

St Michael's Church of England Combined School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110414
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	325146
Inspection dates	25–26 June 2009
Reporting inspector	John Earish

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	200
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Neil Clarke
Headteacher	Mr Kieran Salter
Date of previous school inspection	13 October 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Chapel Square Stewkley Leighton Buzzard LU7 0HA
Telephone number	01525 240248

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This average sized village primary school is located in the Aylesbury Vale about four miles west of Leighton Buzzard. Almost all of the pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and /or disabilities, mostly relating to moderate learning difficulties, is much lower than that found nationally, as is the proportion of pupils who have statements of educational needs. The school has provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage in a Foundation Unit. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is very much lower than average. The school has achieved the Healthy School Award, Eco School and Investor in People Status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school where pupils achieve well. Pupils in all classes are very eager to learn, enjoy coming to school and behave exceptionally well. Parents agree and are overwhelmingly positive in their views of the school. One parent wrote, 'the school is at the heart of the local community' and another added, 'it develops well-rounded, responsible children who respect themselves and each other'.

Good provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage gives children a good start to their education. Most children are working at levels that exceed those for their age groups by the start of Year 1. Standards are well above average overall by the time they leave school at the end of Year 6. Achievement and progress are good. A detailed analysis of the performance data for different groups of pupils and a scrutiny of their work, show they make good progress from their starting points at the school and achieve well. Pupils who have moderate and other learning difficulties and/or disabilities are making good progress against their targets. This is because of the good teaching and support they receive.

Achievement is good because teaching and learning are of good quality. All groups of pupils are achieving well. This is because teachers and teaching assistants provide good quality, targeted support. However, on some occasions, teachers miss opportunities for higher-attaining pupils to explore their own ideas, or do not give them enough time to do so. This means that pupils do not develop independence in their learning or use their initiative as well as they could.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. Their excellent enjoyment of school stems from their extremely positive attitudes, determination to succeed and eagerness to please. They particularly enjoy the practical aspects of the curriculum including their imaginative use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support learning across the curriculum. Many take part in the very good range of activities offered outside lessons. Pupils make an excellent contribution to their school and the wider community.

Care, guidance and support are good and the pastoral aspects are outstanding. Across the school, a high priority is given to pupils' health, safety and welfare. Pupils appreciate this and say they feel safe and able to talk to an adult if they are worried. Academic guidance and support is good overall. There are good systems to track individual pupils' performance so that teachers can quickly identify underachievement and deal with it. However, the systems for tracking different groups of pupils are less well developed, especially across Key Stage 2. Consequently, some of these groups have less guidance on the next steps in their learning.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher, very ably supported by his two highly effective deputy headteachers, is personally committed to building successful partnerships between the school, the home and the community. The promotion of equal opportunities is strong. The most important areas for improvement have been accurately identified and appropriate actions are being taken to tackle the issues. The school's good track record at including all learners and dismantling their barriers to learning means there is a good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The Early Years Foundation Stage provides children with a good start to their education. It is well led and managed, and children are taught consistently well by a team who work together

effectively. The good induction arrangements and very good communication with parents adds much to the children's positive view of learning. There is an excellent emphasis on developing children's personal and social skills and this has a good effect on the way children learn. They are safe and cared for exceptionally well. Pupils enjoy coming to school and happily take part in the wide range of learning activities both inside and outside the classroom.

Children are confident learners. There is a good balance between the activities chosen by the children and those initiated by the adults. They are encouraged to make choices and confidently talk to each other, discuss the activities and explore ideas and interests. For example, children used their reading and writing skills to very good effect when visiting the 'Travel Agent' activity corner. They were able to successfully write down the word 'Wales' for the country to be visited on holiday. As one child pointed out, 'This isn't the same as whales!' Teachers' detailed monitoring of the children's activities enables them to make sure every child has equal access to all the learning experiences. Their accurate assessments show that most children make good progress in all areas of learning. Children are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Sharpen the use of assessment information to develop a clearer picture of the progress made by different groups across the school.
- Ensure that all pupils have sufficient opportunities to learn independently and to use their initiative.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children start in the Foundation Unit with standards that are above those expected for their age. They make good progress and achieve well because teaching and learning are of consistently good quality. Most children start Year 1 with skills and abilities that exceed those expected for their age. Standards are well above average by the end of Year 2 and have been so for a number of years. Standards are also well above average overall by Year 6. The most recent validated national tests show that, compared with mathematics and science, a much higher proportion of pupils exceeded the expected levels in English. The school's accurate tracking data show this is no longer the case and pupils in the current Year 6 are well on track to attain equally high standards in mathematics and science this year.

