

St Michael's CofE (C) First School

Weavers Lane, Off Lichfield Road, Stone, ST15 8QB

Inspection dates 11–12 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Children get off to a good start in the Nursery and Reception classes.
- Achievement in reading, writing and mathematics is good throughout the school.
- Teaching is good. The quality of teamwork between teachers and adults who support pupils is exceptionally good.
- The help given to disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is of high quality.
- Pupils behave well, have very positive attitudes towards learning and are immensely proud of their school.
- The school provides many good-quality opportunities for pupils to develop into mature individuals.
- Music is a very important part of school life. It makes a major contribution to pupils' excellent spiritual and cultural development.
- Leadership and management, including governance, are good. The headteacher is regarded highly by staff, parents and pupils.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher are the major driving forces behind improvement in the quality of teaching and the increase in the proportion of pupils reaching higher levels.
- Links with parents and carers are particularly strong. Parents feel involved in their children's learning.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Boys do not achieve as well as girls in writing. They do not always find it easy to write for a sustained period of time.
- Not enough teaching is outstanding. Some teachers take too long explaining work at the beginning of lessons and do not move more-able pupils on to hard work quickly enough.
- Teachers do not always give pupils enough information on how to improve when they mark work, especially in mathematics. Not all pupils are sure what they have to do to reach their targets.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 19 lessons, three of which were observed jointly with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with pupils, representatives of the governing body and local authority, and staff, including senior and subject leaders.
- Inspectors took account of the 72 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and they spoke with parents and carers informally. They also took account of several letters received during the inspection.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school. They looked at a range of documentation, including information about pupils' progress, and how the school sets targets for teachers to improve their work. They also looked at child protection and safeguarding procedures.

Inspection team

Kath Campbell, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Elaine Stevens

Additional Inspector

Sally Noble

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Michael's is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are White British.
- Very few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- A below-average proportion of pupils are supported by pupil premium, which provides additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals.
- An average proportion of pupils are supported at school action, and a below-average proportion are supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- Care for pupils before and after school is provided by Smart Kids. It is not overseen by the governing body and did not form part of the inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise boys' attainment in writing by:
 - finding more ways of increasing boys' enthusiasm for writing
 - providing varied and motivating opportunities for all pupils, but particularly boys, to write at length and for practical and relevant purposes.
- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching by making sure that teachers:
 - have the opportunity to share and learn from the good practice that exists within the school
 - do not talk for too long so that pupils have more time to practise skills
 - move more-able pupils on to hard work earlier in lessons
 - provide pupils with information about how well they are doing against their individual targets, when they mark work, particularly in mathematics.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children start in the Nursery with skills below those expected for their age. They achieve well, and attainment is broadly average by the time children move into Year 1.
- Pupils continue to make good progress throughout the rest of the school. Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 4 is above average. It has risen in the current year because more pupils have reached higher levels.
- In 2012, pupils did not do as well as they should in reading in the Key Stage 1 assessments. Pupils in Year 1 were also below the nationally expected standards in the Year 1 screening check for phonics (letters and the sounds they make). Reading swiftly became a priority for development. Teachers raised the profile of reading, and initiatives, such as using group reading sessions more effectively to teach reading skills and introducing one-to-one help for targeted pupils, have proved very successful. Pupils were encouraged to read more widely at home and at school. As a result, attainment in reading has risen. Achievement in phonics is now above the expected standards because this aspect of reading is better taught. Pupils of all ages have a great enjoyment of reading. Older pupils talk very knowledgeably about books. They have a wide range of favourite authors ranging from Jacqueline Wilson to J K Rowling.
- Attainment in mathematics in Key Stage 1 has remained broadly average in recent years. The school has focused its attention on raising attainment by developing pupils' calculation skills. In addition, the introduction of problem-solving books has also given this aspect of the mathematics curriculum greater importance and allowed pupils more opportunities to apply their skills to real-life situations. As a result, attainment in Key Stage 1 has risen, chiefly because more pupils reach average levels and above. By the time pupils leave many have a mature approach towards mathematics and develop a wide range of strategies for working out answers.
- The school is very successful at narrowing the gap in attainment between the least able pupils and the rest. Staff are particularly skilled at providing well for pupils with dyslexia. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs achieve well because the work they are given matches their needs and support is well targeted. Some individual pupils make outstanding progress through high-quality support.
- The school has used its pupil premium funding effectively, particularly to support individual pupils with improving their reading skills. In 2012, pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding were the equivalent of one term behind their classmates in English and mathematics. The gap was not as wide as that seen nationally. The school has employed additional support staff and this has helped eligible pupils to narrow the gap again this year.
- Girls' achievement in writing is better than that of boys. Although the gap is closing, boys' progress in writing lags behind that of girls and their attainment is average rather than above average by the time they leave. The literacy coordinator works effectively with teachers to raise expectations of what pupils, particularly boys, can achieve. However, there is still some way to go to motivate boys and to eradicate boys' greater reluctance to write at length.

The quality of teaching is good

- Good teaching is at the heart of this school's success. Parents are very appreciative of the quality of teaching their children receive. Nearly all the teaching observed during the inspection

was of good quality.

- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children do well because learning is fun. Activities are well organised, and staff create a very positive environment for learning.
- Teachers make sure that classrooms are lively and exciting places where pupils want to do well. Displays of work are bright and contain interesting bits of information to help pupils learn.
- Where teaching is most effective, teachers and other adults move pupils' learning along at a rapid pace and pupils are highly motivated to succeed. In a Year 4 lesson on subtraction, the pace was crisp, expectations were high and pupils were totally engrossed in their work. Every adult skilfully helped pupils to sort out any misunderstanding in their work and this input made a very strong contribution to the success of the lesson.
- Highly skilled adults who support teachers in the classroom make sure that disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs succeed because these pupils respond positively to the additional help. In group activities, some of these pupils make exceptional progress.
- Although most teachers have high expectations, some teachers spend too long explaining to the whole class before pupils move into groups. This slows progress because some pupils waste time going over work they already understand. As a result, there are occasions when pupils who find work easy do not spend enough time on more demanding work.
- The quality of marking, although much improved, is not yet consistently high. Most work is carefully marked, although the quality of marking in English is better than in mathematics. Some teachers do not let pupils know what they need to do to reach the next level because marking often focuses solely on how well pupils have done in that particular piece of work.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Nearly all pupils behave well. Pupils are positive about their work and show great pride in their school. Most develop into mature, confident individuals by the time they leave the school.
- Children in the Nursery and Reception classes gain good social skills because all staff develop this aspect of children's learning right from the start.
- There is a warmth and friendliness about this school. Pupils know they are part of a caring community. There is a strong feeling of mutual respect between adults and pupils.
- Assemblies show the school at its best. These are special occasions where there is a deep sense of community. The singing of the school hymn is a particularly moving experience, and assemblies make a strong contribution to pupils' excellent spiritual development.
- Several parents and carers wrote letters or came to speak to inspectors during the inspection to express appreciation for the care their children receive. Most think very highly of the school.
- In discussion, pupils say that incidents of bullying are rare, and that they are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Pupils show a good understanding of how to stay safe, including when using computers and the internet.
- The school keeps a very careful check on pupils' attendance and works successfully with the

families of a small minority of pupils to keep attendance high.

- Occasionally, when teachers talk for too long at the beginning of lessons, some pupils sit passively and do not listen or involve themselves enough. Boys, in particular, are sometimes slow to start their written work.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher provides strong leadership. One parent expressed the views of many stating that that this was 'a model headteacher who had a total understanding of her school'.
- The headteacher and highly supportive deputy headteacher complement each other's skills well. They have successfully moved the school forward at a good pace and have maintained the good quality of education found at the time of the previous inspection. The actions they have taken in the current academic year to increase the proportion of pupils reaching higher levels have proved very effective. The introduction of ability groupings for mathematics, the increase in the number of adults employed to support teachers in the classroom, combined with earlier identification of pupils in danger of falling behind have all contributed to the improvement.
- Senior leaders have an honest, accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. All staff are committed towards seeking improvement. There is a high level of teamwork and this contributes greatly to the school's success. Staff say they are well supported in their roles by the headteacher and deputy headteacher. Other senior staff support colleagues, work alongside them and monitor their work in order to help them improve.
- Systems for assessing whether pupils are doing well enough have improved and are now of high quality. Teachers are far more accountable for the standards achieved than in the past.
- The checks carried out by senior leaders on the quality of teaching and learning are wide-ranging and detailed. The headteacher uses these checks well to set targets designed to improve the performance of all staff. They have contributed to, for example, more consistently good teaching across the school since the previous inspection.
- Pupils' work celebrates the rich and diverse range of subjects and topics taught. The school holds many awards, ranging from being a Diocesan Beacon School to holding the Arts Mark Gold Award. Great emphasis is placed on pupils' personal development. Pupils receive many enjoyable learning experiences and adults use the outdoor areas extensively to promote good learning. There are many opportunities for pupils to practise their literacy and numeracy skills in different subjects.
- Music is particularly strong in this school. Teachers regularly use music to create the right climate for learning in their classrooms, and pupils have many opportunities to participate in concerts in school, in the local community and beyond. The school holds the Midlands Sing Up Honorary Platinum award in recognition of the high quality of its musical skills. Regular visits and visitors, such as a visit by a group of singers during the inspection, greatly enhance pupils' enjoyment.
- Strong links with parents and with partner institutions are a very important part of the school's work. Parents say they are well informed about how well their children are doing and there are many examples of meetings and evening events, such as the recent Year 4 performance, for parents to attend.

- Staff value pupils as individuals and make sure that any barriers to learning are removed so that every pupil has an equal opportunity to succeed.
- The local authority School Evaluation Partner knows the school well and reviews its work at regular intervals. She provides additional training opportunities when requested, such as the recent help in the development of the Early Years Foundation Stage and mathematics.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body is well organised and highly supportive of the school. Governors have a clear idea about what is working well and what needs to be improved. They make sure that the school meets safeguarding and other statutory requirements. They keep up-to-date with, for example, safeguarding training. They keep a close eye on how effectively the school uses its pupil premium funding so that they can challenge senior leaders when necessary. They support the headteacher in making sure that teachers are not rewarded unless pupils make good progress. There is evidence of good-quality data analysis and monitoring reports by individual governors and there is a commitment to extend this level of involvement further across the governing body.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	124275
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	412664

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	389
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Harry Brunt
Headteacher	Rachel Mary Gale
Date of previous school inspection	25 February 2010
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