

St Michael's EAL Quality Mark Gold Award

Google search can be very unkind. St Michael's RC Primary School is in the part of Newcastle called Elswick. If you type Elswick Newcastle into Google, you are offered an alternative: Elswick Newcastle rough.

I have a very different view of Elswick because I know about St Michael's RC Primary School. Test results do matter in schools, but moral purpose matters more. St Michael's moral purpose leads a deep engagement not just with all of the school's stakeholders- parents, pupils and staff- but also the wider Elswick community and the range of community groups that have helped Elswick through COVID 19.

Let's not think that test results don't matter at St Michael's. The data tell us a lot. 62% of current pupils are disadvantaged, but in 2019 76% of all pupils reached the expected standard in reading, writing and maths (the national figure was 65%); 74% of disadvantaged did so (the national figure was 51%) as 88% of EAL pupils (compared to a national figure of 64%).

The school invests heavily in pre-teaching across the curriculum. It sees its Forest School as a major opportunity for language development.

Above all St Michael's knows its families and its community very well. The initial meeting with parents of new arrivals is built around an excellent bank of questions (you can download them [here](#)). The school asks about languages used at home, not the language, and clarifies who uses which language. It asks about the extended family and family and community networks.

One indicator of St Michael's relationship with its wider community is that it is a School of Sanctuary. Another is its response to COVID19. Its strong relationships with community partners enabled it to establish a food bank and to deliver 1645 meals. To ensure continuity in learning for pupils, it found ways of helping a small number of families with absolutely no internet access and many more with only mobile phones with limited data that does not stretch to many hours of online lessons each week. The school's links with refugee organisations allow it to find support for children from families with no recourse to public funds.

St Michael's is one of the safest, kindest and most aspirational places you could hope to see. Maybe if we all googled "St Michael's Elswick safe kind aspirational" several times, we could nudge Google into a fairer view of Elswick.

Graham Smith

EAL Academy

November 2020