

St Michael's Catholic School

Daws Hill Lane, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire HP11 1PW

Inspection dates

15–16 January 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The executive headteacher and governors have established a strong team of senior and middle leaders who have demonstrated their capacity to improve the school.
- The Aylesbury school site is enabling pupils to make a positive beginning to their secondary education.
- Leaders, staff and pupils have created a diverse and cohesive school community that values people from different cultures.
- Pupils in all phases of the school, including those at the Aylesbury site, behave and attend well. Pupils' courtesy, delightful manners and good conduct are strengths of the school.
- Teaching is good in all phases and on both sites. Pupils make good progress and develop very positive attitudes to learning.
- Pupils achieve well in reading and mathematics in the primary phase. Their writing is improving rapidly. Pupils in the secondary phase make particularly good progress in English and mathematics.
- The early years provision, including the Nursery, is good. Most children progress well with their reading, writing and mathematics, and quickly develop positive habits and relationships.
- The sixth form has improved since the last inspection and is now good. Students develop impressive leadership skills and are helping to shape and improve the school.
- Since the last inspection, governors have reviewed the school's performance more stringently and precisely, leading to rapid improvement.
- At all ages, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. Pupils from all cultures and beliefs benefit from frequent opportunities to reflect deeply.
- The school is rightly proud of its reputation and focus on sports and physical education (PE).
- Inconsistent teaching in some areas of the secondary curriculum has resulted in uneven progress for some pupils.
- Some children in the early years do not have enough opportunity to develop their English language skills.
- Staffing changes in secondary science at the Wycombe site have led to variable teaching quality.
- While current leadership has improved the sixth form, students' progress and attainment are not yet as strong as they should be.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that pupils in all phases and on both sites benefit from consistently good teaching, learning and assessment, and that variation in quality is minimised.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in secondary science at the Wycombe site, ensuring that all staff have the same high expectations and are able to learn from each other.
- Ensure that staff in the early years promote children's early language development effectively, particularly those children who speak English as an additional language.
- Improve students' progress and attainment in the sixth form so that students' academic outcomes match their strong personal development.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The executive headteacher has established a strong senior leadership team, which has had a rapid impact on improving standards across the two sites and different phases in the school. Leaders and governors responded promptly to the areas of weakness identified at the last inspection in January 2018. The school is now in a secure position.
- The impact of the school's inclusive ethos on pupils' welfare, attitudes and optimism is clearly tangible throughout the school, including on the Aylesbury site. Leaders and staff are forward-looking and determined, and have high expectations. As a result, pupils develop into good citizens and are rightly proud, both of what the school offers and of their own achievements.
- Leaders and governors know their school and the pupils well. They work together well to create a welcoming and thriving school community, both on the Wycombe site and in Aylesbury.
- Leadership in the early years and primary site is effective, and in tune with the school's positive values and high aspirations. Leaders' focused attention on the priority of improving pupils' writing has had a significant impact on raising standards.
- Undaunted by the challenge of establishing the 'satellite' site at Aylesbury, leaders have ensured that strong leadership is in place. The new school has got off to a very good start, with happy pupils who are learning well.
- Typical of leaders' monitoring and review is their evaluation of the sixth-form provision. Leadership has been strengthened, the curriculum offer improved and, as a result, the sixth form is becoming more effective.
- Teaching staff and teaching assistants are supported well through a thoroughly planned programme of training and professional development. In this way, leaders are promoting improved consistency, shared values and high standards.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported well. The new special educational needs coordinator has brought a sharper focus on meeting pupils' complex needs and ensuring their improved progress.
- Pupils in the primary and secondary phases benefit from an interesting and motivating curriculum, both within and outside the timetabled lessons. Good provision for English and mathematics is a backbone of the school's strength and reliability, supporting a broad range of subjects. Pupils – including those in the primary phase – have plentiful opportunities to study humanities, arts, sciences, technology, languages and PE.
- In spite of the limitations of the temporary premises for the Aylesbury site, pupils study a wide curriculum which is suitably in line with the tried and tested approaches in the Wycombe site.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted very well, as demonstrated by pupils' openness when talking about their personal ideals and spiritual awareness. Pupils value and enjoy being in a Catholic school, irrespective of their own beliefs. They appreciate what they learn about other faiths and cultures, and practise tolerance and humility. For example, during the inspection, pupils paid thoughtful and

respectful attention to an assembly on the hajj pilgrimage that is part of the Islamic faith. The principles of charity and mutual respect are threaded through the taught curriculum and extra-curricular opportunities. Pupils are inspired by discussions about tricky moral questions and they value debating different viewpoints.

