



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

ST MICHAEL'S PREPARATORY SCHOOL

MARCH 2017



SCHOOL'S DETAILS

School	St Michael's Preparatory School			
DfE number	886/6016			
Registered charity number	307924			
Address	Otford Court Otford Sevenoaks Kent TN14 5SA			
Telephone number	01959 522137			
Email address	office@stmichaels.kent.sch.uk			
Headteacher	Mrs Jill Aisher			
Chair of governors	Ms Paula Carter			
Age range	2 to 13			
Number of pupils on roll	447			
	Boys	246	Girls	201
	Day pupils	447	Boarders	0
	EYFS	119	Years 1-2	75
	Total pre-prep	194	Prep	253
Inspection dates	01 March to 02 March 2017			

PREFACE

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework and DfE requirements. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or a combined inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards following their inspection may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any unmet standards identified at their previous inspection.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is an EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection, reporting on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

Since the school was last inspected, the framework for inspection has changed. The current inspection framework uses different criteria and arrangements for grading from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

All inspections of independent schools in England are conducted according to the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, different inspectorates apply different frameworks that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. The ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by the national inspectorate, Ofsted. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement about key outcomes for pupils and information on the quality of the school's work.

The headline judgements must include one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Graham Gorton

Reporting inspector

Mrs Kerry Cooke

Team inspector (Deputy head, IAPS school)

Miss Katy Morgan

Team inspector (Head of pre-prep, IAPS school)

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 St Michael's Preparatory School is an independent day school for boys and girls between 3 and 13 years. The school was founded in 1872 in Croydon and moved to its present site in 1925 as a boarding school for boys. It first admitted girls in 1990.
- 1.2 The school is a charitable trust administered by a board of trustees and a governing body. Since the previous standard inspection in 2011, the school has added new facilities for the pre-prep department. The school is structured into two departments: the pre-prep, which includes the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Years 1 and 2, and the prep which includes Years 3 to 8.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school aims to provide a varied education within a Christian context. It seeks to challenge and stimulate pupils to achieve excellence, and foster a sense of wonder and joy in learning, so that pupils take pride in their accomplishments. It aims to help children understand their emotions and promote tolerance and respect.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Pupils come from a range of professional backgrounds, mostly from White British families living within a 15-mile radius of the school. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is above average. The school has identified 80 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia and dyspraxia, all of whom receive additional specialist help. None of these pupils has an education, health and care (EHC) plan or a statement of special educational needs. English is an additional language (EAL) for 40 pupils, whose needs are supported by their classroom teachers. Data used by the school have identified 59 pupils as being the more able in the school's population, and the curriculum is modified for them and for 30 other pupils because of their special talents in sport, art, music or drama.
- 1.5 Where the school's own names differ from those used nationally, the details are given in the table below:

<i>School name</i>	<i>National Curriculum name</i>
Nursery (for children aged 2 to 3 years)	Nursery
Kindergarten (for children aged 3 to 4 years)	Nursery

Recommendations from previous inspections

- 1.6 The previous full inspection of the school by ISI was a standard inspection in February 2011. The recommendations from that inspection were:
- Disseminate the approach to assessment and marking in core subjects across all subject areas.
 - In the EYFS, develop further the evaluation of assessment and planning across the setting.
- 1.7 The school has successfully met all the recommendations of the previous inspection. Further detail is given in the main text of the report.

2. KEY FINDINGS

2.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

- The pupils' outstanding communication skills are a strength of the school.
- Pupils display exemplary attitudes and a strong work ethic from a very early age.
- Pupils achieve highly in a wide range of activities.
- Pupils only lose focus and their acquisition of knowledge and development of skills is restricted during the few times when teaching does not meet their individual needs.

2.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

- Pupils' self-understanding is exceptional.
- Pupils display an excellent cultural understanding and wholly represent the inclusive nature of the school.
- Pupils' social awareness is outstanding.

Recommendation

2.3 The school is advised to make the following improvement:

- Ensure that pupils' acquisition of knowledge and development of skills is always supported by teaching that consistently engages them and meets their individual needs.

