. Pupils are encouraged to take part in residential activities, various out-of-school courses, and clubs, including music and dance, and many do so. Impressively all pupils, including those with disabilities, are given the opportunity to participate in sporting events and competitions.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school is right in its judgement that provision for pupils' care, guidance and support is outstanding. Procedures for health and safety and for child protection are very secure. The school gives an exceptional level of attention to the personal needs of every pupil within a very safe and supportive environment and has highly effective systems to counteract bullying and racist incidents. As a result, the care and support that pupils receive are excellent.

The school ensures that vulnerable pupils receive strong support for their personal development and learning; for example, the work of the learning mentors is highly focused on pupils' individual needs. When necessary, pupils also have the benefit of professional services provided by a very wide range of specialist agencies. This excellent blend of support allows some pupils who have previously experienced failure in their education elsewhere to be successful at St Michael's. Those who have physical disabilities or visual impairment receive multi-disciplinary support, as well as benefiting from the support of highly skilled school staff, including those in the centre for Enhanced Learning Provision. As a result, pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are helped to make good progress.

The role of the form tutor in providing guidance is prominent. Form tutors teach the well-structured programme of personal, social and health education, which includes citizenship and careers. The developing tracking system is also enabling form tutors to take an even stronger role in helping pupils to reach more challenging targets.

The way in which the school enables pupils to support and guide each other through a systematic and extensive peer-tutoring scheme, which involves a third of the school, is exceptional.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership and management of the school are good. The school's commitment to inclusion is evident in all that it does; for example, the curriculum is well adapted to meet the sometimes very complex needs of pupils. The senior leadership team has approached strategically the difficulties of recruiting good quality staff, particularly

in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Staff development is a priority. The programme of support and development for newly qualified teachers and for those on the graduate teacher programme is very good, and there is an effective strategy to recruit other staff, such as learning mentors, from the local community. As a result of these initiatives, staff who join St Michael's, including those early in their careers, are enabled to develop their skills quickly and make a good contribution to the school. This effective programme of recruitment and training has begun to have an impact on the progress which pupils make in some subjects. Innovation and leadership by all staff are effectively encouraged; for example, a member of the learning support team has set up an excellent support group for a small group of parents.

Monitoring and evaluation are thorough and have been improved in the last year by the introduction of a new system for monitoring pupils' progress. The leadership team carries out a detailed review of each department's work on an annual basis, which leads to changes being made to improve practice. Middle leaders make decisions about the organisation of teaching in their areas and take an appropriate level of responsibility for supporting other staff. As the tracking system develops they are becoming more accountable for promoting pupils' progress.

Governance is good and the governing body is well led. The chair of governors knows the school very well and, with other governors, is very involved in the school's work.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for your excellent contribution to our inspection this week. We appreciated how you talked to us in your lessons, around school, and in the two different groups we saw, and shared your opinions. You are very good ambassadors for your school. These discussions helped us to understand what is distinctive about St Michael's.

We were particularly impressed with the excellent care and support which the school gives to you, and the way in which this allows you to mature and to be ready for work or college at the end of Year 11. The peer tutoring system is an important part of this: it is unusual to find quite so many pupils involved in teaching and supporting each other, and you do this very well indeed. Through this, as well as in other ways, you make an outstanding contribution to your school community. The business and enterprise work really helps you to develop important skills. Your dance company Fusion is excellent and you achieve dance GCSE results which are well above most dance results in the country.

You, the headteacher and your parents told us that you were concerned that in some subjects, particularly in maths and science, you have had many temporary teachers. For some of you, this has affected the progress you have made. The leadership team has worked hard to recruit good staff to teach and to support you and we were glad to see that most classes now have permanent teachers. This should allow all pupils to do well.

The main thing we have asked the school to concentrate on now is to make sure that you are always challenged enough in all of your lessons. In the good lessons we saw, you were really being expected to think and to do work that stretched you. At other times you were not asked to do enough. Also, the school now has a lot of information about how well you are doing, and this can be used by all teachers to plan work which is at the right (difficult enough!) level for you. You will be able to help the school and yourselves by rising to this challenge and really pushing yourselves to reach the highest standards that you can.

Thank you again for welcoming us to St Michael's. I wish you every success in the future.