

St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Maple Avenue, Braintree, Essex CM7 2NS

Inspection dates

15–16 December 2015

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The school is on a clear upward trajectory, and is continually improving, as a result of the headteacher's exceptional leadership.
- The school's senior leaders form an effective and efficient team. Their strong focus on improving the quality of teaching has raised standards throughout the school.
- The school's culture is firmly rooted in the effective teaching of its core values. This has a direct impact on how well pupils behave and how well they achieve.
- Pupils are very well prepared for life in modern British society. They are taught to value all people and not to make judgements based on what people look like or what they believe.
- Safeguarding is effective and safer recruitment practices are followed closely. The school has robust procedures in place to deal with concerns about individual pupils when they arise.
- Teaching is highly effective throughout the school. Teachers plan well to meet pupils' individual needs based on thorough assessment.
- Pupils achieve very well throughout the school and make good progress. Attainment is above the national average throughout the school.
- The early years classes provide children with an outstanding start to their educational careers. The quality of teaching is outstanding and children make rapid progress during the Reception Year.
- Overall, disadvantaged pupils make good progress and some make outstanding progress. The pupil premium is spent effectively and leaders check closely how well it improves standards.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress from their individual starting points.
- The governing body is effective and efficient. Governors know the school well. The broad range of knowledge and experience that makes up the governing body is highly beneficial to the school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of middle leaders so that they have a greater and more direct impact on school improvement by providing them with:
 - specific training on developing their leadership skills
 - more opportunities to lead and develop initiatives that affect the whole school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- The headteacher provides exceptionally strong leadership. She is passionate about providing the pupils at St Michael's with the very best possible quality of education. It is clear that the headteacher has had a very significant impact on improving both the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils since she has been at the school.
- The headteacher is very well supported by a strong and efficient senior leadership team that works very well together. The deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher have different strengths and these complement the headteacher's strengths well.
- The school's senior leaders check the quality of teaching very thoroughly and effectively. The headteacher is not afraid to tackle weaknesses in teaching or to give hard messages when they are needed. Equally, well-judged support is put in place to help teachers to improve the quality of their teaching or to remedy individual weaknesses.
- The school's senior leaders reflect frequently on how best to continue to improve the quality of teaching and they adjust their approach accordingly. The school is currently trialling a method of monitoring teaching that does not rely on a frequent programme of lesson observations because, the headteacher commented, 'You don't make a pig any fatter by continually weighing it'. Instead, there has been a careful identification of what each teacher wants and needs to improve about their teaching practice and a programme of development is being put in place to cover each area.
- Self-evaluation is robust and accurate. The senior leadership team and the governing body know the school's strengths and weaknesses well. Where there are differences between the school's own judgements and the outcomes of this inspection, they are the result of particularly high expectations and aspirations rather than inaccuracy.
- The school's culture has a direct and substantial effect on how well pupils behave and how well they achieve. The school's values – love, resilience, integrity and creativity – are at the core of everything it does. They are not only taught about these values but, as one pupil commented, 'we actually use them'. For example, pupils use what they know and understand about 'resilience' to help them carry on doing their very best with a piece of work that they are finding difficult.
- The school's values have also helped to create a very welcoming and inclusive ethos at St Michael's. Pupils are taught to value all people and they display strong anti-discriminatory attitudes. Staff at the school are not afraid to discuss difficult subjects with pupils when the need arises. For example, when discussing responsibility for the recent atrocities in Paris with the lead inspector, one pupil commented that their teacher had told the class, 'Don't think that just because someone's a Muslim, they're a terrorist', tackling head-on the prejudice surfacing in the media as a result of these events.
- Leadership of special educational needs and of assessment is very strong. Both leaders check their areas very effectively and both know the pupils very well. The leaders have a comprehensive understanding of their roles and responsibilities and their leadership has led to improved outcomes for pupils.
- The primary physical education (PE) and sport premium is spent very effectively. For example, a specialist teacher works individually with staff to improve the quality of their teaching in this area of the curriculum because the headteacher's belief is that 'outstanding teaching produces outstanding outcomes'. As a result, the quality of teaching in PE is strong. Pupils have danced at the Royal Opera House and the school was named as a finalist in BBC Essex's School of the Year competition in 2014.
- The pupil premium is spent very effectively. The grant provides additional government funding for pupils who are eligible for free school meals and those in the care of the local authority. Funding is used very effectively to support disadvantaged pupils very well and leaders regularly check what a difference it has made.
- The school's curriculum is broad, balanced and continually developing. The strong cross-curricular links between subjects have a clear impact on developing pupils' basic skills. The school offers a very wide range of extra-curricular activities and clubs, both after school and at lunchtimes.
- The school's middle leaders (those responsible for individual subject areas) are committed to the school and passionate about its further development. As very strong practitioners and very capable individuals, they have a positive impact on the school's development. However, not all of them have the leadership skills that they need to have the maximum possible impact on school improvement. They also do not have enough opportunities to become involved in initiatives that affect the school as a whole.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The governing body is efficient and effective. Governors have a thorough and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are able to hold the school's leaders to account effectively.

