

Ryecroft CofE (C) Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124450
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	359673
Inspection dates	16–17 November 2010
Reporting inspector	David Anstead 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	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	182
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pat Curtis
Headteacher	Stephen Bardon
Date of previous school inspection	9 July 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. The inspection team saw 11 part lessons taught by 10 different teachers. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, staff and the Chair of the Governing Body. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at pupils' books, analysed assessment data, checked policies, observed a school council meeting and read reports about the school from the local authority. The views of 27 parents and carers, 98 pupils and 25 members of staff expressed in questionnaires were taken into account.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- What do school assessments and lesson observations show about the progress made by pupils between Years 5 and 8, and their attainment?
- How effectively does teaching, and particularly the use of assessment, meet pupils' differing needs?
- How successful are the school's leaders in identifying and tackling weaknesses and bringing about sustained improvement?

Information about the school

The school is much smaller than other middle schools. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. Around one per cent of pupils are from minority ethnic groups, and around a half of all pupils travel from remote rural locations. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. The senior leadership of the school has been substantially reformed since the last inspection. The school holds the International School award.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**3****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****3**

Main findings

This is a satisfactory and rapidly improving school. The school was in a precarious position for the year following the last inspection. During this time it was overseen by acting headteachers, who conducted a thorough evaluation of the quality of provision and identified that around one third of the teaching was inadequate. At the same time the number of pupils on roll was falling, leading to a reduction in income which in turn reduced the number of staff the school could employ. Consequently, the current headteacher faced a difficult and challenging set of circumstances when appointed just over a year ago, and set about tackling the school's problems by creating a new senior leadership team and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of other leaders and managers. This enabled the school to conduct a detailed audit of all aspects of its work and to identify a prioritised set of actions to begin to turn its fortunes around.

Monitoring and evaluation of provision are rigorous and insightful, and so the school has a good grasp of its strengths and weaknesses and is taking appropriate action to bring about improvement. Pupils, staff, governors, and parents and carers have all contributed to establishing the school's vision for its future and place in the community. The resulting plan sets out a number of detailed strategic intentions. Monitoring of the progress made in implementing the plan is extremely thorough, and there are good systems in place to make sure the school moves swiftly towards realising its ambitious vision. It is doing the right things in the right order. Parents and carers commented on a real sense of momentum about its work, and a collective desire to do better. Already the impact of good leadership, ambition and drive can be seen. The curriculum and care, guidance and support are now good, behaviour is better and now good, and attainment at the end of Year 8 is up. As these improvements are relatively recent, the school is demonstrating a satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

There is a strong commitment to individualised care and support, and a personalised curriculum. This is a strength of a small school such as Ryecroft, where pupils and staff get to know each other well, but also a challenge because the resources with which to do it are limited. This good provision results in a majority of pupil outcomes also being good. Pupils say they feel safe at the school, and their parents and carers agree. Pupils enjoy school and this is reflected in their high levels of attendance. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The international school work gives the mainly White British pupils from small rural communities a good understanding of other cultures. There is good provision for collective worship, sometimes led by pupils and sometimes by the vice-chair of the governing body who is a vicar. The school successfully boosts the self-esteem and confidence of pupils. One parent wrote: 'When my child arrived at Ryecroft she wasn't confident and didn't think she was good at school. The progress she's made at Ryecroft has been fantastic. She is doing really well in her studies...has appeared in school plays and represented the school at sport.'

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The quality of teaching and learning has improved more slowly. Although some good teaching was seen, overall the quality of teaching and the use of assessment are satisfactory, resulting in satisfactory achievement. Attainment in mathematics has improved to above average, but attainment in writing is below average. The school is aware that it does not provide enough planned opportunities for pupils to consolidate their writing skills in different subjects. There is some confusion in teachers' planning between identifying learning objectives for the lesson and the tasks pupils will complete. This is because teachers do not use assessment information well enough to plan work of appropriate challenge for pupils' individual ability levels. Consequently classes tend to be given the same work to do, which is too easy for some and too hard for others. Teachers over-direct learning, leaving insufficient time for pupils to work autonomously and to engage in collaborative group work. Pupils are aware of their target grades, but most were unable to explain what they needed to do to improve their work in order to reach them.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in writing by ensuring there is a strong focus on promoting literacy across the curriculum.
- Improve the quality of teaching and the use of assessment by:
 - ensuring teachers use assessment information to plan tasks of appropriate challenge for all the pupils in their classes
 - providing pupils with more opportunities to work independently in ways which they choose and in small groups
 - making sure pupils understand what they need to do to improve their work.
- Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Attainment on entry is broadly average. Pupils make satisfactory progress so that attainment at the end of Year 8 is average overall. It is above average in mathematics, average in reading and below average in writing. In the 2010 national tests the attainment of Year 6 pupils fell sharply due to sustained turbulence in staffing. The school's analysis of data identified that lower attaining pupils had been most affected by these circumstances, and it has acted swiftly and vigorously in providing additional support. Tracking data this year show that the school has been successful in helping lower-attaining pupils make up lost ground. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are now making satisfactory progress in all year groups, and the achievement of all other ability groups is satisfactory. Although pupils have good opportunities to experience business working and to act as class representatives, the preparation for their future economic well-being is limited by the weaknesses in their literacy skills.

