

School inspection report

3 to 5 March 2026

St Michael's School

198 Hadleigh Road

Leigh-on-Sea

SS9 2LP

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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Summary of inspection findings

1. Leaders create a warm and inclusive community that thrives on kindness and respect, in line with the school's aims and heritage. Pupils' wellbeing is consistently well promoted and is at the heart of decision-making. Leaders are highly visible and approachable and build positive relationships with pupils and their families. Governors are experienced and knowledgeable and maintain close oversight of school policies and their implementation. Leaders and governors collaborate well to evaluate the school's performance, to plan for its future and to ensure that the requirements of the Standards are met.
2. The school's broad curriculum and extensive programme of extra-curricular activities support pupils' learning effectively. The early years curriculum is well planned and includes French, music and a range of sports. Older pupils are introduced to a broader range of subjects including computing, Spanish and design and technology. Throughout the school, the curriculum has a strong focus on developing pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding in mathematics and English. By the end of Year 6, pupils develop a wide range of skills, knowledge and understanding. They make good progress and are well prepared for the next stages in their education.
3. Leaders deploy staff well to make effective use of their specialist skills and the school's specialist facilities. Teachers know their pupils well and use questioning skilfully to encourage discussion and debate in lessons. Typically, lessons are well planned, stimulate pupils' interest and promote high achievement. However, some teaching in the early years and Year 1 is less effective. This is because, sometimes, work is not consistently adapted well enough to ensure that those pupils who are ready to apply their learning in more complex ways are supported to do so.
4. The school has an effective system of assessing pupils' progress. Teachers use a range of assessments to check pupils' understanding, track progress and to inform lesson planning. Regular verbal and written feedback is provided to pupils about their work, but frequently this is not linked to next steps in pupils' learning and they are not routinely given time to act on this advice. This hinders the learning and progress of some pupils.
5. Pupils benefit from a well-planned personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) programme which is effective in helping pupils to develop self-awareness and an understanding of others. Pupils develop high levels of confidence and self-esteem. Close links with St Margaret's Church serve to maintain the school's ethos and help to further pupils' spiritual understanding and tolerance for others. A wide-ranging and inclusive physical education (PE) programme is successful in promoting pupils' physical development. Leaders' approach to health and safety ensures that the school premises and classrooms are well maintained and that pupils' wellbeing is prioritised.
6. Standards of behaviour are generally high. Relationships between pupils, and between pupils and staff, are positive. There is low-level disruption by a small minority of older pupils in some lessons. Leaders have recently introduced additional strategies, which are improving behaviour. However, teachers are not implementing this new approach consistently. Some pupils are not supported enough to improve their behaviour, and some learning time in lessons is lost.
7. Staff listen carefully to pupils' views. A range of methods enable pupils to share concerns and ideas for improving the school. Leaders provide many opportunities for pupils to take on responsibilities, which supports their understanding of leadership and shared decision-making. Pupils learn about

democracy, in theory and in its practical application in school life. Pupils collaborate well with each other and are taught, from the early years, how to share, take turns and work together effectively.

8. The school has an effective safeguarding culture, underpinned by precise and well-implemented policies and procedures. Staff are suitably trained to identify and report any safeguarding concerns promptly. These are acted upon by safeguarding leaders to ensure pupils' safeguarding needs are met. Leaders ensure all required staff recruitment checks are completed effectively.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- improve teachers' guidance and feedback to pupils, so that it supports pupils more precisely to improve their learning
- ensure that teaching consistently identifies and supports the youngest pupils to apply their learning in more complex ways, when they are ready to do so, and make the progress of which they are capable
- ensure that the school's behaviour policy is consistently implemented by all teachers, so that pupils are fully supported to regulate their behaviour and learning time is not lost to poor behaviour.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Leaders create a warm and positive environment in which pupils' wellbeing is prioritised. They know the school well and are fully committed to ensuring pupils are happy and safe at school. Pupils are valued and their voice is heard. Leaders are highly visible around the school and build positive relationships with the school community. This fosters an inclusive and supportive environment for pupils and their families.
10. Governors are experienced and knowledgeable. They have an appropriate range of skills which help to support the school and its leaders. Governors regularly visit the school to meet with subject leaders, observe lessons and attend events. Many of them have a long association with the school. They know the school well and provide close oversight of policies and procedures. The governing body includes the local church priest, who leads weekly school chapel assemblies. This helps to maintain the school's heritage and ethos. The governing body ensures that leaders are suitably trained and that they possess the professional understanding and skills to fulfil their roles effectively.
11. Leaders and governors have a good understanding of the school's effectiveness and how it can continue to improve, as detailed in the school's development plan. The plan is regularly reviewed and amended to ensure its effective implementation in line with the school's aims. Leaders are ambitious in securing improvements. They have, for example, recently increased the school's sports provision, introduced a breakfast club and developed plans to expand the nursery. Governors and leaders work closely together to monitor and evaluate pupils' progress through the school.
12. Governors and leaders manage risk carefully and thoroughly. Pupils' wellbeing is prioritised through the detailed identification of risk and the implementation of appropriate strategies to manage and mitigate those risks. Suitably trained staff provide risk assessments across a wide range of activities, including those on and off the school site. A thorough process of review and evaluation of risk assessments ensures their continuing effectiveness.
13. Leaders regularly review school policies. Parents of current and prospective pupils receive comprehensive information about school policies and activities, via the website as well as through the prospectus and parent handbook. Leaders provide the local authority, as required, with information about pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan), including information relating to funding. They also inform the local authority whenever pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition points.
14. Pupils' progress is reported regularly to parents in parent-teacher meetings and through written reports. Staff in the early years make efficient use of online platforms to inform parents of their child's activities and progress in class.
15. Complaints are handled efficiently following the school's clear complaints policy. Leaders are quick to respond to any parent concerns and keep a thorough record of complaints and actions taken in response to them.
16. Leaders implement their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. The accessibility plan is appropriate and regularly reviewed and supports pupils' specific individual needs so that they can access their education and make progress alongside their peers.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance

17. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

18. Leaders provide a broad and well-planned curriculum that extends pupils' knowledge and understanding. Children in Nursery and Reception have their planned curriculum enriched by learning French, music, drama and a range of sports. As pupils get older, they are introduced to a broader range of subjects, including computing, design and technology and Spanish. Across the school, there is a focus on developing pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding in English and mathematics. The curriculum enables pupils to study across a wide range of subject areas, so that they are ready for their transition to senior school.
19. The early years curriculum is well thought out, providing a good range of activities to develop children's knowledge, understanding and skills in areas such as numeracy, writing, communication and reading. The phonics scheme is particularly well planned, with small group lessons that build on children's prior attainment and target the next steps in their learning precisely. Where appropriate, children explore and develop their learning through play in a well-resourced environment. Adults provide close support, guidance and care.
20. Teachers are knowledgeable about the subjects that they teach. Leaders deploy staff well, making effective use of teachers' specialist knowledge and purpose-built specialist facilities. Staff are committed to the care and teaching of their classes. Pupils show high levels of engagement. Typically, there is a stimulating and purposeful atmosphere in lessons. Teachers make particularly good use of questioning to deepen pupils' learning. Pupils ask and respond to questions confidently, share their ideas and respect others' opinions. This helps them to learn effectively.
21. Teaching is generally ambitious and well-planned, supporting pupils to apply their knowledge in increasingly complex ways. Leaders and staff provide a culture that promotes and celebrates high achievement. Teaching in the early years and Year 1, however, is less consistently matched to pupils' ongoing learning needs. This means that sometimes children are not moved on quickly enough when they are ready to apply their learning in more complex ways. When this occurs, pupils do not learn as well as they could.
22. There is an established framework for tracking and monitoring pupils' progress and attainment. This framework provides teachers with information that they use to plan lessons and support pupils' learning. Teachers use a range of formative and summative assessment strategies to check pupils' understanding and track their progress over time. Senior leaders and subject leaders analyse assessment information well, to identify trends and plan interventions to support pupils' progress as required.
23. Teachers provide positive regular feedback to pupils about their work, verbally and in writing. However, this is not always linked to pupils' individual next steps in their learning, and they are not routinely given time to act on this advice. This means that sometimes pupils do not precisely know how to improve their understanding and work. This hinders their learning.
24. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including those who have an EHC plan, make good progress over time. Their needs are identified quickly, and appropriate support is organised by the knowledgeable leader. Staff receive clear advice, information and training in how pupils can be supported in class. Leaders monitor pupils' provision closely, ensuring that support is

adapted to meet each pupil's needs. Targeted intervention is provided through teaching assistants in class, individual and small group support sessions, and the use of external professionals as required.

