

St Michael's Primary School

Address: Station Road, Withyham, Hartfield, East Sussex, TN7 4BP

Unique reference number (URN): 114423

Inspection report: 10 March 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Pupils' national test results are broadly in line with national figures, though outcomes do fluctuate due to very small cohorts. Performance improved in the 2025 end of key stage 2 tests, and results in the Year 1 phonics check and Year 4 multiplication tables check remain in line with national averages over time.

Leaders have introduced a new handwriting scheme, which is improving the consistency and quality of younger pupils' writing. Handwriting among older pupils is less consistent because they have had proportionately less time using the scheme.

Thoughtful classroom support, including for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, helps all groups of pupils to progress well through the curriculum. Leaders have an accurate understanding of pupils' achievement and provide timely help so that gaps in knowledge are addressed. Pupils talk confidently about their learning, using subject vocabulary well. For example, in Years 5 and 6 science lessons, pupils confidently explain the difference between transparent and translucent.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

The previous inspection identified that the school's curriculum needed further development. Leaders have worked hard to design and implement a broad and exciting curriculum from the early years onwards. This includes careful consideration of how pupils in mixed-age classes can build knowledge across a range of subjects. Teachers now benefit from clear guidance about what to teach and when. Teachers use subjects' clearly defined end points to assess how well pupils progress. Leaders have systems to check curriculum quality, but some subjects are monitored more effectively than others.

Generally, teachers have secure subject knowledge. This enables them to check pupils' understanding during lessons and to support pupils to keep up with the curriculum. Pupils have many opportunities to revisit prior learning. The school prioritises the core skills of reading, writing and mathematics. In the wider curriculum, leaders use engaging resources to bring learning to life. For example, in history, pupils handle artefacts and consider what these tell them about life in the past.

In lessons, teachers adapt their teaching well for vulnerable pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, all pupils access learning well. However, at times, pupils do not receive timely feedback about mistakes in their work, such as spelling or incorrect letter formation, which means that these errors persist.

Early years

Expected standard 

Children get off to a great start in the Reception year. Warm and attentive interactions with staff, along with a carefully set-up learning environment, help children to learn with confidence. Staff know each child extremely well. This helps them to respond quickly to their

needs. Staff celebrate children's successes. As a result, children are happy and increasingly independent.

Staff create positive learning environments indoors and outdoors that sustain children's motivation across all areas of learning. There is a clear emphasis on developing language and vocabulary, with opportunities for oracy woven through daily provision. Children's core skills develop well. Reading is prioritised and staff are trained to teach phonics and early reading effectively. The new handwriting scheme is helping children develop secure writing skills from the start. Children receive targeted support, for example through collaborative writing activities that extend their vocabulary. They use their phonics knowledge confidently, including when reading tricky words such as 'asteroid'.

Children learn to make healthy choices and manage risks. Carefully chosen resources provide wide opportunities across the curriculum. Established procedures ensure children move smoothly into Year 1. Parents and carers frequently comment that their children settle quickly and happily when they begin in the early years.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders have responded appropriately to the increase in the number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders have strengthened staff training so that classroom provision and resources are carefully adapted to meet pupils' needs.

Staff know pupils well, which enables them to identify learning and wellbeing needs swiftly. Leaders provide thoughtful support to help pupils manage their emotions so they can take part successfully in school life, including at busy times of the day. Leaders select and deliver targeted support that addresses identified and emerging needs for pupils with SEND and other vulnerable pupils. They review the impact of this support and adjust it when required. For example, moving some targeted support to the start of the day has improved some pupils' attendance and readiness for learning.

Leaders and staff work closely with families and external professionals to shape support plans, ensuring that pupils' views about their needs and aspirations are included. Parents and carers are typically very positive about the help their children receive. A very small number of pupils are eligible for pupil premium funding. Leaders use this funding appropriately to enhance these pupils' experiences.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders have worked effectively to address the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. They use the findings from ongoing monitoring to identify priorities and take informed action. Given the school's small size, leaders understand the importance of working with external partners. They engage well with the local authority and nearby schools. Professional learning for staff is aligned with the school's priorities.

Governors provide robust oversight and know the school well. They draw on a range of evidence to triangulate leaders' accounts of the quality of provision. They demonstrate a secure understanding of their statutory duties, including those linked to equality. Governors provide appropriate support and challenge to leaders. They keep a clear focus on the

experiences and outcomes of vulnerable pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Governors understand that a rising proportion of pupils with high levels of need has implications for staff training and the use of resources. Governors have ensured that leaders manage these pressures effectively.

Leaders make effective use of local partnerships, for example to moderate pupils work and share practice. When introducing new initiatives, leaders consider staff workload and wellbeing carefully, which staff appreciate. Staff typically say that changes in recent years have been managed well. Parents and carers value the clear community spirit of the school. They feel involved in their children's experiences and learning.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Pupils' personal development and wellbeing is shaped by a well structured personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum. This is enhanced by many additional experiences that help pupils develop their interests. All pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, can take part so that no one misses out.

Leaders recognise the importance of promoting diversity through the curriculum and wider provision. Across the curriculum, pupils access a selection of diverse books that celebrate difference and broaden their understanding beyond the local area. Pupils find out about people around the world who live in different ways and understand that it is important to treat everyone equally.

The daily assembly programme plays an important role in promoting pupils' cultural and spiritual development. Pupils recall recent assemblies that deepened their appreciation of music and standing up for what is right, such as those about important role models in history. They also value the reflective time provided during assemblies, saying it helps them to think about what they have learned. Pupils know that it is important to treat everyone with kindness and respect.

