

St Michael's CofE (C) Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124258
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	292935
Inspection date	16 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Melvyn Hemmings

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	456
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alison Stains
Headteacher	Helen Mckay
Date of previous school inspection	26 November 2001
School address	Sturgeons Hill Lichfield WS14 9AW
Telephone number	01543 510778
Fax number	01543 510782

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a much larger-than-average primary school. The majority of children enter school with attainment above that expected for their age. The percentage of pupils whose first language is other than English is above average and a few of these are at an early stage of learning English. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is below average. There has been recent disruption to staffing in Years 1 and 2 because of two maternity leaves.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school with good features. Pupils' good personal development is reflected in the above-average attendance rates and the good behaviour of the majority. Most parents support the school and are pleased with the good care and support given to their children. One parental comment captures the views of many, 'The school has a good caring atmosphere and I am happy to send my children to St Michael's'.

A significant minority of parents expressed valid concerns that pupils in some classes make better progress than in others. The maternity leaves have meant that pupils in Years 1 and 2 have recently had a succession of different teachers. This has been out of the school's control, but it has had an adverse effect on some pupils' progress. Although it is still satisfactory, progress in Years 1, 2 and 3 is slower than in other year groups. The school is tackling this situation. For example, it is providing extra training for some teachers, particularly in the teaching of basic skills in mathematics. However, the results of these initiatives are not rigorously monitored. Consequently, the school does not have a clear view of their effect on pupils' learning.

Pupils achieve satisfactorily and reach standards that are above the national average by the end of Year 6 in English, mathematics and science. In Nursery and Reception, progress is good and, by the time children enter Year 1, most of them are exceeding the levels expected for their age. Progress slows in Years 1 and 2 because at times there is insufficient challenge, especially for the more able. Nonetheless, standards at the end of Year 2 are above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Progress in Year 3 is satisfactory. It then accelerates and is good in other year groups because work is more effectively matched to pupils' individual needs. Achievement in mathematics is relatively weaker than in English and science. This results from pupils not having enough opportunities to practise and refine their skills in basic numeracy through problem-solving activities across the curriculum. A satisfactory curriculum is enriched by the wide range of visitors and visits to places of educational interest and residential stays. These make a positive contribution to pupils' personal and social development. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, although, at times, the work set for pupils is not challenging enough, especially for the more able. Pupils show positive attitudes to their learning and clearly enjoy their activities. The school works well with others to promote pupils' well-being. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Effective steps have been taken to bring about improvement since the last inspection, such as making better provision for those pupils who need extra help to support their learning. The school's recent track record indicates there is good capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the rate of progress in Years 1, 2 and 3 by ensuring pupils are more effectively challenged, particularly the more able.
- Boost pupils' numeracy skills by providing more opportunities for them to be involved in problem-solving activities across the curriculum.
- Devise and implement more rigorous systems for evaluating the effectiveness of strategies to improve pupils' achievement. A small proportion of schools whose effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Overall satisfactory achievement helps pupils reach standards above the national average at the end of Years 2 and 6 but progress between classes is inconsistent. Children in the Nursery and Reception classes make good progress and reach levels above those expected nationally because their work is tailored effectively to their individual needs. This is also the case for pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6. In other classes, progress is slower and pupils do not always achieve as well as they could. This is particularly noticeable in the work of more-able pupils. Although standards in mathematics are above average, pupils' performance in this subject is not as strong as in English and science. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make the same progress as other pupils because of the extra support they are given. This is the same for pupils whose first language is other than English.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