25. Leaders ensure that pupils benefit from a wide range of enrichment opportunities. Pupils take part in enrichment days, educational visits and residential experiences that enhance curriculum learning, including a trip to France for pupils to develop their language skills. Pupils are highly successful in drama and music examinations. They perform in a range of music, sport and drama events at venues such as Southend Cliffs Pavilion and the O2. Pupils also enjoy an extensive range of clubs during and after school, including pottery, book club, musical theatre, ballet, cookery and chess. Pupils' enthusiastic participation in these clubs enables them to develop their interests and acquire new hobbies.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation

- 26. All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

27. The PSHE curriculum, including relationships and sex education (RSE), is taught through a well-structured and age-appropriate programme. Pupils study topics such as growing up, relationships, respect, democracy, managing emotions and anti-bullying strategies. The programme is adapted well to cover issues in school and wider society. Staff then further develop understanding of these themes in assemblies and form periods. This helps pupils to acquire self-awareness and emotional literacy. The quality of the PSHE and RSE programme is monitored closely by leaders and refined in response to feedback from pupils, staff and parents.
28. The school's ethos is supported by close links with the local church and by regular chapel services in school, which are led by the church priest. Prayers are said at lunch and at the end of the school day. The religious education (RE) curriculum covers world religions, and parents of different religions speak to the pupils about their faiths. This serves to further pupils' spiritual understanding, tolerance and respect for others.
29. Leaders provide an extensive physical education (PE) curriculum, through PE and games lessons as well as the extra-curricular programme. In the early years, children develop their fine- and gross-motor skills through planned play. They practise cutting, sticking, painting and using construction toys. In PE lessons, specialist teachers promote running and balancing skills and children learn how exercise supports their physical wellbeing. From Year 1, pupils learn team skills and play regular team sports such as football, tag rugby, netball and cricket. They learn teamwork skills through a programme of competitions and fixtures against other schools at local, regional and national levels. Pupils receive sports awards in assemblies for showing high levels of respect, honesty, determination and teamwork. The sports programme's inclusive approach is particularly effective in promoting pupils' enjoyment, physical development and wellbeing.
30. Typically, pupils behave well. They interact well with each other and their teachers and show politeness and courtesy. For instance, in the early years, the teaching of 'golden rules' encourages children to think about their feelings and the feelings of others and to develop an early understanding of mutual respect and tolerance of others. However, low-level disruption by a small minority of older pupils in some classes hinders the progress of pupils. The school has recently introduced a number of behaviour strategies, including the 'ask, remind and consequence' system, which are working well and improving behaviour. These systems, however, are not fully established, so some pupils are not supported consistently well by staff to regulate their behaviour.
31. An appropriate anti-bullying strategy is in place. Pupils learn what constitutes bullying and strategies they can use to avoid or respond to it. Cases of bullying are dealt with well by leaders in line with school policy. Typically, pupils show respect for each other and trust staff to resolve any incidents that occur.
32. Appropriate staff supervision across the school promotes pupils' typically good behaviour. Effective deployment of staff during breaktimes supports pupils' play and recreation. Pre-prep leaders ensure that the required adult-to-child ratios are maintained in the early years.

33. First aid is delivered in a caring and timely manner. Pupils who are injured or unwell benefit from appropriate first aid and medication provided by staff suitably qualified in first aid, including paediatric first aid.
34. The school's buildings and classrooms are well maintained. Health and safety checks and fire safety procedures are undertaken effectively and in line with requirements. Leaders seek relevant external expertise to maintain all health and safety expectations, including through staff training. Any required actions, including those recommended by external, specialist assessors, are promptly acted upon.
35. Leaders ensure that the admission and attendance registers are suitably maintained. Staff monitor pupils' attendance closely and liaise promptly and supportively with parents if their child's absence level causes concerns.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

- 36. All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

37. The broad and well-planned curriculum is effective in teaching pupils about the importance of kindness and consideration for others. In the early years, children are taught to value the ideas of others through role-play activities. In English and art, older pupils study a range of texts, writers and artists to enhance their appreciation of different cultures. In RE, pupils look closely at the differences and similarities of the major world religions. Topics such as racism, disability and rights and responsibilities are covered in PSHE lessons. These topics are explored further in assemblies and in whole-school activities that mark events such as Black History Month and Neurodiversity Celebration Week. Consequently, pupils develop an understanding of and respect for those of different backgrounds. This prepares them well for life in British society.
38. Pupils learn about democracy in history and PSHE lessons, including different versions of democracy over time and how voting rights have changed. In English, pupils study world war texts and discuss democracy and the loss of freedom. Elections to the school council provide pupils with an understanding of how democracy works in practice. During UK Parliament Week, the school council talks with the local MP to discuss their work and the role of government. Visits from the fire brigade, police and medical professionals build pupils' understanding of different British institutions and public roles.
39. Staff in the early years set consistent routines so that children gain greater independence and learn to collaborate well with adults and each other. Children are taught how to share and take turns. As they get older, pupils are taught how to co-operate with each other in the classroom, on stage and while playing music and sport. The PSHE programme covers topics such as teamwork and friendship. Leaders plan activities, such as enrichment days, house events and the reading buddy scheme, in which pupils in different year groups work together. As a result, pupils learn about the importance of supporting and encouraging each other.
40. Teachers develop pupils' economic understanding effectively. The youngest children are supported to understand the role of money. Older pupils learn about the origins of money in history lessons. Maths topics cover bank accounts, interest rates, taxes and savings. In off-timetable activities, such as the school's 'countries around the world day', pupils acquire an understanding of different currencies and how a bureau de change works.
41. Pupils contribute positively to the local community through a range of charitable activities, such as making gifts for the local care home, donating food to the local foodbank and raising funds for the local hospice. Much of this charitable work is pupil-led. Leaders encourage pupils to initiate and design their own charity events. Pupils design and lead their own dog show, for example, with the funds raised being donated to a local autism charity. Choirs and orchestras regularly perform at local and national venues and take part in the town's annual Remembrance Day services.
42. Pupils contribute to their own community through forums such as the school council. The council has recently started an eco-committee, instigated a change to the school uniform and made improvements to the lunch menu, including 'fruity Friday'. Older pupils act as positive role models for the younger children when taking up positions of responsibility, such as house captain, sports captain and music prefect. These opportunities help to develop pupils' leadership skills and prepare them well for the future.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

43. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

44. Leaders have embedded an effective safeguarding culture throughout the school. The school has an appropriate safeguarding policy. This is reviewed and updated regularly and is available on the school's website. Governors provide close oversight and support for safeguarding leaders. This includes regular and thorough reviews of safeguarding, to ensure that procedures are suitable and in line with statutory requirements. Governors and leaders are aware of the school's contextual safeguarding risks and take effective action to mitigate them.
45. Safeguarding leaders are suitably trained. Staff are provided with routine training from induction onwards, with regular updates and checks on their understanding. This training includes information related to duties, policies and procedures to prevent radicalisation and extremism. Staff are vigilant. They act appropriately and in a timely way if they have a concern.
46. Staff know what is expected of them. They understand the whistleblowing policy and the school's safeguarding processes, including those relating to allegations against adults working with pupils. The relevant systems are used appropriately when required. Leaders maintain a log of any concerns and respond quickly and effectively, including seeking specialist external guidance when needed.
47. Leaders respond promptly to any safeguarding concerns that are raised. They liaise well with external agencies, when required, to seek advice and refer safeguarding concerns. Pupils are provided with the support they need. Records are detailed and are stored securely.
48. Staff teach pupils how to keep themselves safe. This includes regular online safety lessons in PSHE and information and communication technology (ICT). Leaders implement appropriate filtering and monitoring systems to manage the school's internet and digital devices. They respond promptly to any notifications of potentially inappropriate use and regularly review the effectiveness of the filtering and monitoring systems.
49. Suitably trained leaders implement safer recruitment procedures in line with statutory requirements. These are recorded appropriately on the single central record of staff appointments (SCR). Leaders and governors regularly review the SCR to ensure that all the required pre-employment checks have been made on adults before they work with pupils and that they are recorded accurately.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

- 50. All the relevant Standards are met.**

School details

School	St Michael's School
Department for Education number	882/6000
Registered charity number	280688
Address	St Michael's School 198 Hadleigh Road Leigh-on-Sea Essex SS9 2LP
Phone number	01702 478719
Email address	office@stmichaelschool.co.uk
Website	www.stmichaelschool.co.uk
Proprietor	St Michael's School (Leigh-on-Sea) Limited
Chair	Mr Mark Stennett
Headmaster	Mr James Mobbs
Age range	2 to 11
Number of pupils	187
Date of previous inspection	28 February to 2 March 2023

Information about the school

51. St Michael's School is a co-educational independent day school situated in Leigh-on-Sea, Essex. The school is a charitable trust, St Michael's School (Leigh on Sea) Limited. The school premises and chapel are the subject of a scheme between The Chelmsford Diocesan Board of Finance Limited and the school, including the appointment of some of the trustees who take on the role as governors.
52. The school is organised in three sections on the same site: the early years, for children in Nursery and Reception; the pre-prep, for pupils in Years 1 and 2; and the prep, for pupils in Years 3 to 6.
53. There are 46 children in the early years, comprising two Nursery classes and one Reception class.
54. The school has identified 36 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. A very small number of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
55. No pupils have been identified by the school as speaking English as an additional language.
56. The school states its aims are guided by its Christian ethos, to provide pupils with a first-class education and to instil in them a thirst for knowledge and a love of learning. It seeks to inspire and support all pupils to fulfil their potential and develop their talents, confidence, self-esteem, independence and integrity, thereby laying the foundations of a happy and successful life.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

3 to 5 March 2026

57. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

58. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and safeguarding governor
- discussions with the headmaster, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

59. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

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