The PSHE curriculum also enables leaders to respond to emerging risks such as mobile phone use and reinforce online safety. Pupils explain how they keep themselves safe, for example by using passwords and protecting their privacy. They say they are happy at school because adults help them. For those who require it, staff provide high-quality pastoral support. Playtimes promote cooperation and enjoyment. As well as working well with each other, pupils also collaborate with wider stakeholders, such as the parent teacher association, to raise funds for the school and when taking part in national initiatives including the National Garden Scheme.

Needs attention

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention 

In recent years, pupils' attendance has consistently been lower than the national average. This contrasts with the very high attendance typically seen before the Covid-19 pandemic. Leaders prioritise attendance and have strengthened their approach to tackling concerns.

For example, they have carefully considered how they communicate with parents and carers and increased their work with the local authority. Leaders understand the barriers faced by some pupils and their families. Their targeted work has improved attendance for some pupils, although the full impact of this work is not yet realised.

Pupils are positive about behaviour in the school. They treat one another with kindness. Warm relationships between staff, pupils and their families help to create a calm environment. Pupils say they can usually sort out disagreements but know an adult is always nearby to help.

In lessons, most pupils concentrate well. Classrooms are productive and settled. Staff prioritise pupils' care and wellbeing, so pupils feel well known and confident that adults will address any issues promptly. Leaders deal with the small number of serious incidents appropriately. Pupils know that discrimination is not tolerated. They learn to manage their feelings and receive timely support when needed, which helps them manage their behaviour well.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Pupils love the small size of their school and build positive relationships across year groups. For example, children in the Reception year often choose to sit with older friends during calm and happy lunchtimes in the dining hall. Pupils feel their school is a special place. They appreciate features such as the field beyond the playground, where they take part in sports day. The well-used school boot rack shows how often pupils pull on their boots to explore and play.

Across the school, including in the early years, pupils benefit from the improvements leaders have made to the wider curriculum. Older pupils can explain the approaches that help them learn well. They describe contributing to subject floor books and adding key knowledge to their 'memory jars'. Staff understand pupils' needs well and this enables all groups to make secure progress through the curriculum.

Pupils understand and live the school values of collaboration, challenge and community. With the current focus on challenge, older pupils talk confidently about pushing themselves in their learning. Pupils feel listened to. Their class councils give them real influence, including securing the new art hut in the playground. They also value chances to contribute to the wider community, such as performing in the local church and taking part in the annual Maypole dance. Special events, including the residential visit for older pupils, help them develop independence and a sense of belonging.

Pupils feel safe and well cared for. They say staff listen and support them when needed. They appreciate the varied offer of clubs, with popular options including football, drama and Makaton. Bullying and serious behavioural issues are rare and pupils trust staff to act if concerns arise. Leaders know attendance has been lower than national figures in recent years and are taking appropriate action to address this.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue to prioritise pupils' attendance and strengthen their strategies, including thorough analysis of patterns and trends, to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence.
 - Leaders should ensure that handwriting is taught consistently well across all year groups and that staff provide pupils with feedback that helps them correct errors in their work, including spelling and letter formation, so that mistakes do not persist.
 - Leaders should strengthen their approach to monitoring the curriculum so that all subject curriculums are checked with equal rigour and leaders have an astute understanding of the quality of provision across all subjects.
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About this inspection

The co-chairs of the governing body in this school are Lisa Gibbs Murray and Lisa Fitzsimmons.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, other school leaders and members of the governing body. Inspectors also spoke to representatives of the local authority and spoke with pupils, parents and carers and staff.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school does not use any alternative provision.

Headteacher: Catherine O'Shea

Lead inspector:

Katie Hancock, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Kirstie Fulthorpe, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.



This data is from 10 March 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

73

Well below average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 272

School capacity

105

Well below average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 300

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

4.11%

Well below average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 26.3%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

8.22%

Well above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.5%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

16.44%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 15%

Location deprivation

Below average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standards in a combined reading, writing and mathematics measure.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	48%	61%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	71%	62%	Above
2023/24 (final)	44%	61%	Below
2022/23 (final)	33%	60%	Below

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	88%	74%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	71%	75%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	100%	74%	Above
2022/23 (final)	89%	73%	Above

Pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	76%	72%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	71%	72%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	78%	72%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	78%	71%	Close to average

Pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	52%	73%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	71%	74%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	56%	73%	Below
2022/23 (final)	33%	73%	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		46%	
2024/25		47%	
2023/24		46%	
2022/23 (final)	S	44%	S

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		62%	

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25		63%	
2023/24		62%	
2022/23 (final)	S	60%	S

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		59%	
2024/25		59%	
2023/24		58%	
2022/23 (final)	S	58%	S

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average		60%	
2024/25		61%	
2023/24		59%	
2022/23 (final)	S	59%	S

‘S’ in the table above indicates the data has been suppressed, which is usually due to small cohorts. The suppression rules applied by the DfE when publishing the data have been mirrored and applied in the report card.

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics, including the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average		68%	
2024/25		69%	
2023/24		67%	
2022/23 (final)	S	66%	S

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average		80%	
2024/25		81%	
2023/24		80%	
2022/23 (final)	S	78%	S

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average		78%	
2024/25		78%	
2023/24		78%	
2022/23 (final)	S	77%	S

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average		80%	
2024/25		81%	
2023/24		79%	
2022/23 (final)	S	79%	S

‘S’ in the table above indicates the data has been suppressed, which is usually due to small cohorts. The suppression rules applied by the DfE when publishing the data have been mirrored and applied in the report card.

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	6.5%	5.2%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	6.3%	5.5%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	7.3%	5.9%	Above

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	21.7%	13.3%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	14.3%	14.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	19.2%	16.2%	Close to average

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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