- Additional funding is used effectively in the school. Leaders have considered more precisely how the pupil premium funding is used for individual pupils. They are consequently able to give a better account of how interventions are making an impact on pupils' progress. In the same way, leaders can point to improvements in pupils' basic literacy and numeracy as a result of the Year 7 catch-up funding.
- The sport premium is used to good effect to extend teachers' skills and ensure greater participation from primary pupils. The school benefits from its all-through status because younger pupils are taught by secondary teachers and use the secondary facilities. As a result, pupils are excited by physical exercise and sport, and grow up with a greater understanding of what is on offer to keep them healthy and active. PE is a strength of the school, with pupils priding themselves on their fitness training and participation in competitive sports.
- Staff, parents and carers, and pupils have a positive view of the school, including the Aylesbury site. Pupils in particular prize the school's inclusive community and their relationships with staff and each other. Parents and staff – in nearly all cases – have confidence in the school's leadership and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- School leaders have wisely made use of the support from the local authority and the diocese. There has been effective support with strengthening the leadership, establishing the Aylesbury site, improving primary pupils' writing and supporting changes in the secondary phase's science department.

Governance of the school

- Members of the governing body have a precise understanding of the strengths in the school and know what needs to improve. They are stalwart and ambitious guardians of the school's inclusive values. They make sure that they balance the support they give the school with equally scrupulous challenge and oversight.
- Governors responded effectively to the findings and recommendations from the last inspection in January 2018 and have honestly reviewed their work. Governors have supported school leaders with important appointments to senior roles, which has assured the school's improvement.
- A detailed and helpful review of the pupil premium funding was undertaken after the last inspection, and governors have made sure that leaders acted on the recommendations. This area of governors' statutory responsibilities is now secure and making the necessary impact on pupils' progress and welfare.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

- Checks on staff working with pupils on both sites are carried out carefully and in line with current guidance. Safer recruitment of staff is overseen regularly by governors and leaders.
- Leaders have reviewed arrangements for leadership of safeguarding, strengthening the team and ensuring that they are well trained. The senior leaders on the primary, secondary and Aylesbury sites work together closely and scrupulously carry out their responsibility to share information where appropriate.
- Leaders and staff across both sites have had suitable training. They are knowledgeable about risks to children, as well as local concerns, including female genital mutilation, child sexual and criminal exploitation, and forced marriage. Staff are watchful and take their duty to report concerns seriously. Because they know pupils well, staff are alert to even the smallest signs that pupils may be at risk of harm, neglect or exploitation.
- All pupils who spoke to inspectors knew exactly how to report concerns and who to approach if they were worried or feeling unsafe. Parents and staff are also confident that pupils are safe in the school. Pupils' safety and welfare come first and are at the heart of staff's attitudes and values.
- During the inspection, it was identified that the school's records of safeguarding concerns were not as efficiently organised as they could be. Leaders immediately followed up the issues identified and were able to confirm that there was no risk to pupils arising from these shortfalls. Leaders also undertook to carry out a full review of their records and to implement a more efficient and user-friendly system before Easter 2019.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers in all phases and on both sites have strong subject knowledge, which they use to good effect in planning interesting and challenging sequences of lessons.
- Most teaching is well planned and takes account of what pupils know, understand and can do. Some excellent practice inspires pupils to work hard and become more ambitious for knowledge and improved skills.
- Learning at the school is characterised by willing pupils who want to succeed. They form good working relationships with their teachers and teaching assistants, promoting a positive and purposeful atmosphere in lessons.
- Teachers question pupils well. Most ensure that pupils are challenged to answer questions articulately and thoughtfully. Pupils contribute well, ask questions themselves and are keen to participate in lessons.
- Teachers are skilled at explaining key concepts and ideas and they promote pupils' thoughtful concentration on their work. Pupils clearly feel confident in nearly all their teachers.
- Teaching of English and mathematics is consistently strong at the Wycombe site, with equal strengths in English in Aylesbury. Pupils read well. From the early stages of handling books in Nursery, through phonics teaching, to the promotion of reading for pleasure, reading is rightly a priority in the school.

