

# Leighton Middle School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	109689
<b>Local Authority</b>	Central Bedfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	356604
<b>Inspection dates</b>	9–10 June 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Ian Middleton HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Middle deemed secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	9–13
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	457
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Fiona Dry
<b>Headteacher</b>	Anne Thompson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	9 July 2008
<b>School address</b>	Church Square Leighton Buzzard LU7 1EX
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 24 lessons, observing 18 different teachers for periods lasting around 30 minutes, and 12 shorter sessions as part of a 'Memorable Day' curriculum initiative. The support base for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and a school assembly were also visited. In addition, inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, other school leaders and managers, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, and staff. Discussions with groups of pupils in Years 5 to 8 with their work, included boys and girls with different abilities, interests and responsibilities. Inspectors scrutinised planning and evaluation documents including the school's analysis of pupils' progress and attainment. Inspectors analysed 162 questionnaires received from parents and carers, 23 from teaching and support staff and a sample of 100 questionnaires received from pupils.

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

- How well do pupils progress, and what is the range and quality of achievement, in particular that of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities?
- How effective and consistent is teaching and in particular, how well is assessment information used to pitch levels of challenge and support?
- How effective are care, guidance and support in ensuring that pupils are prepared for future economic well being and life in a diverse society?
- How well does the vision, plans and actions reflect pupils' above average attainment on entry overall, and the school's popularity with parents?

## Information about the school

Leighton Middle School is an average sized middle school situated in Leighton Buzzard town centre. The school attracts pupils from 17 different lower schools and is part of a local learning community network. The proportion of pupils identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the proportion with a statement of special educational need are above average. The majority of pupils are White British and the proportion from minority ethnic backgrounds is low. A small proportion of pupils are Travellers of Irish heritage. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average.

The school's awards include Sportsmark and Healthy Schools status.

**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?**

**2**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**2**

## Main findings

Leighton Middle School provides a good quality of education and care for its pupils within a stimulating environment for learning. Boys and girls make good progress from starting points that for many pupils are above average. They enjoy their learning, achieve well across a wide range of subjects, and develop their skills of literacy, numeracy, creativity and their personal and physical well-being very well.

Good teaching is evident in all years and across almost all subjects. This improvement since the last inspection is due to the sharp focus of senior and middle leaders on developing and recruiting confident and capable staff who are able to support and challenge pupils with wide ranging ability. Lessons are well prepared and resourced, the pace is brisk and interspersed with different activities well, and good collaborative work between pupils is common. Regular and rigorous assessment has contributed to teaching that is appropriately pitched. However, there are still inconsistencies, particularly in the quality of marking. This is exemplary in English where pupils' successes and targets related to their progression are precise.

The curriculum is satisfactory overall. Although planning ensures pupils' progress in subjects, more could be done to improve the coherence of the curriculum in order to provide opportunities for pupils to develop and apply their skills, knowledge and understanding across the curriculum. This process has begun through the use of 'memorable days' that punctuate the school year and enrich pupils' learning and enjoyment. Although extra-curricular activities, particularly related to sports and arts, are extensive and well supported by pupils, there are fewer opportunities to participate in pursuits that focus on intellectual challenge. Initiatives designed to 'aim high', for example through university visits, are raising pupils' expectations.

Responses to the questionnaire demonstrate the school's popularity with parents and carers, almost all of whom agree the school prepares pupils well for their future. Inspection evidence supports these views. Transition into and through the school is cohesive, strengthened by pupils' roles and responsibilities within the school, and for the wider community. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, feel reassured by the school's good safeguarding provision and the skill and sensitivity with which staff use knowledge about them. Pupils behave very well. Overall attendance has improved, supported by clear communication about the qualities that contribute to future economic well-being. Less well promoted is pupils' awareness of communities working in different and more diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts nationally.

Improvements made since the last inspection, supported by accurate self-evaluation, an able and active governing body, and positive partnerships with parents, carers and other schools, indicate effective leadership and management. The school's capacity to improve

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further is good. Nevertheless, senior leaders recognise the limitations of current improvement plans in making their vision for excellence explicit.

## **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Develop a coherent approach to improvement planning that ensures that the school's vision for excellence is clearly expressed and evaluated.
- Address remaining inconsistencies between subjects, in particular the use of assessment, including marking.
- Ensure that pupils develop and apply their skills, knowledge and understanding across the curriculum.
- Enable pupils to increase their understanding of diversity in the community.

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

**2**

Overall, boys and girls start at the school having attained above average standards when tested in Year 2. Assessment data and scrutiny of pupils' work indicate that between Year 5 and Year 8 pupils make good progress, which accelerates as they move through the school. Overall, by the time pupils leave, their standards in English and mathematics are above those expected in the end of Key Stage 3 tests taken in Year 9. Many pupils also achieve above average standards in science, design and technology, art and design, music and physical education. Achievement is also good in French, albeit from lower starting points. The progress of pupils in geography and history is satisfactory, subjects in which assessment, marking in particular, is weaker. Pupils with special educational needs and/ or disabilities generally make good progress, supported by clear diagnosis of their needs and effective intervention by support staff. More-able pupils also make good progress but flourish on occasions when staff use their assessments of pupils to set 'star challenges'.