- The governing body has developed and improved since the last inspection. An audit of the skills and experiences of its members was carried out and the governing body now recruits governors to fill identified gaps when vacancies occur. As a result, the governing body now has a notably strong range of skills, knowledge and experience among its members and these benefit the school. For example, a governor with specific expertise in information technology was recruited following the last inspection to support the improvements needed in this area.
- Governors take their responsibilities for safeguarding pupils very seriously. The Chair of the Governing Body regularly checks the school's single central record to satisfy herself that it meets requirements and is up to date. Governors recently carried out a 'learning walk' with pupils in order to check how safe pupils feel, how well they are taught to keep themselves safe and their perceptions about the safety of the school site.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school's single central record is very thorough and well kept and is monitored regularly by the headteacher. Recruitment practices are thorough and appropriate.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- Relationships between staff and pupils are notably strong and have a direct impact on how well pupils achieve. Teachers create very positive environments for children to work in, where they feel able to take risks in their learning. Pupils understand that getting things wrong is an important part of learning and teachers make it feel safe to make mistakes.
- The school's core values, particularly resilience and creativity, play a full part in pupils' learning. Pupils are taught to persist when things become difficult and to think broadly when considering how to tackle the tasks they are set. Pupils develop excellent attitudes to learning and work well with their peers, as well as learning independently.
- Teachers plan high-quality lessons based on their thorough knowledge of pupils' needs and abilities. Tasks are provided at three levels of difficulty, enabling pupils to challenge themselves appropriately. Ongoing assessment is a key part of every lesson and this enables teachers to ensure that misconceptions and gaps in understanding are identified quickly and remedied. There is parity between the two classes in each year group because teachers work closely together and support each other.
- Teaching is very strong throughout the school and across the curriculum but there are particular strengths in physical education, French and in Year 6. The Year 6 team is particularly successful in identifying the specific learning needs of individual pupils and ensuring that effective measures are put in place to address them.
- Teachers focus very well on helping pupils to know how to improve their work. Teachers and teaching assistants provide effective feedback to pupils during lessons so that they know what is best about their work and what to focus on next.
- Teaching assistants work well with individuals and with groups of pupils. Teachers and teaching assistants work closely and well together and pupils benefit from this effective teamwork.
- Teachers use modelling well to help pupils to learn effectively. For example, during a gymnastics lesson, pupils were able to carry out their warm-up activities well because the teacher demonstrated clearly what she wanted them to do and how she wanted them to do it. Teachers use questioning effectively to check pupils' understanding of what they have been taught and to encourage them to think more deeply.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. The school's very effective focus on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development encourages pupils to develop into well-rounded young people.
- The school's focus on love and integrity teaches pupils not to judge others by their differing belief systems, the colour of their skin or any other physical characteristics. Pupils display strong beliefs about fairness, equality and tolerance towards others, within their own school community and beyond.
- Safeguarding practices are clear and robust. All three members of the senior leadership team have had appropriate training to fulfil the designated senior leader role effectively and, together, they form an effective safeguarding team. Staff and governors undertake safeguarding training regularly. Systems for

dealing with concerns about pupils are well established and practices such as posters in the staff room serve as effective reminders about what to do and who to speak to.

- Pupils feel safe at school. They have been taught about a range of issues to help them to keep themselves safe, including road safety, bike safety and fire safety. Pupils have been taught well about bullying and what to do if they are ever concerned. The headteacher takes pupils' and parents' concerns very seriously and takes appropriate action on the rare occasions that issues arise.
- Pupils come to school regularly and on time and rates of attendance are above average. There are strong systems in place to promote good attendance and tackle issues with pupils' attendance when they arise.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils know the school rules and follow them well. As a result, the school has an extremely orderly and purposeful atmosphere, where learning can and does flourish.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and are confident, friendly and welcoming. They are happy to talk to visitors about their school and the work that they do. Pupils display excellent manners (such as holding doors open, saying 'please' and 'thank you', and standing back to let adults pass) and are a credit to their school.
- Pupils show excellent attitudes to learning. They are keen to talk about their work and are interested in what they are doing. In a meeting with the lead inspector, pupils described how their work in school encouraged them to do more work at home. One pupil commented that he 'would love a chemistry set' because he had been so inspired by the science he had done in school.
- Pupils' behaviour is managed very well. Expectations of how pupils should behave are very high and pupils respond accordingly. Teachers use a range of behaviour management techniques very effectively and are consistent in their approach. Pupils try hard to behave well at all times, not least because they do not want to disappoint the headteacher. One pupil commented about being sent to the headteacher as the ultimate sanction saying, 'she never shouts but you know you're in trouble'.

