

Stowmarket Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124821
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	359782
Inspection dates	9–10 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Ian Seath 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	527
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lesley Mayes
Headteacher	Sally Holmes
Date of previous school inspection	4 March 2008
School address	Walnut Tree Walk Stowmarket IP14 1JP
Telephone number	01449 742510
Fax number	01449 774637
Email address	head@stowmarketmiddle.suffolk.sch.uk

Age group	9–13
Inspection dates	9–10 March 2011
Inspection number	359782

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 4234

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2011

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Lessons were observed on 24 occasions with 22 teachers seen. In addition, a larger number of shorter visits to classes were made to gain evidence for themes identified during the inspection. Inspectors observed the school's work, looked at documentation, and met with students, staff, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors received and analysed 186 completed questionnaires from parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Does the performance of boys and those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities differ significantly from their peers?
- Do the progress and standards attained by students in Key Stage 3 accelerate from Key Stage 2?
- How effectively do managers, leaders and governors set challenging targets for improvement and monitor progress towards them?

Information about the school

The school is smaller than the average secondary. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is lower than the national average, as is the proportion students from minority ethnic heritages. Fewer than average have special educational needs and/or disabilities and the catchment is one of relatively low deprivation. The school is subject to the reorganisation plans of the local authority which is moving from a three-tier to a two-tier system. The school has Healthy School status, and a Basic Skills 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 school overall in which there are good aspects and early indications of improvements in standards especially in mathematics, and increasingly in English. Standards reached at the end of Key Stage 2 have been low in recent years. This reflects lower-than-average prior attainment and slow progress during this phase. At Key Stage 3, standards have begun to accelerate, and though this trend is not yet fully established progress through the school as a whole is satisfactory.

The school has responded successfully to some of the issues identified at the last inspection, although standards have remained low at Key Stage 2. Issues remain around the extent to which assessment practice is incorporated to aid learning in all classes. Governors are aware of the schools strengths and weaknesses, but have not challenged the school's performance systematically. Some targets for the improvement of standards are low. Aspects of the school's self-evaluation is overgenerous, although detailed plans for the improvement of mathematics and English are robust and are beginning to have an impact. Consequently, the school is demonstrating a satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

Teaching and learning and the use of assessment have improved but are not consistent across the school. Where assessment is used well to structure learning it is effective in driving up progress. Sometimes however there is a mismatch between what is taught and what could be learnt by students, particularly the most able. The school's lesson observation system identifies many aspects of good practice but these are not always disseminated systematically across the school. The system does not give sufficient emphasis to learning and standards in class.

Attendance is high. Students are well-cared for and are given good support and guidance particularly at times of transition between schools. A combination of the good curriculum and good support has meant that those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities now make better progress than their peers. Differences in the attainment of boys and girls have been recognised and tackled, for example, by the introduction of single-gender English classes in Year 8.

A small minority of students and a few parents raised concerns about poor behaviour and the consistency with which it is dealt with at the school. A small number raised issues around bullying. This was not seen by inspectors however, who observed behaviour that was generally at least satisfactory throughout the school.

Leaders and managers have identified most of the issues facing the school. Targets are generally clear though progress towards them is not always well monitored. Governors are not fully familiar with the use of school performance and improvement data which has impeded their ability to challenge effectively. Governors have ensured that the school

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

meets all statutory requirements, and safeguarding arrangements are good. However their monitoring and comparison of the performance of different groups of pupils is underdeveloped.

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.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Within nine months, improve the governance of the school by:
 - ensuring that governors are more familiar with school performance data
 - improving the extent of the challenge that governors give the school
 - ensuring that progress towards targets is systematically monitored
 - improve the monitoring of attainment and progress of different groups of students.
- Within nine months, improve teaching and learning by:
 - ensuring lessons take into account the range of starting points of students
 - improving the identification and sharing of the best practice
 - ensuring that the lesson observation system pays sufficient attention to learning and standards in class rather than teaching
 - ensuring that governors set targets for the improvement of teaching and learning and monitor progress towards them.
- Within nine months, address the concerns of the minority of students and parents around behaviour.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Students enter the school in Year 5 with levels of prior attainment that are generally below national expectations. By the end of Key Stage 2 they have made broadly satisfactory progress so standards remain below average. They continue to make broadly satisfactory progress in the first two years of Key Stage 3 until they leave at the end of Year 8. Students leave with attainment that is broadly average. There are some signs of recent improvement, most notably in mathematics where progress is a little better and standards higher.

Boys reach standards that are lower than girls although compared to their starting point the progress they make is similar. In English however the gap between boys and girls widened markedly in 2010 with boys underachieving significantly. More recent data indicate that this gap is now narrowing because of measures the school has taken to tackle the issue and this was confirmed in classroom observations. The students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because of the good care guidance and support that they receive.

In class, students are generally compliant and classroom observations confirmed the satisfactory progress that they make. In those classes where they are encouraged to do so, students develop skills of independent and collaborative learning well. For example in a

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

Year 5 English class students of all abilities helped each other very well in their learning and so made good progress. Overall however these skills are not well developed across the school. Inspectors observed behaviour around the school that was generally calm and well ordered.

The very large majority of students and almost all parents and carers say that they enjoy their time at school. Attendance is high and persistent absence low. Students show a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle and participate well in the school's good extracurricular activities and sports. Students make good contributions to their school and the wider community, for example through the school council.

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	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
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?

