

St Michael Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125233
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	315205
Inspection dates	5 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Mr Rob Crompton

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

Type of School	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4 - 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	393
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Clive Taylor
Headteacher	Miss Ursula Beirne
Date of previous school inspection	09 June 2003
School address	Feltham Hill Road Ashford TW15 2DG
Telephone number	01784 253333
Fax number	01784 240834

Age group	4 - 11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the quality of teaching, the impact of the curriculum on pupils' academic achievement and personal development, and the effectiveness of leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation, national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records, curriculum and planning documents, observation of the school at work, interviews with staff and pupils and the parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

St. Michael's is a large primary school serving the local Catholic community. About three quarters of pupils are from White British backgrounds with the remainder from different minority ethnic groups. About 10% of pupils have learning difficulties or disabilities, which is below average. A similar proportion has English as an additional language and 25 pupils are at an early stage of acquiring English.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The school provides an outstanding standard of education and care. It succeeds in its core aim, to 'bring out the best by learning and achieving together in an explicitly Christ centred environment'. Pupils really enjoy coming to school; their behaviour and attitudes to learning are exemplary. They feel safe and well cared for, and many commented on the friendly nature of the school and the excellent relationships they enjoy with one another and their teachers. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. This comment was typical of the many glowing tributes received: 'The pride in the school that the staff and children have is a joy to behold.' The inspection found this view to be fully justified.

Pupils' achievement is outstanding. Children's skills and knowledge as they enter school are a little below what is expected for their age. They make very good progress in the Reception class and many reach above average standards. The youngest children do exceptionally well compared with their national counterparts. Pupils go on to make good and often exceptional progress through the school. By the time they leave, at the end of Year 6, pupils reach above average standards in English, mathematics and science. There are significant strengths in English, where the number of pupils reaching the expected levels is much higher than average, and in science, where a large proportion reaches the higher levels.

Excellent achievement results from a combination of outstanding teaching, care, guidance and support. The great majority of pupils exceed the challenging targets they are set. The tracking and monitoring of pupils' progress are very rigorous and there is rapid and effective intervention when necessary. For example, the monitoring process revealed that more boys than girls were reaching the higher levels in mathematics. This became a focus for every teacher. As a result, although it remains a school priority, there is less of a gender gap. Pupils from minority ethnic groups, including those at an early stage in acquiring English, reach higher standards than those with similar backgrounds in other schools. As a result of first class support, pupils with learning difficulties make good progress towards their individual targets, reaching standards above the national average for such pupils. Parents wrote glowing tributes about the provision for them, including, 'The whole school, teachers and pupils alike, have been more supportive than I could have ever imagined.'

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. They support each other and respect differences. Pupils have an exceptional range of opportunities to take responsibility and contribute to the life of the school. As school councillors, prefects, house captains and members of the 'green team', pupils acquire an excellent understanding of working together to improve their community. Acting as 'guardian angels' for newcomers or 'pastoral care leaders' they develop a genuine concern for others. By the time they leave, pupils are equipped with high-level skills to help them move on successfully in all that they do.

The teaching is outstanding. As one pupil put it, 'Teachers are encouraging and positive, they make learning fun.' Visits to lessons confirmed this. There was a hive of productive activity in every classroom. Aply supported by well-qualified and experienced assistants, teachers plan meticulously and structure lessons very well. They use interactive whiteboards highly effectively to stimulate interest. For example, Year 6 pupils watched a video including dramatic images as they drafted poems about the Irish potato famine. Teachers ensure that pupils are aware of the next steps in their learning, often involving them in self-review. Pupils said they found this very valuable. Teachers provide excellent feedback through marking, using symbols that pupils understand. Pupils complete individual target sheets and often look at one another's work and comment on how well they have met specific criteria.

The curriculum is outstanding and provides a wealth of opportunities for pupils' academic and personal development. It contributes significantly to their excellent cultural and spiritual development. Music is a major strength. All Year 4 pupils learn the violin and many continue this in subsequent years. Pupils talked enthusiastically about the wide range of visits, visitors and clubs, and were keen to explain the new partnership with a school in Tanzania. Pupils practise and extend their computer skills in various contexts. When learning how to write persuasively, for example, Year 5 pupils created brochures extolling the virtues of different countries, using a desktop publishing program.

The school welcomes all children whatever their needs. Parents recognise this and it is a key factor in pupils' highly positive attitudes to school. Child protection and health and safety procedures are well established and any pupils who are at risk are quickly identified and supported extremely well.

The leadership and management of the headteacher and other senior managers are excellent. Parents paid tribute to the pivotal role of the headteacher in creating a 'caring and supportive environment in which children thrive'. Self-evaluation is rigorous. Governors provide first class support and use their very good knowledge of the school to monitor and evaluate its performance. The school has made excellent headway since the last inspection in improving the monitoring of pupils' progress. Managers are not complacent and recognise where further improvement can be made. The evidence is that that they have an excellent capacity to achieve this.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The outstanding provision in the Foundation Stage gets children off to a flying start. The highly effective staff team provides challenging activities that move children's learning on apace. Through close observation, adults track progress meticulously and modify their teaching accordingly. A very good balance between teacher-led sessions and activities initiated by the children provides highly effective support across all areas of learning. As a result, children make very good progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that more able girls are set appropriately challenging targets in mathematics in order to bring their attainment further in line with that of boys of similar ability.

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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?	1
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?	1
The effectiveness in the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is 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
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
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?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interest of learners?	1
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.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

² IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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



Letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection.

13 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Michael Catholic Primary School, Ashford, TW15 2DG

Thank you very much for helping me when I visited your school. It was delightful to meet you and I was very impressed indeed by your excellent behaviour and your friendliness. You told me how much you like St Michael's and I am not surprised. It is an excellent school.

All the adults in school care for you very well and a special feature of your school is the way that you care for each other too. You are growing up into responsible and confident young people. I was impressed by the way you contribute to school life. It was particularly interesting to see how the older pupils act as 'guardian angels' to help new children settle in. Also, I have never been in a school which had a 'pastoral team' of pupils. It is clear that you live up to your school motto to 'learn and achieve together in an explicitly Christ centred environment'.

Your teachers work hard to make lessons interesting and a number of you told me how much you enjoy learning. I saw this when I visited your classrooms. I wanted to be back at school myself! You make really good progress and by the time you reach Year 6 you have learned a lot, reaching standards that are much better than many other schools. Teachers do a great job in helping you spot the next steps in your learning. It was good to see how much you are involved in checking your own work. Older children explained how 'smarpop' helped you remember to think about similes, metaphors, alliteration, rhetorical questions, personification, onomatopoeia, and punctuation when writing. What a great idea! I will certainly pass this on to other children. The school has found that some girls are not doing as well as they might in mathematics and I agree the teachers should continue to help them do as well as they can.

The headteacher leads the school very well indeed and other teachers give her enormous help to make the school even better. Your parents think that this is an extremely good school and they are right. As well as excellent lessons, you have lots of clubs, activities and trips that make your education even more exciting. Enjoy your time at school and continue to work hard.

Yours sincerely,

Rob Crompton
Lead Inspector