Outcomes for pupils

are outstanding

- Children make an outstanding start to their education in the Reception Year. They make rapid progress and are well prepared for Year 1.
- Pupils make good progress in phonics (letters and the sounds that they make). Results in the phonics screening check have been above the national average for the past three years. The phonics screening check is a statutory assessment of pupils' phonics knowledge at the end of Year 1.
- Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 1 has been consistently above the national average since the last inspection, notably so for the last two years. Overall attainment has risen year on year since the last inspection.
- Results in the Key Stage 2 national tests have also been above the national average for several years and are rising. The attainment of pupils leaving Year 6 in 2015 demonstrates clearly how well and how quickly the school is improving. Results for this year group were well below the national average, and a cause for concern, at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2011. By the end of Key Stage 2, this group of pupils had not only caught up with the national average but overtaken it.
- In 2015, pupils made well above average progress in reading and mathematics and above average progress in writing. The school's assessment information and the work in pupils' books show that this trend is continuing. Pupils make good progress throughout the school and some make outstanding progress.
- The work in pupils' exercise books shows the good progress that pupils make in a range of subjects. Pupils' work reflects the school's high expectations and standards are high. Pupils take pride in their work and present their work carefully.
- The school's assessment information shows that overall disadvantaged pupils make good progress and some make outstanding progress. It is clear that the longer disadvantaged pupils attend the school, the better progress they make.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress from their individual starting points. The special educational needs coordinator checks pupils' progress closely and effectively and ensures that the right approaches are used to help pupils to make good progress.

Early years provision

is outstanding

- The quality of teaching in the early years is outstanding. Adults support children particularly well and provide an excellent range of challenging activities based on their assessment of children's needs and interests.
- Children learn the school's rules and values very quickly. They show good attitudes to learning from early in their school careers. Children do not flit between activities but, instead, sustain their interest in what they are doing for extended periods of time.
- Children make good progress during the Reception Year. Children enter the school with skills and abilities that are broadly typical of their age. By the end of their time in early years, an above-average proportion achieve a good level of development when compared with the national average.
- Children are taught phonics very effectively and this prepares them well for the increasing academic demands of Year 1. Children draw on their knowledge of phonics very well to read and write. After just one term in Reception, the most-able pupils are writing at a level that is well above expectations for the end of the year.
- Leadership of early years is very strong. The leader knows the strengths and areas for development in the early years well and tackles them effectively. The team of early years staff works particularly well together and provision is continually improving as a result.
- Parents are involved well in their children's education. Staff carry out home visits before children join the school and several parents commented on how much they valued this approach. Parents are kept informed about what their children are doing and appropriate homework enables them to engage with what their children are doing in school well.

School details

Unique reference number	115157
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10003435

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	414
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jennifer Bailey
Headteacher	Mandy Short
Telephone number	01376 344866
Website	www.stmichaelsbraintree.co.uk
Email address	admin@st-michaelscofe.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	10–11 May 2012

Information about this school

- This primary school is much larger than average. There are two classes per year group from Reception to Year 6. Children start full time in the Reception Year in the September after their fourth birthday.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is below the national average.
- A very small minority of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and very few speak English as an additional language.
- The school meets the current floor standards. These are the minimum expectations, set by the government, for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was initially carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 as a short inspection of a school judged to be good at its most recent section 5 inspection. The inspection was converted to a full section 5 inspection when it became apparent that the school might have improved sufficiently to be judged outstanding.
- The inspectors observed parts of 17 lessons throughout the school, some jointly with the headteacher or assistant headteacher. Inspectors looked at the work in pupils' exercise books, listened to them read and talked to them about their work. Inspectors examined the school's documentation on pupils' outcomes and on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- The views of parents were taken into account, including 101 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and information gained from conversations with parents on the playground. The inspectors also listened to the views of staff, including 33 responses to a questionnaire.
- Meetings were held with pupils, staff, governors and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors looked at a range of school documents, including information about safeguarding, the school's self-evaluation summary, plans for future development, attendance and behaviour records.

Inspection team

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Richard Griffiths	Ofsted Inspector
Debbie Rogan	Ofsted Inspector
Olive Millington	Ofsted Inspector

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