

Inspection of St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Maple Avenue, Braintree, Essex CM7 2NS

Inspection dates: 6 and 7 December 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Outstanding

What is it like to attend this school?

St Michael's school is calm and welcoming. Pupils enjoy school and are keen to learn. Adults are friendly and caring. They respond to pupils' academic needs, supporting them well in the classroom.

Pupils do not learn as well as they should. This is because leaders have not created a well-planned curriculum. For instance, while pupils enjoy a range of activities, such as 'trench day', 'Italian food afternoon' and World Book Day, they cannot always remember what they learned in each subject.

Pupils enjoy the leadership opportunities that they can apply for, including eco-warriors, house captains, play leaders and school council members. These roles help them to develop an understanding of contributing to the school community.

In the classroom, pupils behave well and want to learn. They have a positive attitude to school. They know the expectations for behaving in the school building and in lessons. Pupils answer questions and share ideas with their peers. Some pupils do not behave as well as they could in the playground. Most pupils say that they feel safe in school and trust adults to sort out issues. Some pupils, however, say that when bullying does happen, staff do not always deal with it effectively.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders are ambitious for what they want pupils to achieve. They make decisions they hope will inspire pupils. However, their vision is not always realised.

In some subjects, such as mathematics, leaders have identified what they want pupils to learn each year. In these subjects, leaders have set out clear expectations for the knowledge and skills that pupils will learn, beginning in the early years. Where leaders' curriculum thinking is stronger, pupils' learning builds on previous knowledge so that pupils remember more over time. This is not the case for all subjects. In too many subjects, leaders have not considered precisely what they want pupils to learn, and when. It is not clear how pupils will develop their individual subject knowledge, understanding and vocabulary over time. As a result, pupils do not achieve as well as they could across the curriculum.

Leaders have not set out clear expectations for checking pupils' understanding. This means that assessments are not informing leaders about what pupils can do and where they are not secure in applying knowledge. Teachers are not using checks on pupils' learning effectively to adapt their teaching. This means that teaching and how well pupils learn are too patchy.

Leaders have a focus on developing reading across the school, but the reading curriculum remains less effectively planned. Pupils in some year groups do not enjoy reading. Some staff have received effective phonics training while others have not. Pupils have books that match the sounds they know but leaders are not checking if

pupils can decode these sounds fluently. Pupils who find reading tricky are not always given the right support to catch up. As a result, some pupils struggle to read confidently and fluently, and struggle to access other parts of the curriculum. Adults teach reading more effectively in the early years. Children learn the sounds set out by leaders. Staff make regular checks in lessons to ensure that children have learned the sounds. Staff provide opportunities for children to practise and revisit sounds during their time in Reception. The reading curriculum for the youngest children is better organised than in the rest of the school.

Leaders have clear procedures in place to identify the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders ensure that all pupils access the same curriculum. While leaders provide the right information about pupils' needs, they are not making regular checks on how well pupils with SEND are supported to access the curriculum. In contrast, children with SEND in the early years are very well supported to access the curriculum.

Leaders have high expectations for pupils' behaviour, but they do not have robust systems in place to track and record behaviour concerns. This leads to pupils' behaviour not being dealt with effectively. Leaders have not set out consistent approaches to deal with behaviour issues, including bullying. Leaders do not always communicate effectively with parents when behaviour incidents happen. Some groups of pupils are not in school regularly, and leaders are not supporting some pupils and families effectively to improve attendance.

Leaders have set out a well-sequenced personal, social and health education curriculum that starts in the early years. Pupils learn about relationships and other aspects of character development. This builds on what pupils already know. Leaders have thought about the emotional support that some pupils need. They attend a young carers group, nurture group and/or mentoring to help them care for their own well-being.

Leaders, including governors, are not making regular checks on how well the curriculum is being taught. This leads to staff not knowing what they need to teach and expectations not being clear.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders provide regular training for staff. Staff keep up to date with national issues. Consequently, staff are clear on the school's safeguarding procedures, and report concerns in a timely manner. Leaders follow up concerns quickly. They work closely with outside agencies to secure support for pupils and their families. Leaders' actions ensure that pupils are kept safe. All staff have the view that 'it could happen here'.

Leaders make the necessary checks on adults working in the school, to keep pupils safe.

Pupils know whom to report concerns to if they are worried.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, including reading, leaders have not identified precisely what pupils need to learn to build effectively on what they already know and can do. Staff have not always had the training and guidance to teach subjects effectively. Pupils do not effectively develop the knowledge and skills needed for future learning. Leaders must ensure that, in all subjects, curriculum plans precisely identify the knowledge that pupils should learn and order this so that pupils build on their learning from early years upwards. Leaders should ensure that all staff have the training needed to implement curriculum plans effectively.
- In many subjects, staff are not checking what pupils have learned and can remember effectively. Pupils have gaps in their knowledge that staff are unaware of. Leaders should ensure that teachers use assessment to check what pupils have learned and use this information to adapt their planning so that all pupils access the curriculum successfully and are secure in their understanding.
- Leaders do not use available information about behaviour, attendance and bullying effectively. There are some pupils who do not attend school as regularly as they should. Leaders do not spot patterns and trends or employ strategies to improve pupils' behaviour and attendance consistently well. Leaders should ensure they use available information to identify and evaluate strategies to improve further the behaviour and attendance of some pupils.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	115157
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10240547
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	414
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Jennifer Bailey
Headteacher	Andrew Cumpstey
Website	www.stmichaelsbraintree.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	17 and 18 November 2021, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, one new assistant headteacher has been appointed.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- This is a Church of England primary school. The school's most recent section 48 inspection took place in July 2017. The school's next section 48 inspection will be within eight school years.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the second routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors met with the headteacher, the assistant headteachers, subject leaders and the special educational needs coordinators.

- The lead inspector met with three governors, including the chair of the governing body.
- The lead inspector met with the local authority school effectiveness partner and the diocesan representative.
- Inspectors spoke to staff to discuss workload, well-being and safeguarding.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics, science, history and physical education. For each deep dive, the inspectors discussed the curriculum with the subject leader, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The inspectors also looked at other curriculum plans, including art, French and geography.
- The inspectors spoke with pupils about their learning, safety and behaviour.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.
- The lead inspector took account of the 88 responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the 88 free-text comments.
- The lead inspector took account of the 14 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.
- The lead inspector took account of the 112 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.

Inspection team

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His Majesty's Inspector

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