

Inspection of an outstanding school: St Michael's Church of England Primary School

Front Street, Bishop Middleham, Ferryhill, County Durham DL17 9AL

Inspection dates:

23 and 24 January 2024

Outcome

St Michael's Church of England Primary School continues to be an outstanding school.

The headteacher of this school is Beth Dawson. This school is part of One Excellence Multi Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Lindsey Vollans, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Tom Cunningham.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school fulfils its ambition to support pupils to live 'life in all its fullness'. The individual needs of pupils are at the heart of all the decisions that staff make. Pupils flourish in this supportive environment.

The school has high expectations for all pupils in all aspects of school life. A culture of excellence is evident. The rich curriculum develops pupils both socially and academically. As a result of the high-quality teaching, pupils enjoy learning and are inspired to learn more. Pupils are well prepared for their next stage in education.

Relationships between staff and pupils are very positive. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They learn a strong moral code from the early years onwards. Pupils are kind and considerate to one another. They know they are safe and happy in school.

Pupils excel in their various roles and responsibilities. These include being ministers in the pupil parliament and sports leaders. Pupils make a highly positive contribution to school and community life through these roles. This contributes strongly to pupils' personal development.

The school provides a wealth of enrichment activities. Pupils are very involved in organising and attending school clubs. Pupils enjoy the educational visits, especially the Year 5 and Year 6 pupils who went on the recent residential visit.

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

The school adopted a highly ambitious long-term strategy to be at the centre of teacher education in the region. This has paid dividends in terms of providing additional resources, including extra teaching staff. The trust is highly proactive in developing the school's workforce so that it can develop others. There are many opportunities for staff to learn about current research and best practice in education. Staff are well supported to achieve their best and to work towards further qualifications. As a result, there is a wealth of experience available in this small school. This is having a direct influence on the subject curriculum and outcomes for pupils. Staff work together to plan an exacting curriculum that best fits the needs of all pupils. Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve highly.

Reading is a school priority. The teaching of phonics is well structured and consistent throughout the school. Teachers are adept in delivering the phonics programme. They ensure that the books that pupils read match the sounds that they know. In early years, children are very keen to listen to and join in with stories, songs and rhymes. Across the school, there is a sense of excitement about reading. Older pupils enthusiastically share their reading recommendations. They access a wide variety of high-quality books. By the end of key stage 2, pupils read fluently and accurately.

In mathematics, pupils are confident when doing more complex calculations. This is because the curriculum includes specific lessons to build up knowledge of multiplication facts. Pupils can instantly recall multiplication tables and have an excellent grasp of patterns in number. The teaching sequence ensures that pupils regularly revisit mathematics topics such as shape, space and measure. Pupils say that this helps them to remember more.

Children in early years get off to a flying start. Early years staff exploit every opportunity to move children on in their learning. Caring teaching staff provide well-planned and well-presented learning activities. Children learn to problem-solve, for example making their own play dough from the ingredients that they have been given. Adults support children by asking questions rather than telling them what to do. This provokes some deep thinking. Children are actively learning through practical activities. They develop resilience when there are setbacks and remain focused for considerable periods of time. Children talk extensively to one another about their learning, a trait that continues into Year 1.

The school has highly effective systems to identify pupils who may have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers use a wide range of strategies to support pupils with SEND in accessing learning. These include resources such as accessible writing fonts. Provision is seamless; all pupils work alongside each other. Pupils with SEND are fully included in the wider life of the school.

Leaders have developed an impressive personal development programme. This includes visitors to school, such as local authors. Planned sessions include teaching about the Holocaust. Pupils learn about what happened under the Nazi regime in Germany. They have an excellent understanding of people's suffering at the hands of others. Pupils have in-depth conversations about what took place and what we can learn from this. The focus

on a person who lives locally and their story of being in a concentration camp gives pupils a deeper connection with these events. They have poignant opportunities to reflect on humankind.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, St. Michael's C of E Primary School, to be outstanding in September 2017.

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	148854
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10297555
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	123
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Tom Cunningham
CEO of the trust	Lindsey Vollans
Headteacher	Beth Dawson
Website	www.stmichaelsprimary.durham.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	14 and 15 September 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school does not use any alternative education provision.
- The school is a hub for school-centred initial teacher training. Members of staff have part-time secondments and teach professional studies to trainees.
- As a Department for Education funded English hub, the school offers a range of support and continuing professional development to other primary schools to improve the teaching of early reading.

Information about this inspection

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- The inspector met with the headteacher, other senior leaders and the special educational needs coordinator. Meetings were also held with subject leaders, class teachers and the early career teacher.
- The inspector also met with representatives of the trust, including the chair of trustees.
- The inspector spoke with a representative of the diocesan board for education.
- The inspector carried out deep dives into reading, mathematics and physical education. For each deep dive, the inspector looked at curriculum planning, conducted joint lesson visits with leaders, spoke to pupils about their work and looked at pupils' books and samples of their work.
- The inspector also looked at other curriculum documents and a wider sample of pupils' work.
- Prior to the inspection, the inspector reviewed documents on the school's website, as well as published information about the school's performance and previous Ofsted inspections.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms, around the school and at playtime and lunchtime. She spoke with pupils about their views of the school and their learning, behaviour and safety.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector: 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.
- As well as speaking to parents at the school gate, the inspector considered responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View. The inspector took the views of staff into account through a number of meetings as well as their responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Mary Cook, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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