3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.2 The pupils' outstanding communication skills are a strength of the school. Pupils are articulate, speak passionately and relish the opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas, which they do with maturity and a strong demonstration of linguistic skills. Their writing is detailed and pays strong attention to the rudiments of grammar. Pupils demonstrate excellent listening skills and are genuinely interested in what others have to say. The youngest pupils in the school listen to instructions carefully and are always enthusiastic to share their ideas. The high quality of the pupils' communication skills is often expertly facilitated by school staff, who nurture these skills strongly through partnered discussions and group debates in lessons. Older pupils listened attentively and with sheer delight as staff explained their childhood reading habits during a World Book Day assembly. Younger pupils demonstrated superb verbal skills as they retold part of the class reader, showing insightful perceptions which were delivered with a vivid vocabulary and articulacy.
- 3.3 Pupils display exemplary attitudes and a strong work ethic from a very early age. They are always keen to try their hardest and their attitudes towards learning and achievement are excellent. Pupils apply themselves fully, always support one another in lessons and are happy to use their collaborative skills to achieve a team task. This is reflected in a wide range of activities, such as sports matches and when pupils enthusiastically researched astronauts in science lessons. Pupils delight in their achievements and those of others. Staff genuinely care about their pupils and actively demonstrate enthusiasm and a positive approach to school life which encourages the pupils to do the same. This was reflected in responses to the pre-inspection questionnaires, where almost all pupils agreed that teachers are supportive and helpful if they have any problems with their work.
- 3.4 Pupils achieve highly in a wide range of activities both within school and outside. Their achievements are diverse and reflect the multitude of opportunities afforded them. Pupils demonstrate an excellent range of talents across sport, music, art and drama. Their substantial success at the point of secondary transfer to a wide variety of schools, often with scholarships and awards, is a result of high quality teaching and coaching, as well as leaders' effective embedding of high standards across the school. Leaders ensure that staff focus on the success of each pupil, whatever their interests and competency, whether it be in national team competitions or yoga sessions. Staff have extremely high expectations of pupils, and pupils are always willing to rise to the challenge. The excellent achievement of all pupils is supported by staff's outstanding use of the high quality accommodation and resources.
- 3.5 The school does not undertake National Curriculum tests, but the available evidence shows attainment to be above average in relation to national-age related expectations. Most children in the EYFS reach the level of development typical for their age, and a large majority attain higher than typical standards.
- 3.6 Pupils of all ages and abilities achieve highly and make at least good progress. Pupils with SEND achieve well and progress swiftly due to the high quality of support and excellent intervention strategies they receive. More able pupils make similar rapid progress due to the excellent curriculum and extra-curricular opportunities that reflect and meet their needs. Data show that pupils progress well during their time at the school, with some pupils making excellent progress in core curriculum areas. Leaders successfully address any trends of pupil under-performance through their systematic and comprehensive assessing and tracking of pupils' progress. This fully meets the recommendations from the previous standard inspection. Pupil performance is strengthened through the opportunities given to pupils to meet with staff to

set their own targets each term. In questionnaires, a very large majority of parents agreed that teaching enables their child to make good progress and develop skills for the future. All pupils who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school gives them the opportunity to learn and make good progress.

- 3.7 Pupils are equipped with the skills, knowledge and understanding required to maximise their potential. In the questionnaire, a very large majority of parents agreed that their child's educational needs are met effectively by the school. Pupils of all ages demonstrate high levels of subject knowledge and develop excellent skills which they apply effectively to ensure their achievement is as high as possible. The excellent foundations in the pre-prep provide a strong platform for the pupils as they move through the school. Pupils generally display a high level of knowledge in a wide variety of subject areas as a result of the strength of the curriculum and extra-curricular opportunities. In the questionnaire, an overwhelming majority of parents agreed that the subjects offered by the school is suitable and most agreed that the school provides a good range of extra-curricular activities. All pupils who responded to the questionnaire said that they can be involved in a good range of activities. Pupils' strong knowledge and understanding strongly reflect the impact of the enthusiastic and often dynamic teaching. However, pupils' focus and acquisition of knowledge and skills are restricted during the few times when the teaching and planning does not meet their individual needs.
- 3.8 Pupils are competent mathematicians, showing a strong grasp of computational skills and the practical aspects of the subject. The youngest children in the EYFS identified and sequenced numbers confidently and could work out how many classmates were missing when the register was taken. Pupils use their mathematical skills effectively in other subjects, such as science, geography and information and communication technology (ICT). Pupils' substantial mathematical competence is supported successfully because teaching is well-matched to their needs. For example, the upper prep department groups pupils by prior attainment effectively. Pupils display excellent knowledge and skills in ICT and develop the ability to set up algorithms for coding programs. From an early age in the EYFS, children use programmable toys successfully and with much enjoyment. Pupils of all ages display high levels of competence as they use their excellent IT skills to support their learning in other curriculum areas, such as music and mathematics. Pupils are confident and enthusiastic users of ICT. They demonstrate the ability to research independently, code and be creative. They love emailing their pen-pals in China. They are keen to become digital leaders and show off their expertise to their peers. Coding clubs and a trip to an international ICT provider have supported the development of pupils' skills in this area.
- 3.9 Pupils demonstrate excellent study skills. They reason carefully and apply logic successfully to solve problems. Pupils enjoy the challenges offered in their work and their higher order thinking skills are developed well. They demonstrate excellent analytical skills and are able to think through tasks to reach a conclusion, debating with others and listening to their opinions. Detailed planning and often inspiring, focused teaching enables pupils to settle to activities quickly, focus fully and apply themselves to learning. Pupils take full advantage of initiatives, such as the 'curiosity curriculum', which provide excellent opportunities to pursue lines of enquiry into science, culture, sport, history and politics. Younger pupils in the pre-prep displayed some excellent reasoning skills in predicting what their reading book picture might show. One suggested, "It must be a big vehicle because the pigeon is smaller than the wheel," whilst another exclaimed, "It could be a fire engine, because it is red!"