Progress and achievement are good. A sampling of pupils' work and a detailed analysis of the differential rates of progress made by different groups shows that pupils make good progress and achieve well across all key stages. Progress from Year 2 to Year 6 is good. However, the most rapid progress is made by the older pupils. Those pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, mostly to do with reading and writing, are also making good progress and achieving well. This occurs because they receive good quality help.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are outstanding. Their very positive attitudes to learning and high levels of enjoyment have a significant impact on their progress and are reflected in high rates of attendance. One parent wrote, 'My son has learnt that his voice is important and that he can make things happen. What a fantastic lesson for future life'. Pupils are able to reflect on who

they are as individuals as well as celebrating their own and others' cultures. They talk very knowledgeably about world issues, for example through the links with their partner school in Bosnia. Pupils concentrate exceptionally well and involve themselves fully in their lessons. Their skills at working collaboratively and cooperatively are very well developed, although teachers sometimes fail to make the best use of these skills and qualities during lessons. Pupils are very polite and courteous towards each other and towards adults. They willingly take responsibility for duties that support the smooth running of the school, as well as actively participating in the activities of the school council and Eco Group. Pupils are fully aware of the importance of healthy lifestyles and staying safe. This is reflected in the award of Eco School Status and national recognition as a Healthy School. Pupils rapidly acquire literacy, numeracy and ICT skills that will equip them exceptionally well for later life and learning.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Lessons are generally well planned, and taught by committed staff with good subject knowledge. In the most successful lessons, inspiring teaching promotes pupils' creativity, independence and self-awareness. For example, in an outstanding Year 5 literacy lesson, pupils were able to offer each other constructive criticism about how to improve their writing. They were able to accurately judge its quality against nationally expected levels and knew how to improve. This is excellent preparation for their future learning. However, there are instances when teachers fail to make the best use of the pupil's well-developed abilities to learn confidently and independently on their own. Consequently, there are missed opportunities to develop their self-reliance and independence and progress is not as rapid.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

An exciting range of additional activities enriches the good curriculum. Pupils enjoy these very much as it enhances their experience of school and captures their enthusiasm for learning. These include opportunities for sports, competitions, public speaking, and environmental awareness through the very successful gardening club. Pupils' personal development is promoted exceptionally well through personal, social and health education. Links between the different areas of learning are developing well. Pupils can use their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills in an increasing range of different and meaningful contexts. However, the school recognises that more remains to be done. Recently developed links with a school in Bosnia are successfully promoting pupils' understanding of world issues.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral care is outstanding and the school works well with parents and outside agencies to ensure pupils' well-being and progress. The school provides a very safe, secure environment in which pupils feel happy and well cared for. Procedures for child protection and ensuring pupils' welfare are securely in place, and there are very good systems to provide extra support for those pupils who need it. This was confirmed by older pupils who were adamant that the adults were always there for them if they needed additional help and support. Pupils who have learning difficulties are given good support and guidance in achieving their challenging targets.

Target setting is used well to help pupils understand exactly what they need to do to improve their work. There are good systems to track the performance of individual pupils and teachers use this information well to identify underachievement and deal with it. However, the school does not have a sufficiently clear view of the progress made by different groups of pupils, especially across Key Stage 2. This is because its systems for tracking the progress of groups of pupils do not provide the necessary detail.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and senior leadership team are successfully focusing on accelerating further the rate of progress and sustaining good levels of achievement for all groups of pupils. Senior managers are using challenging targets well to secure these improvements. As a result, the school is an inclusive, tolerant and welcoming community which rightly prides itself on its commitment to develop the whole child through high-quality pastoral care and support. It also seeks to develop the skills of all the adults and has been awarded Investors in People Status. For example, the training and performance management of non-teaching staff is well organised and allows them to play a full and active part in supporting pupils' learning. The new chair of governors is determined that governors will support the headteacher in all that he does to secure further improvements to the school's provision in partnership with the community. Thorough and accurate school review results in detailed plans for the future. A key feature of these developments is to augment subject leaders' skills at managing change within their areas of responsibility in order to sustain very good levels of attainment and to accelerate further achievement.

Community cohesion is of good quality. The school has reached out well to the wider community in very many ways, for example through developing links with a Bosnian school. This has a very positive impact on the children's knowledge and understanding of the world and international relationships.

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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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
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?	2

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

10 July 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Michael's Church of England Combined School, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 0HA

Thank you for being so welcoming and helpful when we came to inspect your school. You go to a good school and receive a good education. Here is a list of some of the many good things about it.

- You work hard at school and make good progress.
- Your behaviour is excellent, and you told us that you really enjoy school and we could see that you do!
- Your curriculum is good and there is a splendid range of out-of-school clubs and activities that you all thoroughly enjoy.
- You are taught well, and when you find work hard you are given the right sort of help.
- You are extremely knowledgeable about healthy eating and lifestyles. I hope you will continue to eat lots of fruit and vegetable and take lots of exercise!
- Your school garden is terrific. We were very impressed to see the rows of potatoes, raspberries, sweetcorn and lettuce. It was so neat and tidy and we found it very difficult to find any weeds. Well done!
- You really enjoy taking on responsibility and representing your classmates on the school council and Eco Group.

All of the adults in your school want it to be even better. To help them to do this we think that there are two things to do next.

- Your teachers are going to find new ways of keeping track of the progress made by different groups of pupils. This will help them find out if they can improve the way you learn.
- We would also like your teachers to give you even more opportunities during lessons to learn independently and explore your own ideas. You said you enjoyed learning this way.

You can all help by continuing to work hard and by listening carefully to your teachers' advice. We are sure that you are ready for this challenge!

Yours faithfully

John Earish

Lead Inspector