- Teaching is mostly strong at the Aylesbury site. Staff skilfully plan for the full range of abilities in their groups and have made sure that pupils are in no way disadvantaged by the potential limitations of the school's temporary site.
- As a result of improved teaching of writing in the primary phase, pupils enjoy writing and are making more progress. Opportunities for pupils to write well are built into the wider curriculum. Pupils have gained more confidence and fluency through having interesting topics to write about and the opportunities to practise.
- Pupils routinely explain their thinking using mathematical vocabulary in the primary phase. These developing skills are built upon in the secondary phase. Strong teaching in key stages 3 and 4 encourages pupils to reason and explain their solutions to problems clearly and precisely.
- Pupils are expected to complete homework and commit to their studies, supporting their revision and build-up of long-term memory. Assessments are used to reinforce pupils' learning, rather than to increase teachers' workload.
- Learning support assistants (LSAs) support pupils discreetly in lessons. LSAs have benefited from a helpful training programme about different types of SEND.
- Weaknesses in individual subjects remain and are – rightly – a focus for leaders in the secondary and primary phases. Some of the pupils' experiences depend on the teacher or on the group they are in. Recent staff changes in science on the Wycombe site have resulted in too much variability in teaching quality for secondary and sixth-form pupils. Although leadership in science has been strengthened, leaders know there is more to do to establish consistently high standards.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils' positive attitudes and good relationships have created a happy, lively and orderly school on both sites and in all phases. Pupils care for each other and are rightly proud of their vibrant, inclusive and multicultural school.
- Pupils are courteous, friendly and outgoing. Around the site, for example, they do more than just respond to adults' greetings but initiate conversations, such as by asking 'How are you?' without waiting to be asked first.
- Older pupils demonstrate the strong team atmosphere by supporting those who are younger. Over time, pupils make the most of the opportunities offered by the all-through environment to work together and form strong bonds.
- Pupils enjoy learning and take it seriously. When expectations are high, pupils study productively and take pride in their work. They wear their uniform smartly and need few reminders to keep it tidy.
- Pupils' personal development and welfare are woven throughout the school day. Moments of reflection and prayer provide pupils with quiet time to think and contemplate. The chaplaincy is a sanctuary for all pupils, regardless of belief or faith.

- Pupils embrace the opportunities to get involved and to make a difference. Pupils have rich opportunities to participate in wider school life, including sports, leadership programmes and charity work. In this way, pupils' good mental health is nurtured.
- Leaders and staff have ensured that pupils who attend alternative provision are cared for and enabled to develop personal qualities and resilience.
- Pupils are confident that, when bullying happens, it is dealt with effectively. Some pupils do not feel that there is any bullying. In the school's inclusive community, staff and pupils firmly and unequivocally challenge the rare instances of derogatory or intolerant language.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The school's well-established routines and expectations support pupils' good conduct in and out of the classroom. Pupils respond well to instructions and take responsibility for their own behaviour in nearly all cases. Pupils are reliably respectful and solemn when required in formal occasions, such as assemblies. For example, pupils in Reception class rise to the occasion of sitting still and listening alongside older pupils when together in assembly.
- School leaders take an appropriate and proportionate approach to the use of exclusion. A firm and restorative approach supports pupils' improved behaviour. School leaders are rightly proud of the support that they have provided to pupils who have transferred from other schools. These pupils go on to succeed at St Michael's.
- Successful behaviour management strategies have been extended to the Aylesbury site and are proving to be effective. Pupils behave well on this site. They are receptive to learning and respectful to adults. These pupils particularly appreciate the smaller-scale start to their education and work together cohesively as a close-knit team. Pupils with particular social and emotional needs who attend the Aylesbury site are supported well to improve their behaviour.
- Pupils' attendance on the Wycombe site is in line with national figures. Pupils' attendance on the Aylesbury site is above the national average. Few pupils are persistently absent. Overall, school leaders can point to improvements in individual pupils' attendance as a result of focused and tenacious work with families.
- The small number of pupils who attend alternative provision improve their behaviour and attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils attain good outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 1 and make good progress from their starting points. Pupils' scores in the phonics screening check compare well with national figures.
- Pupils go on to make good progress by the end of key stage 2, particularly in reading and mathematics. Pupils' results at the end of key stage 2 in writing were well below national figures in 2018. School leaders and teachers have systematically set about

improving pupils' writing and, as a result, current pupils write well, enjoy their written work and are making rapid progress. Standards in writing are still behind those in reading, but there has been strong improvement. Pupils' ability to reason and problem-solve in mathematics has also been improved over time as the new curriculum becomes fully established.