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 Pupils feel confident and secure in the school, and their self-knowledge and self-esteem are outstanding. Pupils thrive as a result of excellent relationships between themselves and staff. Recent initiatives in developing pupils' understanding of their own thought processes mean that pupils have an acute awareness of how to improve their own learning and performance. Pupils reflect upon their own learning extremely well and set their own targets for improvement. This is demonstrated throughout the curriculum in the way that all lessons are conducted and in the feedback given to children, which successfully promotes pupils' self-awareness and resilience. Teachers actively promote self-reflection so that pupils can judge if they are improving in relation to their desired goals and whether they are taking full advantage of feedback from previous assessments. For example, pupils demonstrated excellent self-awareness as they openly responded to teachers' marking to show how they might improve a historical essay about the feudal system. Most parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed the school promotes an environment which successfully supports their child's personal development.
- 4.3 Pupils display an excellent cultural understanding and represent the inclusive nature of the school. They are enthusiastic and keen to celebrate and embrace other cultures and religions. Pupils show respect for diversity, different faiths and cultures. This is supported by the excellent curriculum where pupils consider other cultures. For example, older pupils discussed aspects of French culture in a language lesson, and children in the EYFS compared African lifestyles to their own. In interviews, pupils spoke passionately about their work on Martin Luther King and the injustices that prevailed when mutual respect was not at the core of society. In the questionnaires, a vast majority of parents, and all pupils, agreed that the school actively promotes values of democracy, respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.
- 4.4 Pupils' social awareness is extremely well developed. An advanced sense of social maturity and a highly collaborative approach underpins all that they do at St Michael's Preparatory School. Children in the EYFS could see how their mutually supportive work on a painting project improved the end result. Pupils understand the effectiveness of working together to achieve a common goal of which everyone can be proud, whether creating their initial learning circle in a prep drama lesson or working together in their house teams to practise harmony for house music. They place a higher value on team success than individual glory; a mature quality that reflects their excellent social development.
- 4.5 Pupils show great maturity when making decisions. They feel they have a voice that is listened to and acted upon. Pupils' decision-making skills and confidence develop because they are given considerable opportunities to be autonomous and independent in lessons. For example, pre-prep pupils make decisions on what kind of materials to use when constructing things, and prep pupils determine when to start particular tasks in English. An active school council gives pupils a voice in the decision-making process at the school and this enables them to feel valued and that their opinions and views matter to everyone.
- 4.6 Pupils have a deep sense of spiritual understanding through their involvement with the school's positive Christian values. Pupils think and reflect during prayer times. Their spiritual development is further enhanced by the school's beautiful environment. Pupils openly express their appreciation of the stunning views and the peace and quiet that prevails. Pupils value the opportunities for creative expression which they feel strengthens their sense of spirituality. Art and music provides excellent opportunities for pupils to develop their spiritual awareness

and this is shown through colourful displays of high quality artwork around the school and in the high profile given to music. Pupils develop an excellent understanding of philosophical issues. This was shown in some of their writing in religious studies about themes such as 'is knowledge of good and evil beneficial?' or 'is anger ever productive?'

- 4.7 Pupils work together extremely well, have an excellent understanding of fairness and aim to follow the school's code of conduct, guided by high staff expectations. Pupils respect each other and demonstrate consistently excellent behaviour, both in and out of the classroom. Pupils are courteous and polite to each other, staff and visitors. They have a deep sense of right or wrong and accept responsibility for their own behaviour, which is reflected in the comprehensive sanctions system and the caring ethos that pervades every aspect of school life. Pupils' ethical values are strengthened through discussions about moral issues, such as the messages imparted in traditional tales, and they understand how some stories set very good examples from which to learn. In the questionnaire, almost all parents agreed that the school actively promotes good behaviour. Every pupil who responded to the questionnaire feels that the school encourages them to behave well and that they understand the sanctions for poor behaviour.
- 4.8 Pupils appreciate they are part of a caring community where every child is encouraged to take on responsibility. This is seen in the dining hall, where every table member has a job to do to ensure that everything is effectively cleared up at lunchtime, such as collecting everyone's plates or refilling the water jug for the next sitting. From a very young age, children love to take on responsibilities that impact positively on school life. Pupils are active fund raisers for the school's chosen charities. They are inspired to share their skills and knowledge with people from the local community for the good of all. One pupil recalled fondly the experience of playing the piano at a local nursing home.
- 4.9 Pupils are well aware of the importance of staying safe and eating healthily. They appreciate the choice of food given to them and understand the need to have the optimum combination of protein, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals. Pupils' strong understanding of how exercise supports a healthy life is nurtured through lessons and the excellent facilities and opportunities for them to enjoy a wide range of sports and activities. Pupils' awareness of safeguarding is extremely strong as a result of assemblies, the school council and lessons. Their appreciation of internet safety is excellent. All pupils who responded to the questionnaire agreed that they know how to keep safe online. Almost all parents who responded to the questionnaire felt that the school does all it can to ensure their child learns in a healthy and safe environment.
- 4.10 The excellence in pupils' personal development reflects the excellence in the school's leadership and management. Leaders put the pupils' happiness and emotional well-being at the centre of their work, so that pupils come to the school knowing that they are appreciated, respected, cared for and valued.