



St Michael's C.E. Middle School
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FAQs about joining St Michaels in September 2022

These questions arose from parental inquiries over the last few months. We hope by grouping them we have not missed the essence of the question:

- If you live out of catchment and fall into category F on your admissions policy, from previous years' experience, what is the likelihood of getting a place at St Michael's?

In category F (faith criterion), based on previous years, everyone gets in. We recognise many families have not been able to be physically present in church during the virus so we will accept letters from Vicars/Pastors which confirm an ongoing commitment to church life in general rather than confirmed attendance.

In reality, whatever your faith background, **if you put us as your first choice school**, in the first round of applications, you will be highly likely to get a place as we have over 60 places for children outside our official catchment area. Please check out our admissions leaflet that explains all this: https://www.stmichaelsmiddle.org/_site/data/files/documents/AE719EAE461422E05BA1E321708B11CE.pdf?pid=16 Please do contact Mr Jenkinson directly, via the school office, if you would find it helpful to talk through your personal circumstances prior to applying for a place.
- In year transition support (buddies?) / Developing confidence in starting middle school/ Middle School is a big jump from primary school especially as the children have had a large lockdown gap of schools. How are you supporting / adapting to this gap?

In a normal year, as well as a visit to school for all pupils we arrange extra visits for those coming from smaller schools so that they can meet other pupils before transfer day. This is on top of the work by Year 5 leads who visit all the children in their home school. Before arriving Year 8 Peer Mentors write to their nominated Year 4s to introduce themselves and then on the first day they all meet up in a safe environment. The Year 5s love this because it makes them feel like they have an older friend in school. It also makes the school feel smaller quickly because they get to know more people including their buddy's friends!

Academically, we are well placed to support any gaps in learning. Every year we receive pupils from over 17 different schools so although they have had amazing experiences in First School clearly the variety of their experiences mean that there are differences, if not gaps. Our team have developed a curriculum which allows us to quickly identify where these differences are and adjust weekly planning accordingly. We have also developed a great Teaching Assistant team including some teachers who have recently trained in proven intervention programmes that allow us to deliver comprehensive tailored support.
- Will children with SEN be able to visit the school as part of a smaller group for Transfer- if covid is still around in the summer?

Last year, in peak covid we brought people onto site in the open environment, it wasn't the same but it did help everyone who came. As with all things covid at this time, we will take guidance and work with local schools on an agreed plan but our preference would be for pupils to have as full a transfer

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as possible. For pupils with SEN we did do COVID secure visits to school as we know that for them the anxiety can be even greater.

4. Do you offer netball to Year 5's? Do you do cricket? Do you do lots of different music lessons? What sport and arts provisions do you have?

St Michaels has amazing clubs- existing pupils often talk about the great choice. We try and offer as many as possible and we ask all our teachers to run at least one club each. For sport there is something for everyone across the year and although we do this for fun we are really proud of our record in tournaments with finalists and semi-finalists in boys' and girls' football and cricket; swimming; cross country; athletics; basketball etc.

Music is also a massive thing for us whether that is individual lessons; orchestra; jazz orchestra; battle of the bands; and every second year we put on a musical too!!

Additionally, we run clubs, tech clubs, design clubs, science clubs, eco club school council and if you want a club that we aren't doing we will try and run that too- really - because we just love it when pupils get stuck in!

5. How does the school enable parents to understand what their child is learning?

As well as the details on the school website,

<https://www.stmichaelsmiddle.org/page/?title=Curriculum&pid=28>, there are a range of things we do to help. These include frequent parents' evenings focussed around your child and information evenings in Year 6 specifically to explain the curriculum surrounding Standard Assessment Tests (SATS). We also run workshops called 'Learning Live' for some families who have demonstrated that they want more help for supporting their child to catch up with learning at home. Increasingly we are also using online resources to help. At Key Stage 2 there are two programmes which help parents keep up with children's learning. One is Accelerated Reader which records how much reading pupils are doing and whether they are retaining key elements of the plot and vocabulary. The other is Hegarty Maths which allows pupils to watch online videos over and over again and share those with parents too if they are stuck. The quizzing after the video either moves pupils on or goes back over the previous ground until the learning is secure.

