

Inspection of St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Maple Avenue, Braintree, Essex CM7 2NS

Inspection dates:	29 and 30 April 2025
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Recent changes in governance have stabilised the leadership of the school. However, this arrangement is temporary and securing a permanent governing body is a priority for the school. The effect of this weakness is largely unnoticeable to pupils.

Pupils are happy and proud of their school. At breaktimes they enjoy the many activities provided for them. Pupil play leaders kindly support younger children to play various games. Pupils are confident that staff will listen to them and help them sort out any issues they may have.

The school has high expectations for pupils' behaviour. Pupils meet these by following the school rules. The school provides a calm nurture space, which runs every afternoon, for pupils to reflect and talk about their feelings.

Recent improvements to the quality of education ensure pupils study a full range of subjects. Staff have high expectations for pupils' achievement. Pupils enjoy the activities teachers plan for them. Some say they would like to be given work that helps them think even harder about their learning.

There are many opportunities for pupils to pursue their interests. These include taking part in clubs. For example, guitar, art and yoga. Pupils relish the leadership roles they have, for example, as librarians, school council members and reading champions.

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

With support, the school has taken meaningful steps to implement a more ambitious curriculum since the previous inspection. Subject leaders have worked with added focus and intent to ensure the curriculum is well developed in most areas. In subjects like English, mathematics and science, pupils benefit from well-structured teaching that deepens their understanding. Some other subjects remain in earlier stages of development. Pupils report that lessons are enjoyable and engaging.

The school's checks on how effectively the curriculum has been implemented and the impact it is having on pupils' progress, are not sufficiently robust. Leaders are not aware of how well pupils are learning the curriculum. This hampers their efforts to refine and improve the quality of education further.

Reading is a high priority for the school. The new phonics programme is consistently implemented from the start of the Reception Year. Pupils who find reading a challenge get the extra help they need to catch up. Whole-class reading, supported by carefully chosen texts and teachers' skilled questioning, helps pupils build their fluency and comprehension. Opportunities such as author visits and peer book-sharing further foster a love of reading and support writing, which is often of a high quality.

Children in the Reception Year get off to a strong start. They learn as they play together in the well-resourced classrooms and considerable outside space. Adults skilfully

encourage children's curiosity through the questions they ask them. There are many opportunities for adults to support children with the development of their writing, early number and motor skills. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are supported effectively, equipping them well for key stage 1. As one parent said, 'I am thrilled at the progress my child is making in reading and pleased that his confidence and character are growing.'

Provision for pupils with SEND is inclusive and adaptive. Staff work in partnership with external agencies, where needed, and make adjustments to enable pupils to access the curriculum. Some parents would like better communication about the help their children receive and how they can support them at home.

Pupils behave well across the school. They are polite, kind and courteous to adults, their peers and visitors. Attendance is closely monitored and leaders work constructively with families when concerns arise.

The school offers a wide range of enrichment opportunities. Pupils enjoy trips, residential visits and themed days, such as Language Day, all of which broaden their cultural horizons. They understand the importance of equality and respect for diversity. Older pupils talk with maturity about relationships and values.

Leadership capacity has developed over time. However, there has not always been a shared strategic overview of the school's work. More recently, changes to governance have introduced greater clarity and focus. The recent addition of an interim executive board is already showing early signs of impact, identifying the most significant areas for improvement. However, this is in its early stages and only provides a temporary solution until more stable governance arrangements can be secured.

Staff are proud to work at the school. While some feel supported, a number of staff and parents say they would like more consistent communication of the school's priorities and pupils' learning. Leaders recognise the need to strengthen communication with the wider school community.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Recent improvements to governance are beginning to take effect but remain at an early stage. Without sustained development, governance cannot provide the necessary strategic direction. Those responsible for governance should continue to build their capacity and form an effective governing body to challenge and support school leaders.

- The school does not know how well the intended curriculum is being implemented. Therefore, it does not know if the improvements made to the curriculum are having the necessary impact or meeting the needs of all pupils, so that they achieve as well as they could. The school should ensure that it has a clear oversight of how the curriculum is delivered and if the changes made are meeting the needs of all pupils across the school.
- Communication with staff and parents is not always clear or consistent. This leads to uncertainty about how parents can best support their children at home. Leaders should strengthen communication, so that families and staff are well informed about the school's work and priorities.

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	115157
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10378457
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	416
Appropriate authority	Interim executive board
Chair	Cathryn Adams
Headteacher	Andrew Cumpstey
Website	www.stmichaelsbraintree.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	6 and 7 December 2022, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the last inspection, an interim executive board has been established.
- This Church of England school is part of the Diocese of Chelmsford. Its last section 48 inspection took place in April 2025.
- The school uses two registered providers of alternative provision.
- The school runs a breakfast club.

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 a school's education provision
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the COVID 19 pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with school leaders, the chair and two other members of the interim executive board. The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with two representatives of the local authority.
- Inspectors met with a range of teachers and support staff to gather their views of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects; English, including early reading, mathematics, history and geography. For each deep dive, the 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.
- Inspectors also considered the curriculum in some other subjects, including science and art.
- The lead inspector observed some pupils from Years 1 and 2 read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, around the school and at breaktimes
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the views of staff through Ofsted's staff survey and of parents and carers through responses to Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments. The inspectors spoke to some parents on the playground. Inspectors gathered the views of staff and pupils through meetings and discussions throughout the inspection.

Inspection team

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