

Marston Vale Middle School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	109653
Local authority	Bedford Borough
Inspection number	377959
Inspection dates	29 February–1 March 2012
Lead inspector	Martin Cragg HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	564
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Adele Moore
Headteacher	Jim Godfrey
Date of previous school inspection	3 June 2009
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Age group	9–13
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Introduction

Inspection team

Martin Cragg

Her Majesty's Inspector

Lisa Fraser

Additional inspector

Miranda Perry

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 26 parts of lessons involving 23 teachers. They also made 14 brief visits to lessons. They held meetings with the headteacher, a range of staff, groups of pupils, and the Chair of the Governing Body. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. They observed the school's work, and looked at its development plan, assessment information, evidence of self-evaluation, and the governing body's minutes and policies. Inspectors reviewed questionnaire responses from 362 parents and carers, 100 pupils and 34 staff.

Information about the school

The school is smaller than most secondary schools but of average size for a middle school. It has 80 more pupils on roll than at the time of the last inspection. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is above average and has increased since the last inspection.

By the end of Year 6, after two years in the school, pupils usually meet the current government floor standard measures, which set the minimum expectation for attainment and progress. However, this was not the case in 2011 when the school exceeded the standard for attainment but not for progress.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. It is a calm and purposeful environment where pupils enjoy learning. They show respect for each other. Staff foster good relationships which contribute strongly to pupils' confidence and their achievement. Senior staff set high expectations and a clear vision for the school. Although it has strong features, the school is not outstanding because progress varies between Key Stages 2 and 3. Self-evaluation is well-developed at subject level but this information is not always drawn together effectively.
- Pupils leave the school with attainment that is well above expectations. All groups, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, make good progress from their starting points and meet challenging targets. The strong emphasis on pupils' basic skills ensures that they read, write, communicate and manage numbers well.
- Teaching is good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons well. They ensure that pupils understand what they are learning and assess their progress regularly. They use a wide range of activities to interest pupils and challenge them to apply their skills. They give good verbal feedback to pupils on how to improve their work but this is not so consistent in written work.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school, collaborating successfully and taking responsibility willingly. They respond very promptly to teachers' requests. They say that they feel safe and consider that any bullying is dealt with effectively.
- Leadership and management at all levels are good. The curriculum is innovative, emphasising the environment and the use of modern technology to aid learning. Senior staff know the school's strengths and areas for development. They take prompt action to redress issues in teaching and pupils' achievement. They monitor pupils' progress closely and provide an effective range of additional support for individuals.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the rate of pupils' progress in Years 5 and 6 so that it matches that in Years 7 and 8.
- Ensure that the guidance provided by teachers to pupils through verbal feedback is recorded equally well in their written work so that all have a clear understanding of the next steps for improvement.
- Strengthen the evaluation of performance by subject leaders to improve school planning.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils' achievement is good. They enter the school in Year 5 with attainment that is above national expectations. By the end of Year 8, pupils' attainment is well above expectations. Pupils make good progress from their starting points. Their progress in Years 5 and 6 is satisfactory and attainment is just above average at the end of Year 6. However, the good emphasis on basic skills ensures that they make accelerated progress in Years 7 and 8. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs benefit from a range of specific support and interventions, targeted to their particular needs. They make good progress overall, as do pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and the few who speak English as an additional language.

Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning. They concentrate well in lessons and try hard whatever their ability. They thrive in the all-boy or all-girl groups in English and mathematics. Pupils enjoy working together in pairs and small groups, wasting no time in organising themselves. They take responsibility well, setting up equipment for experiments quickly yet safely in science and acting as expert markers for others in mathematics. Pupils apply their knowledge and understanding well, making good progress. Pupils, parents and carers confirmed in responses to questionnaires that learning is good.

Pupils enjoy the work that they do to improve their basic skills. Most lessons start with activities which test their understanding. In mathematics this involves timed, mental arithmetic tasks. Pupils are competitive and show mainly good number skills. In guided reading lessons, they read enthusiastically and enjoy checking their recall of books using computer-generated quizzes. Pupils all have a reading book. They read aloud accurately to inspectors, often with expression and fluency, showing good understanding of what they had read. Pupils' attainment in reading is broadly average by the end of Year 6 but it is well above expectations by the time they leave Year 8.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is good. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and plan lessons well. They form good relationships with pupils and set clear expectations, using school procedures consistently. They establish a very effective climate for learning in which pupils flourish and try hard. They set clear objectives and ensure that pupils understand exactly what they are to learn. In the best examples, the curriculum relates to real problems, as in science where pupils found out about

forces and materials by exploring how to transport objects to the moon, coinciding with a trip to the National Space Centre. Teachers develop pupils' social skills effectively through regular paired or group work and build their confidence by expecting them to organise themselves and take responsibility. In history, they enjoyed re-enacting the trial of King Charles I. Teachers use a range of questions well to check pupils' understanding and develop their thinking. As a result, lessons move at a good pace, challenge pupils of different abilities and secure good progress. Pupils, parents and carers in responses to questionnaires confirm that teaching is good over time, and inspectors agree.