- Primary phase pupils are following a curriculum that enables them to make good progress and be well prepared for secondary school. These pupils achieve high standards in technology, PE, science and humanities. Pupils who are disadvantaged and those with SEND also make good progress in a broad range of subjects.
- Secondary pupils' progress over time in English and mathematics is consistently good, with 2018 published data comparing well with national figures. At the end of key stage 4, pupils also achieve well in a range of subjects, including history, PE, religious studies and music. Pupils who speak English as an additional language achieve good results, and progress well through the curriculum.
- Pupils with SEND are making good progress overall and are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Concerted work to minimise the difference between disadvantaged pupils' progress and that of their peers at each key stage is having a positive impact. This group of pupils is catching up, and their attainment compares well with that of other pupils in the school.
- The school's careers programme is a strength of the school. Younger pupils are introduced to the world of work and older pupils are provided with detailed advice and guidance. Some imaginative partnerships with local businesses have enhanced pupils' experiences of careers, apprenticeships and the opportunities provided by higher education.
- The very small number of pupils who attend alternative provision are supported to gain useful qualifications for the future.

Early years provision

Good

- Leadership across the early years and Nursery is effective. Leaders have established high expectations of children's behaviour and attitudes to learning right from the very start. The early years leader has a clear and accurate overview of the strengths of the provision and has identified appropriate next steps to improve the provision further. In spite of some very recent staff changes in Nursery, children are completely settled, thanks to firmly established routines and high expectations.
- Children cooperate well and sustain their attention, some with impressive concentration and patience. They have opportunities to make choices and contribute to the smooth running of their day. For example, in Nursery, children tidy up with enthusiasm and take turns to wash their hands, with only unobtrusive supervision from adults. Children in the Nursery and Reception classes have good manners and are warmly welcoming to adults, visitors and each other.
- Activities in the Nursery and Reception classes are well planned. They are designed to develop children's motivation to learn and their early reading, writing and number work. Indoor environments are spacious and organised, with enticing tasks and

resources. Children make good progress from their different starting points and are well prepared to join Year 1.

- Children make a strong start developing early writing skills. They practise strengthening their writing skills and applying correct letter formation, with many producing beautiful handwriting. Phonics and early reading are taught effectively, reinforcing children’s spelling and sentence structures, as well as an interest in rhymes, stories and books.
- Adults ensure that children start using accurate mathematical language well. For example, inspectors noted that children naturally and precisely used the names of shapes they had been learning about when making models of robots and houses.
- Children are safe in the early years and Nursery. They behave with consideration to each other and quickly learn to be kind. All statutory welfare requirements are met. Children engage enthusiastically in a variety of opportunities for physical development in the outdoor areas, including running, climbing, jumping and riding bicycles and tricycles. In this way, children are supported appropriately to take suitable risks and overcome challenges.
- Leaders are working effectively to develop helpful partnerships with parents, including keeping them up to date with children’s achievements and progress. Leaders and staff carefully use information from parents about children’s interests and favourite books to plan purposeful learning.
- When not directed by adults, a few children struggle to find meaningful activities that sustain their interest, particularly in Reception. The early years leader has identified correctly that some staff need further training in their use of vocabulary to enhance learning and play, especially for children who speak English as an additional language. These inconsistencies mean that a few children do not make as much progress as they could.
- The outdoor area is not as well planned or stimulating as the indoor classroom and the Nursery building. Leaders agree that there is scope for better-quality opportunities and learning in the outdoor areas.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The sixth form provides a good quality of education. Under new leadership, the study programmes have been reviewed, expectations raised and systems tightened up. Students are improving their work ethic and readiness for higher education and employment.
- Leaders have paid careful attention to students’ overall programme and experience in the sixth form. Programmes of study are more balanced and provide a solid scholarly basis where needed. In addition, students are being supported more overtly by tutors. With just the right level of independence, students are encouraged and inspired to work harder and keep focused on their ambitions.
- Retention rates are rising. Following an overhaul of the subjects on offer, students are on the right programmes and sticking with their courses. They develop greater

commitment and valuable study skills. Over time, more students are going on to higher education where appropriate.