There are good relationships between adults and pupils and this makes a positive contribution to their learning. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. As a result, they clearly know right from wrong and have a good understanding of the traditions and beliefs of a range of different cultures. For example, Muslim pupils talk about their customs and are encouraged to show others how they pray. Although most pupils behave well, a few do not always act as sensibly as they could. Pupils say their school is a very friendly one in which everyone usually gets on together and that, if any bullying occurs, staff quickly deal with it. They have a good understanding of the need to live a healthy lifestyle. Pupils know how to stay safe and they move around the school and play together sensibly. They enjoy taking on responsibilities, such as membership of the school council, and make a positive contribution to the local community. Pupils are well prepared for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Adults are very aware of the needs of children in the Nursery and Reception classes. There is a very friendly atmosphere in which children grow in confidence and develop their skills across all areas of learning. Through the rest of the school, most teachers know their subjects well and so are able to explain new ideas and demonstrate new techniques with confidence. Classes are effectively managed and teaching assistants are deployed well so that pupils sustain their concentration and make good progress in their learning. However, inconsistencies between classes lead to some pupils not always achieving as well as they should. This results from a lack of pace in lessons, the overuse of worksheets as a means of recording, and a lack of challenge at times, especially for more-able pupils. The use of marking to show pupils how to improve their performance is also inconsistent between classes. Leadership and management are aware of this and are working to drive up the quality of teaching and learning in all classes.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum for the Nursery and Reception is planned to meet their individual needs and to help them become independent learners. For older pupils, the curriculum is effectively enriched by the good programme of educational visits and of interesting visitors, such as a professional journalist who led a writing workshop for pupils in Year 6. These provide good opportunities to extend pupils' learning. There is an increasing use of themed days, such as Viking and Tudor days, to add further interest to the curriculum. There is a broad range of extra-curricular activities for pupils in Years 5 and 6. However, this is much more limited for younger pupils. There are not enough opportunities for pupils to develop their basic skills in mathematics through problem-solving activities across the curriculum. Links with other organisations, such as Lichfield Rugby Club, further extend pupils' learning opportunities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

All staff are committed to ensuring the health and safety of everyone in the school community. There are robust child-protection procedures, with staff knowing the procedures to follow if they have any concerns about a pupil. Risk assessments are carefully carried out for activities in and around school and for off-site visits. One pupil observed, 'This is a friendly school in which we feel safe'. Staff work closely with outside agencies to ensure that all pupils, especially those with learning difficulties and disabilities, are well cared for. There is also extra support provided for those pupils whose first language is other than English. Satisfactory procedures for monitoring pupils' progress have accurately identified inconsistencies in progress between classes. However, the information gathered is not always used successfully to guide pupils on how they might improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher provides sound leadership and has clear plans for the school's improvement. Members of the recently restructured senior management team all share this vision and ably support her. Senior managers have a clear view of provision throughout the school. As a result, the school's self-evaluation is accurate and has correctly identified the priority areas for improvement. However, the monitoring of strategies put into place to bring about improvement is not rigorous enough. As a result, the school does not have clear information on what is working well or what may need to be revisited. Performance management is effective in linking staff development to whole-school priorities. A few parents commented that communication from school about forthcoming events, and what their children are learning, could be better. Senior managers acknowledge that they need to develop both of these aspects and they are working towards improvement. Governors are very supportive of the school and are keen to develop their role in holding the school to account for its performance.

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Annex A

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?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
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	2
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	2
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?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
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	3
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

17 May 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Michael's Church of England Primary School, Lichfield, Staffordshire WS14 9AW

Thank you so much for welcoming me so warmly when I visited your school. I will remember for a long time your friendly, smiling faces. I enjoyed my time with you and consider your school to be a satisfactory one.

Teaching is satisfactory, you make adequate progress and you reach standards that are above average by the end of Year 6. You are developing well into responsible and caring young people and you say you enjoy coming to school. Most of you behave well, though some of you could behave better at times. Those pupils could help improve the school by behaving well at all times. All the adults in school take good care of you, which pleases your parents. You feel safe in school and, as one of you said, 'It's a friendly school.' You help to make your local community a better place in which to live, for instance, by sharing your Advent Carol Service with members of the local day centre. You told us you enjoy the curriculum, especially the residential visits. The adults who manage the school do a satisfactory job and are helping it to improve.

A special word of thanks to the school council members who gave their time to talk to me. You are a credit to your school.

What we have asked your school to do now.

- Help pupils in Years 1, 2 and 3 learn more quickly by making sure the work given to them is hard enough.
- Give you more opportunities to solve problems to improve your skills in mathematics.
- Check more carefully to see if recent improvements are helping you to achieve better and reach higher standards.

All my best wishes for the future.

Melvyn Hemmings

Lead inspector