

Inspection of St Michael's Church of England Primary School

Houghton Green Lane, Playden, Playden Rye, East Sussex TN31 7PJ

Inspection dates:	23 and 24 April 2025
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy learning at this warm and friendly school. They feel happy and safe. Pupils have trusted adults they know will address any concerns they have. One pupil, reflecting the views of many, said, 'The best thing about the school is that we look after each other.' This is evident in the polite and courteous behaviour of pupils. Teachers apply the newly established expectations consistently well. As a result, the school is calm and purposeful.

Staff have high expectations for pupil achievement. However, the school's work to address gaps in knowledge is not fully embedded. This means that pupils do not recall the important skills and knowledge they require consistently well. Work in books shows that too many older pupils are not well enough prepared for their next steps.

The school ensures that pupils have well-designed opportunities to develop a range of skills. All pupils benefit from these experiences. They hold a range of leadership roles, including acting as librarians, house captain or school councillors. These help pupils to develop their interpersonal skills effectively. Pupils also enjoy the range of well-attended clubs the school offers, including drama or construction. They share these new talents happily through activities such as well-attended school performances.

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

The school has been through significant change since the previous inspection. This includes several leadership changes and an overhaul of school systems. The school has worked with the new governing body to effect swift improvement in many areas.

Governors are ambitious for pupils. They offer high levels of challenge and support. However, some of the school's work is in its earliest stages and has not had sufficient time to embed. For example, several subject leaders are newly established. As a result, some do not have sufficient understanding of the new curriculum to address inconsistencies in its implementation.

Staff are positive about working at the school. They feel the training they receive allows them to support pupils effectively. However, a small number of staff feel that the rate of change has impacted their workload. Leaders at all levels are sensitive to this and prioritise staff well-being.

The school has worked at pace to design an ambitious new curriculum that meets the needs of all. However, pupils have historic gaps in their prior learning that have not been addressed. This means they cannot always build on prior learning and deepen their understanding. As a result, some pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

Reading is a strength of the school. This begins in early years, where children discuss the stories they learn excitedly. Older pupils enjoy the range of texts they study. They read widely. Staff deliver phonics accurately. They identify those pupils who fall behind precisely and plan appropriate support to help them catch up. The majority of pupils

become fluent readers quickly. The books pupils read are well matched to their phonics knowledge. This means they can practise reading effectively.

Staff in early years explain learning clearly and model communication accurately. This helps children to develop the skills and knowledge they need. Children in early years are well prepared for Year 1. They learn important skills of communication that allow them to express their ideas and can apply them accurately.

Teachers have secure subject knowledge. However, some of the checks teachers make on pupils' understanding lack precision. They do not always identify gaps in pupils' knowledge accurately. Consequently, teachers cannot design activities to fill these gaps. Occasionally, the tasks that teachers select are not designed carefully enough. They do not always take into account gaps in pupils' knowledge. This means that pupils do not always have the prior knowledge to complete their work accurately.

The school knows its pupils well. This helps them to identify the needs of pupils quickly, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This information helps teachers to select activities that allow pupils to access the curriculum. As a result, pupils with SEND learn the ambitious new curriculum alongside their peers.

Pupils behave well. They have positive attitudes to learning and play together happily at breaktimes. Pupils' attendance is close to national averages and is improving. The school identifies pupils who need additional support swiftly. Staff work with families and external agencies to help pupils to improve their attendance over time.

The school prioritises pupils' personal development. Pupils enjoy a range of experiences that broaden the curriculum. These include trips to local museums or theatres. Pupils also enjoy meeting authors or enriching their learning through drama activities. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. They are caring and tolerant of all.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The use of assessment to evaluate the curriculum and adapt teaching to pupils' needs is not always effective. Consequently, some pupils do not know how to improve their knowledge and skills in some subjects clearly enough and gaps in knowledge are not identified swiftly. The school should ensure that they develop the expertise of staff to be able to identify and address gaps in pupils' knowledge effectively.
- Some of the activities given to pupils are not selected carefully enough. They do not take into account the gaps in knowledge and skills that pupils have. As a result, some pupils do not build on prior learning or learn curriculum content as well as they could.

The school needs to ensure that teachers design activities that allow pupils to deepen the important skills and knowledge they need.

- Leadership in some subjects is newly established, and some leaders do not have a clear enough understanding of the ambitious new curriculum. As a result, there are inconsistencies in the delivery of the curriculum that limit pupils' ability to learn important skills and knowledge. The school should ensure leaders receive support to provide staff with the necessary guidance to teach the curriculum, confidently and effectively.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked-after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	114520
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10379752
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	85
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Rose Durban
Headteacher	Lison Smart and Simon Thurston (co-executive headteachers) Fay Churchill (head of school)
Website	www.playdenschool.com
Date of previous inspection	26 November 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.
- The school's headteacher and senior leadership team have changed since the previous inspection.
- The school manages a breakfast club for pupils.
- St Michael's Church of England Primary School is a Church of England voluntary-aided school. The school's most recent section 48 Statutory inspection of Anglican and Methodists schools took place in December 2024. The school's next section 48 inspection will take place within eight years.
- The school is part of the Genesis Federation. The federation has a single governing body and is made up of Beckley, Peasmarsh and St Michael's Schools. The school joined the federation in December 2024.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth-form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of the school's education provision.
- This is the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The lead inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in this evaluation of the school.
- The inspection team met with the headteacher as well as with other leaders and staff. The lead inspector also held a conversation with representatives from the local authority and diocese.
- The inspection team carried out deep dives in the following subjects: reading, mathematics, history and science. For each deep dive, the inspector held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- The lead inspector considered the views of parents and carers through their responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View. The inspectors spoke to staff and pupils during the inspection and took account of staff responses to Ofsted's online staff survey.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.

Inspection team

Gavin Thomas, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sara Wakefield

Ofsted Inspector

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