

Inspection of St Michael’s Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, St Albans

St Michael’s Street, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL3 4SJ

Inspection dates: 16 and 17 July 2024

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Early years provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are proud to attend this close-knit, community-minded school. They enjoy knowing they are part of the school's important heritage, which includes being above a Roman wall and basilica. Pupils are highly aware of and enthused about the school's legacy and their impact on it.

Pupils behave exceptionally well because staff have unwaveringly high expectations. They keep pupils safe. This is important as some aspects of the school layout mean pupils must move between school buildings and play sites. Pupils know, follow and understand the school rules very well.

Staff have high expectations for pupils' work and what they can achieve. Pupils live up to these expectations and work very hard. As a result, pupils' knowledge in all subjects develops exceptionally well.

Recently, the school has warmly welcomed many new pupils. These pupils have settled quickly due to the straightforward school routines. Pupils already at the school are kind and considerate to these new starters.

Pupils are self-confident and self-assured. They gain a thorough understanding of how to help themselves if they have worries. Skilled teaching helps pupils to learn how to overcome challenges and build resilience. Pupils know that the staff have their best interests at heart.

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

The school has devised well-structured curriculum plans. These specify the small steps of skills and knowledge pupils need to learn at every stage. These plans include careful consideration of subject-specific vocabulary and links between subjects. Teachers devise exciting and focused learning opportunities for pupils. Consequently, pupils love to learn. Teachers are well trained. They use the school's chosen teaching approaches well. This ensures they impart knowledge to pupils expertly. They also create activities that help pupils remember each topic's key elements. Pupils retain their learning over time. Teachers carefully check pupils' knowledge development. Pupils receive tailored support, if needed, to help them catch up. As a result, pupils achieve exceptionally well.

In the early years, expert staff provide interesting learning opportunities that engage children. Staff encourage and guide children to develop their communication and language skills to a high standard. As a result, children are extremely well prepared for their next learning stage.

When they start school, all pupils learn a well-structured phonics programme. They recap and recall sounds every day, which helps them remember what they have learned. Pupils practise reading often and they read books that match their phonics knowledge. Therefore, they are getting the practice they need to become fluent

readers. Pupils across the school love to read; they take every opportunity to enjoy a book. Children in Reception read and share books with staff. This helps them learn more about the wider world and extend their vocabulary. Pupils throughout the school read with confidence.

Skilled staff support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff work closely with parents and carers to help them identify pupils' additional needs. Staff know the pupils well. They provide individual support to pupils when needed while also building pupils' independence skills. Pupils with SEND achieve exceptionally well alongside their peers.

Pupils know how to behave remarkably well in a range of situations. They are calm and quiet when walking from one space to another. Pupils know this is the expectation, and they follow it. In the playground, pupils have different rules depending on how much space they have to play. Pupils are clear that this is important and helps keep them all very safe. Pupils always show mature attitudes. This makes for a highly positive learning environment.

Pupils develop a deep understanding of respect and empathy for others. The school prioritises the happiness of its pupils. All staff work tirelessly to achieve this goal. The school has a well-developed approach to pupil development. This is clear in its focus on aspirations and enabling pupils to live fulfilling lives. There is a strong emphasis on wisdom and exploration across all areas of school life, including assemblies, clubs, trips and visits. This builds pupils' confidence for the next stage of their education.

Leaders and school governors work together to ensure the school continues its drive for improvement. They have been proactive in making changes to ensure that all subjects meet the needs of the pupils. For example, they change the periods and places taught in history to give pupils more insight into the pupils coming into the school. Staff receive highly successful training to ensure they can perform their roles well. School leaders make sure they consider the staff's workload, which they appreciate.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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	117451
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10323648
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	201
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Alex Sage
Headteacher	Alison Rafferty
Website	www.stmichaelsprimaryherts.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	16 and 17 May 2023, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has a Christian religious character. The school's most recent inspection of its religious character, under section 48 of the Education Act 2005, took place in 2020. The school's next section 48 inspection is due this year.
- The school does not use any alternative providers of education.

Information about this inspection

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

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken this into account in their evaluation of the school.
- 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, including attendance, that puts pupils' interests first.

- The inspectors met with subject leaders and looked at a range of curriculum documentation and pupils' work across other subjects, including science and personal, social, health and economic education.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives into these subjects: early reading, mathematics, history and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors 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. The lead inspector also listened to a sample of pupils read to a familiar adult.
- The inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and the deputy headteacher, who is also the special educational needs coordinator.
- The inspectors spoke to pupils in class, in small groups and on the playground.
- The inspectors considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses. They also considered the online staff and pupil survey.

Inspection team

Jessie Linsley, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Stuart Pope

Ofsted Inspector

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