- Students' work experience and enrichment programmes – including the introduction of the extended project – have broadened students' horizons and built up their confidence. Students particularly value sports and PE as a major enrichment activity, inculcating healthy habits that will stand them in good stead for their future.
- As with the rest of the school, sixth-form students benefit from the comprehensive programme of careers advice and guidance. Students are well informed about the opportunities open to them, including employment, apprenticeships and university.
- Students conduct themselves well as young adults. They dress smartly and appear professional. They are proud to act as ambassadors for the school, but not afraid to ask questions and strive for improvement. For example, a group of sixth-form students came up with the initiative to train as mental health counsellors for younger pupils. They sought out professional training and are now an integral part of the school's commitment to pupils' welfare.
- Students benefit from age-appropriate safeguarding guidance and develop a sophisticated understanding of risk. Leaders are aware of the different pressures experienced by older students and the challenges that may be present in the community.
- Students achieve particularly well in A-level courses in law, sociology, media, English literature, PE and philosophy and ethics. Some vocational courses – including finance – are also successful and popular with students. Students who retake their GCSE English and mathematics examinations improve their communication and numeracy, preparing them well for further study or work-related learning.
- However, overall outcomes at the end of Year 13 are not as strong as the rest of the sixth-form provision. There is variation in the quality of teaching and learning in some subject areas, notably in science and business.

School details

Unique reference number	110516
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	10052931

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

Type of school	All-through
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,333
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	107
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brian Greene
Executive headteacher	Garret Fay
Telephone number	01494 535 196
Website	www.stmichaels.bucks.sch.uk
Email address	office@stmichaels.bucks.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11 January 2018

Information about this school

- St Michael's Catholic School is a non-selective all-through school catering for pupils aged three to 19. The school is larger than average.
- The school operates a primary phase, secondary phase and sixth form. The overall provision in High Wycombe and Aylesbury is led by the executive headteacher. The primary phase is led by a deputy headteacher, who also oversees the early years provision, including the Nursery. There are currently 420 pupils in the primary phase.
- In September 2018, a new secondary satellite school opened in Aylesbury, with 120 pupils admitted into Year 7. Pupils on the Aylesbury site are currently in a temporary building. The Aylesbury site shares the same curriculum, assessment systems and

behaviour management approaches as the High Wycombe site. A head of school leads the Aylesbury provision, assisted by a senior assistant headteacher who works across both sites.

- A higher-than-average proportion of pupils on the High Wycombe site speak English as an additional language.
- A very small number of pupils attend the pupil referral unit, Aspire, as alternative provision.
- The school is part of the Catholic Diocese of Northampton. The school's last section 48 inspection took place in March 2016.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited lessons in all phases and on both sites across all subject areas. Pupils' work was reviewed in lessons, in addition to a sample selected for closer scrutiny. Inspectors spoke to pupils informally both during and outside lessons. In addition, formal meetings were held with representative groups of pupils from the primary, secondary and sixth-form phases. Inspectors visited assemblies.
- An inspector visited the satellite site at Aylesbury and spent the day observing teaching and learning, speaking to pupils, reviewing their work and meeting with leaders and staff.
- Inspectors considered information about pupils' performance in the primary, secondary sixth-form phases, and the Aylesbury site, including published data and the progress and attainment of current pupils.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, middle leaders, staff and governors. They reviewed documentation relating to the work of governors, and the school's improvement planning and self-evaluation. Meetings were also held to discuss the school's curriculum, pupils' behaviour and attendance, and the use of additional funding.
- An inspector spoke to parents who were dropping their children off at the primary school. The views of 132 parents who responded to Parent View were taken into account, together with their free-text responses.
- In addition, 59 responses to the staff survey were considered.
- An inspector spoke to a representative from Aspire, the pupil referral unit.
- The school's arrangements for child protection and safer recruitment were checked, as were the school's procedures for referring pupils to local authority children's services and the records of referrals made.

Inspection team

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Jane Cartwright	Ofsted Inspector
Clive Dunn	Her Majesty's Inspector
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