Where learning is good, pupils work on different tasks determined by their teachers' awareness of their differing ability levels. Pupils work at a good pace and are clear about their learning objectives. However, much learning is characterised by pupils being occupied in completing the tasks they are set, with insufficient focus on what they will

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understand better or be able to do better as a result. For instance, in one English lesson pupils spent much of the time designing and making pop-up cards, which left little time for them to learn how to write instructions for others on how to use their cards even though this was the learning objective of the activity.

Pupils make a good contribution to the school in taking on tasks organised by the house captains and through their participation as representatives on the school council. Despite the good provision for pupils to learn about living healthy lifestyles, many choose to eat crisps and chocolates rather than healthier options.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

About half of the teaching seen was good and the rest mostly satisfactory, which is in line with how the school judges the current quality of teaching. In general teachers over-directed learning and gave pupils insufficient opportunities to decide for themselves how to proceed with tasks when working independently. Only in a few lessons was assessment good or better. In these lessons pupils' written work was regularly marked and detailed comments were written for them by the teacher to explain to them how they might improve their work. In most lessons teachers did not provide sufficient written guidance on how to improve.

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The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum that caters well for both the academic and personal needs of pupils. Good cross-curricular planning ensures that pupils have regular opportunities to consolidate their key numerical and information and communication technology skills, and the school has responded appropriately to the identified weaknesses in writing by planning to launch an initiative designed to improve sentence structure and punctuation. Gifted and talented pupils are supported through initiatives such as a visit to Liverpool to stretch their literacy skills and a version of Dragons' Den where pupils have to design a product and deal with challenging questioning. Excellent provision for pupils to learn French at Key Stage 2 results in above-average attainment in their speaking skills. A good range of well-attended after-school activities, plus many other opportunities, are made available through partnerships with outside clubs and societies. Some curriculum developments have been introduced quite recently and have not yet had a full impact on the progress made by pupils.

Pupils are enthusiastic in their praise of how well the school cares for and supports them. One said, 'Teachers are always available to help if you need it.' Pupils are known as individuals, and a strong pastoral system supports intervention where necessary through good links with outside agencies. Evidence was seen of the good care and support made for pupils whose circumstances had led to diverse and challenging needs. Good transition arrangements for pupils who join Year 5 enable them to settle into their new school quickly and smoothly.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Parents and carers are appreciative of the impact the headteacher has had in his short time at the school. He has succeeded in uniting the staff and given the school a clear direction and ambition, and this is supporting a gradual improvement in the quality of teaching. A new system for tracking pupils' progress has been introduced. This enables the school to check that different groups of pupils are making sufficient progress and to take remedial action where necessary. Systems for identifying and tackling any inequalities between groups are satisfactory. The governing body has a satisfactory grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses and provides good support, but does not always monitor its work with sufficient rigour.

The management of resources and the required budget reduction is good, and clear attention has been given to finding ways of protecting provision whilst cutting expenditure. Building good partnerships with other organisations has made an important contribution to this as well as enhancing aspects of provision. A strong partnership with

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local schools has facilitated impressive coordinated planning of activities for promoting community cohesion, and has meant that the nearby high school provides a language assistant to help pupils improve their French speaking skills. The school's evaluation of its rural context is excellent and is used well to inform the good promotion of community cohesion locally and globally through its international school work. Safeguarding procedures are good and related staff training is of good quality.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

The parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire were largely positive in their views. All agreed that their children enjoy school and that they are kept safe. A higher-than-average proportion were less positive about the advice the school provides on how they can support their child's learning, about the progress their children are making, and about the extent to which the school takes account of their views. The school has worked hard to improve its engagement with parents and carers, uses a good range of communications about life at the school and good systems for seeking the views of parents and carers. Inspectors found satisfactory arrangements for informing parents and carers of the work their children will be doing, but the school recognises that it does not always provide enough detailed advice on how they can help.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ryecroft CofE (C) Middle School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 27 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 182 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	17	63	10	37	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	18	67	9	33	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	8	30	15	56	1	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	12	44	12	44	1	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	11	41	14	52	1	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	11	41	11	41	2	7	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	10	37	14	52	1	4	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	14	52	11	41	1	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	13	48	12	44	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	11	41	13	48	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	10	37	12	44	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	17	63	9	33	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	15	56	10	37	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



18 November 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ryecroft CofE (C) Middle School, Uttoxeter, ST14 5JR

Thank you for your friendly welcome when we inspected your school. We found that your school is satisfactory and that it is improving. The school looks after you well and you told us that behaviour has got better. We saw you behaving well in lessons and around the school. We were very pleased to see your attendance is so high and this is because you enjoy coming to school and feel safe there.

Although we saw quite a few good lessons, most teaching at the school is satisfactory. This is because your teachers often give the whole class the same work to do, and it is sometimes too easy for some of you and too hard for others. In many lessons teachers do not let you have enough involvement in deciding how you will complete your work and there are not enough times when you work together in small groups. You know your target grades but most teachers have not explained to you what you need to do to reach them. Assessments at the end of Year 8 show you are doing well in mathematics but not so well in writing. Your headteacher is doing a good job of making the school better.

I have asked your headteacher to improve your work by:

- giving you lots of opportunities to develop your writing
- making sure you understand how to reach your target grades
- helping your teachers set you work that is not too difficult or easy for you
- giving you more say in how you will do your work.

You can help by following the guidance your teachers give you about how to improve your work, and by choosing to eat healthier food at break times instead of crisps and chocolate.

Yours sincerely

David Anstead

Her Majesty's Inspector

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