The quality of teaching is inconsistent. Good or very good practice exists but it is not identified well or shared. Overall, teaching is satisfactory because it generates learning and progress that are satisfactory. In the most successful classes teaching is lively and successfully maintains students' interest by using a variety of techniques. In these classes independent learning is encouraged, class discussions are productive and stimulating, and careful planning ensures that all students make good progress. Students of all abilities are stretched both by each other and by the teacher. In other classes weak planning means that there is a mismatch between the level of learning that students are capable of working at and the level at which the teachers are teaching. The school has rightly put

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

much work into the development and use of assessment. In some classes it is used very well to structure the learning to match the needs of all. However this is very variable across the school and is not well monitored. The quality of marking and homework is similarly variable across subjects and years. In the best examples peer marking and clear identification of areas for improvement enable students to effectively understand what they need to do to improve. The extent to which aspects of literacy and numeracy are developed in subjects other than mathematics and English is inconsistent though planning for it has improved.

The good curriculum is well organised and provides for a broad range of opportunities for students. It has been redesigned for those students who are new to the school and now provides a more coherent thematic approach. Early indications are that this is beginning to allow closer working between teachers so that progress can be better monitored. The school is successful in providing a curriculum that enables those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities to demonstrate better progress than their peers. In recognition of the weaker performance of boys in English, intervention literacy programmes with all-male and all-female classes have begun in Year 8. The school has a good range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities and clubs. Students participate well in these activities and speak highly of the opportunities on offer.

Students receive good care, guidance and support. In particular, support for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities is very effective and enables them to make better progress than their peers. This support is well-embedded in many classes where teaching assistants work effectively with students. Transition arrangements from primary school are good, and the school works closely with the local high school to ensure the continuation of both the curriculum and care. The school has effective relationships with many agencies and works well with families where support is needed. New pupils are helped to settle in by a buddy system. Those whose first language is not English receive good in-class support from teaching assistants. Although support is generally good, the school recognises that the amount of challenge for the most able is too low in many classes.

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?

Leaders, managers and governors provide a satisfactory direction to the school and its improvement. The school has been slow to tackle some of the issues identified at the last inspection and some aspects of provision are inconsistent across the school, between Key Stages, and between subjects. The school has rightly placed an emphasis on the use of

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

assessment in the structuring of teaching and learning and in some areas it is used well, but not all. The school's self-evaluation is overgenerous in some of its grades. School improvement plans are sensible and suitably detailed, especially those concerning the improvement of mathematics and English. However the targets that they are aiming for do not stretch the most able.

The school identifies strong and weak features of teaching and has been successful in ensuring teaching is satisfactory. However, because lesson observations do not evaluate the way different strengths and weaknesses affect the learning in the lesson, areas for improvement are not fine tuned. The evaluation of lesson observations to identify whole school areas for improvement is underdeveloped.

Governors bring many strengths to the school. They are dedicated and hard-working and many visit the school on a regular basis, observing classes and participating in various events. However they are insufficiently familiar with school performance data and so have not been able to challenge the weaker areas. They have ensured that the school meets its statutory responsibilities although the extent to which they monitor the performance of different groups of students could usefully be extended further.

Governors represent the school well within the community that it serves, and have ensured a good appreciation of the social, ethnic and religious community that it serves. The promotion of community cohesion is therefore good. Governors have ensured good safeguarding procedures. Responsibilities amongst staff are clearly defined and training in aspects of child protection has been comprehensive. Students benefit from partnerships with other schools and institutions that are well-developed. The school's engagement with parents and carers is good, and this was confirmed by the very large majority of positive parental questionnaire responses.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
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

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

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers that returned completed questionnaires was relatively high. The largest negative response was around the way the school deals with unacceptable behaviour. Many of these made written comments with a minority concerned about bullying. The inspection found that behaviour was satisfactory but noted the level of parents' and carers' concerns. A very large majority of respondents agreed that their child enjoys school, and that they are happy with their child's experiences.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Stowmarket 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 186 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 527 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	58	31	116	62	8	4	3	2
The school keeps my child safe	61	33	119	64	2	1	4	2
My school informs me about my child's progress	72	39	103	55	7	4	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	56	30	118	63	7	4	4	2
The teaching is good at this school	52	28	124	67	4	2	3	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	53	28	108	58	16	9	4	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	37	20	135	73	10	5	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)	44	24	116	62	9	5	4	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	45	24	126	68	7	4	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	35	19	104	56	25	13	9	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	31	17	111	60	16	9	6	3
The school is led and managed effectively	45	24	120	65	11	6	3	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	61	33	112	60	7	4	6	3

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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



11 March 2011

Dear Students,

Inspection of Stowmarket Middle School, Stowmarket, IP14 1JP

As you will know, I visited your school with three other inspectors earlier this week. We met with some of you, visited many of your classes, looked at much of your work, and talked with many of your teachers. Throughout this you were polite and helpful and I would like to thank you for that.

You told us many things about your school. You said that teachers look after you well, and that you are happy at school and enjoy your work. Your school is satisfactory, which means that while some things are going well, there are some areas that the school needs to improve. A good start has been made already, and some of you will have noticed improvements in English and mathematics already because standards are beginning to rise.

We have made some suggestions about how the school can improve further. First,

- we have asked governors to keep a closer eye on how the school is doing and to set higher targets for the school to aim for. They will be working closely with the head and her colleagues to do this. Second, we have suggested some ways to improve teaching, and more importantly your learning. The school has made a good start on this already because the levels you are reaching are already monitored. The school will be developing ways to make sure that all of you achieve your best in all classes.

Some of you mentioned concerns about poor behaviour, and this was also noted from a few of your parents. Although we saw no examples of bad behaviour we have asked the school to look closely at this and to work with you and your parents to make sure that any poor behaviour is tackled quickly. Remember that it is your education and nobody has the right to disrupt it with poor behaviour.

Once again, thank you and I wish you all well.

Yours sincerely

Ian Seath

Her Majesty's Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.