The planned curriculum focuses teachers effectively on consolidating pupils' basic skills across the range of subjects. Teachers reinforce reading, writing and numeracy well in their lessons. For example, pupils practised reading skills in mathematics, scanning to select key terms in problems expressed in words. This helped them to identify and record the number problem accurately. In science, the teacher used pupils' knowledge of how to calculate the volume of objects to assist in experiments on the density of materials. In a guided reading lesson, the teacher carefully used questions to help low ability pupils extract key information from what they had read. This enables pupils to make good progress in English and mathematics by the time they leave Year 8, although progress is not as rapid in Years 5 and 6 because teachers have to improve pupils' basic skills and provide additional support to those who have gaps in their knowledge and understanding.

Teachers provide regular verbal feedback on pupils' work, helping them to understand what they need to do next. Pupils regularly assess their own progress or work. They understand the routines which teachers use for this, often closing their eyes before indicating whether they agree with an answer so that they are not influenced by what others might decide. They use criteria for success well to review their progress and that of their peers, as in an art lesson where they gave constructive advice to others. Teachers provide very detailed written guidance on how to improve work in some subjects, such as the humanities and English, but this is not consistent across all staff.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour is good. In lessons and around the school, they respond well to teachers' high expectations, behave sensibly and safely, and work together well. They are courteous and show respect for each other. They concentrate in lessons and respond positively to challenging targets and strict time allocation for tasks. For example, a low ability class in mathematics focused throughout the lesson, changing activities without fuss, working independently or in pairs, using equipment and completing tasks within a given timescale. Parents and carers in their questionnaire responses stated that behaviour in lessons was good and this was confirmed in discussions with pupils. The school council has provided advice on the behaviour policy. Pupils' attendance has improved since the last inspection and is well above average. Pupils move between lessons purposefully and punctuality is good so that learning starts promptly.

Pupils have a good understanding of what bullying is. In discussions, they said that incidents were rare. They recognise different types of bullying. For example, they

recalled visits from police officers to talk about variations of cyber bullying and how to keep safe. Pupils are confident that they can report any concerns to adults and that they will be dealt with. A few older pupils did not feel that staff always communicate what action has been taken but felt that issues were resolved. Pupils, parents and carers in their responses to questionnaires stated that the school was a safe place. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs feel particularly well supported and benefit from activities which provide a reassuring experience during breaks and opportunities to improve their social skills.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and senior staff set a clear vision for the school. They have high expectations of pupils' behaviour, effort and achievement. The climate for learning in the school is very strong and, in conjunction with good teaching, this ensures that pupils achieve well. The school's self-evaluation is thorough, especially at subject level. Staff monitor pupils' progress closely and promptly identify any who are underachieving, providing effective intervention to help them improve. Senior staff monitor the quality of teaching rigorously. Concerted training to improve the quality of assessment and verbal feedback has improved pupils' knowledge of their targets. Straightforward policies help teachers to apply strategies for managing behaviour consistently so that pupils learn well in purposeful lessons. Although the school's development plans are clear and have relevant priorities, the information from separate subject evaluations is not always drawn together clearly enough. The school has worked hard to improve attendance which is now well above average. It has also increased the proportion of pupils working beyond the expectations for their age by the time they leave Year 8. The school has good capacity to improve further.

The curriculum is good. It is broad and meets the needs of a wide range of pupils, especially through the effective intervention programme in English and mathematics. The school has a strong commitment to develop environmental awareness and the use of modern technology, for example providing electronic books to help weaker readers. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school provides a good range of enrichment activities, including leadership opportunities and regular trips, which broaden pupils' experience. Pupils develop effective learning skills which equip them well for further study. They understand other faiths and cultures and enjoy artistic and musical activities. They improve their self-control and awareness, responding maturely to the meditation exercises used in tutor groups and the daily exercise period at lunchtime.

The governing body knows the school's strengths and areas for development. Its members increasingly challenge senior staff to explain progress and performance. The school has effective procedures to keep pupils safe which meet statutory requirements. A small number of parents and carers did not feel staff communicated well about their concerns. However, the large majority of those who responded to the questionnaires were positive about all features of the school. The school promotes equality of opportunity well. Pupils mix well and there are few incidents of bullying or racist behaviour. Pupils from a range of backgrounds and of differing abilities make equally good progress as they move through the school.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



2 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Marston Vale Middle School, Stewartby, MK43 9NH

Thank you for the welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking with you in lessons, meetings and at breaks. Thanks also to those of you who filled in a questionnaire. Your views helped us find out about the school.

Marston Vale is a good school. You behave well and have positive attitudes to learning in your lessons. You told us that you feel safe and that adults deal with any bullying promptly. Your attendance has improved and is well above average. Teaching is good because teachers set clear objectives, make sure that you understand what you have to do and keep up the pace of lessons. You enjoy challenging tasks and a range of practical activities in lessons. You assess your own progress and that of your peers. As a result, you make good progress and attainment is well above average by the time you leave the school. The curriculum is broad and you benefit from a good range of events, trips and clubs. You find out about the environment and use modern technology to help you learn. You have opportunities through the school council to inform procedures such as the behaviour policy. You also benefit from taking responsibility and leadership roles. Your headteacher and senior staff set high expectations for your work and behaviour and these help you to be successful.

We asked the school to improve some areas of its work. These were to:

- increase your progress in Years 5 and 6
- ensure that the guidance you receive from teachers verbally on how to improve your work is also recorded consistently in your written work
- draw together the information on your progress from different subjects to help the school identify important areas for it to improve its work.

You can help by making sure that you act on the guidance given by teachers to help you improve your work.

We enjoyed our visit to your school and wish you success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Martin Cragg
Her Majesty's Inspector

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