6. What event stands out over the academic year as being the most popular with the children?

Mr Jenkinson's favourite question to pupils on a daily basis is "what's been your favourite lesson this week and why" and the thing that makes him proudest is that it is never the same answer! With over 600 individuals in school there has to be something for everyone and at St Michael's it seems there always is. We can say that those children who go on one of our many residential trips always remember those experiences with great excitement whether it is Heatree in Year 6, River Dart Park in Year 7, France and/or the Tall Ships Expedition in Year 8. We also like to have special moments in the year like big fundraisers which, over the last 3 years, have raised over £20,000- pupils loved the world record breaking dress up as Flash event and the sponsored Dance-a-thon.

7. Are weekly swimming lessons part of the Year 5 and/or 6 curriculum?

Yes and Year 7 & 8 too. There are also swim clubs for beginners and those entering competitions.

8. What support or interventions do you put in place if a child is struggling?

Working closely with First school we have a clear idea of those pupils who may be behind in their learning. For many, great teaching can help them catch up but pupils with special educational needs may need more help. Mrs Ramsey is our school SENCO, she leads on supporting pupils with SEN and if your child has diagnosed SEN then please do contact her. For all other pupils there are a range of things we do on top of excellent classroom practice including: 1:1 coaching interventions; short term targeted interventions around spelling, comprehension and arithmetic; group interventions including a programme called Direct Instruction. We have also found that children need a vast array of emotional and well-being support which for us includes: Emotional Literacy groups, 1:1 mentoring; Dog therapy; Forest School; anxiety workshops; and tailored social activity clubs.

9. How do you cater for varying abilities within core subjects?



As per the best current guidance within education at the moment we ensure that all children master the core curriculum but we recognise that some pupils are able to move through this more quickly. In Year 5 we have consistently found that pupils make the most progress being with their class teacher who settles them into school and has the time to get to know all their strengths and weaknesses. In Year 6 we introduce a support group to maths and two parallel extension groups; again most pupils will be taught English by their form tutor. In Year 7 and 8 we also introduce extension groups into English. Our assessment data tells us that our pupils consistently achieve well above national

10. How do you shape and maximise child's potential and their onward learning journey?
- This is such an important question because it implicitly reminds us that each child is unique and has their own onward journey. Some of our strategies come from the size of school we are- we can offer more bespoke experiences just because we have more staff. So, whether that is the range of clubs or academic interventions we have lots going on. As well as pupils' First School data we do use a couple of tests in Year 5 to help us maintain an ambitious trajectory for pupils; one is called a CAT test and the other is GL. Both test offer slightly different information but make sure we don't set low expectations for pupils. Another key aspect of our culture is that we place a great emphasis on individuality, even our mission statement reminds us that 'each person is uniquely made' and so, for example, the relationship that form tutors build with their classes is key. It's why in the first half term in Year 5 we run an activity week that takes pupils off timetable to face challenges and teamwork building skills so we can see what they are really like.
- As children move through school it is right and proper that we begin to expose them to the world of work. Through our Careers programme we want every child to leave us with the knowledge the wonderful range of careers out there for example, we have ex-pupils currently at university doing degrees in Aeronautical Gymnastics and Competitive Equestrianism- who knew!
- One of our extension programmes in Year 8 focuses on Leadership through the Sports Leader programme and this helps us to recognise and build leadership skills in pupils of great potential.
- Finally, we think our nature as a Middle school helps. Pupils who stay with us for four years leave us as young adults who typically know and understand themselves much better than an 11yr old. So many children lose their way in the early years of secondary school with a drop off in music and sports whereas our pupils accelerate into those teenage years. If pupils can fully absorb our core ABC values (Aspiration, Belief and Creativity) we know we will have equipped them for future success.

We could have written more and I'm sure there will be other questions so don't hesitate to contact the school for more information: office@stmichaelsmiddle.org