Pupils value the sense of calm and security that is promoted well in the school. Their curiosity and cooperation contribute to their enjoyment of learning. They respond enthusiastically to questions. Partnered work is well established in lessons, an example of outcomes of a whole school initiative to build on individual pupils' positive attitudes and encourage greater collaboration. In some subjects, for example music, pupils use peer assessment expertly. Participation rates for optional activities are high. Pupils' involvement in different sports, their awareness of emotional well-being and healthy eating, indicate they have a good grasp of healthy lifestyle and why it matters. When lessons exploit pupils' enthusiasm for team work and competition they also show how well they can apply key skills in different contexts, although this is an inconsistent aspect of provision. Pupils' use of literacy and numeracy, and to a lesser extent information and communications technology in the context of different subjects, together with attendance that is now above average, indicate that preparation for future economic well-being is good. Their contribution to the community is enhanced by roles that develop pupils' individual and shared responsibilities, for example through the relevant issues addressed by the school council and involvement with the town council. However, although there are well established global links, for example with Romania, pupils' awareness of schools working in contrasting contexts in the United Kingdom is limited. Other aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are strong.

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*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

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

<sup>1</sup> 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?

Teaching is good. Consistent strengths include planning that engages pupils through a range of tasks and teaching styles; a lively pace driven by structured use of time; creative use of resources including display work and digital technology; and subject knowledge shared confidently through demonstration and open-ended questioning. The school's work to spread best practice in partnered work between pupils is effective, being a common feature of lessons. The use of assessment is more variable, ranging from skilled use of marking that gives pupils precise feedback about their successes and targets in literacy, to sparse comments in history and geography, which have a negative impact on the presentation and accuracy of pupils' work. The range of assessment information available, with succinct lesson objectives expressed in clear language on lesson plans, make staff well equipped to assess pupils' progress consistently well. While detailed information about pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is used well to target support and intervention, the use of additional challenges for more-able pupils is inconsistent.

The curriculum is satisfactory overall, with strengths in individual subjects. For example the relevance of learning in mathematics is explicit to the pupils, deepening their understanding about the application of numeracy skills. Some subjects use the listed school buildings and inspirational grounds as a stimulus, although generally the immediate environment is underused as a resource. The development of four 'memorable days' annually includes good practice where subject teaching is enriched, for example through a

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visiting author in literacy or through a specific focus on forensics in science. However, cross-curricular work designed to deepen pupils' subject knowledge or apply specific skills, is at an early stage. There is a breadth of extra-curricular opportunities, particularly related to sports and music. However, pupils accurately evaluated that despite initiatives to develop provision for gifted and talented pupils, for example through visits to universities, regular opportunities to participate in intellectual challenges are more limited.

The quality of care, guidance and support is good. Guidance that eases pupils' transition into the school and into the next phase of education are strengths. The role of pupils in contributing to the support of other boys and girls is also very effective. For example, peer mediators and cyber mentors contribute to the sense of safety and security that pupils value. External partnerships are also effective in informing provision. For example, specialists have helped to develop support to meet the needs of the growing proportion of pupils from traveller families. The base within school developed to support pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable contributes well to their inclusion. Regular communication with parents and carers, through reports, direct consultation, and use of information and communications technology, enable parents and carers to reinforce the work of the school. However, a few parents would still welcome more information about how to support their child's learning. Effective home-school collaboration and robust monitoring have contributed to improved attendance, although some persistent absenteeism remains.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

## **How effective are leadership and management?**

The impact of leadership and management on improving provision and raising pupils' achievement is good. Joint lesson observations between inspectors and four senior leaders confirmed that school evaluations of teaching are accurate and supported by consistently high expectations, which are clearly communicated to staff. Monitoring is rigorous and feedback is evaluative. However, some aspects of planning are less well established because not all embrace the school's vision for excellence. For example, school improvement plans show some inconsistencies in prioritisation and use of performance measures. Nevertheless, recent initiatives demonstrate the impact of a sharp focus and concerted effort, for example the 'Mind the Gap' strategy that is proving effective in tackling underachievement and promoting equality of opportunity. There are also strengths at the level of middle leadership, including the use of work scrutiny, although as yet this is not entirely consistent.

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The questionnaires completed by parents, pupils and staff show a high level of satisfaction with the school's leadership and management. Inspection evidence supports these views. A welcoming environment combined with a strong work ethic creates good conditions for staff and pupils to succeed. Good collaboration with other schools in the area contributes to the range and quality of approaches taken, for example active participation in the local learning community. As yet, however, there is little collaboration with schools working in contrasting socio-economic and cultural contexts to support pupils' understanding of diversity. The views of pupils, parents and carers, are regularly sought and inform decisions taken. The governing body is very well informed and closely involved in supporting and challenging the school. For example, the governing body was involved in developing safeguarding procedures that exceed government requirements. Financial management is efficient and effective in ensuring that resources are used judiciously.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

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

## Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers who returned a response to the questionnaire was broadly average. Responses indicate a high level of satisfaction with the school. Of the parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire the most negative response related to behaviour. No evidence was observed during the inspection of anything less than good behaviour. Pupils' behaviour in the lessons visited was exemplary. A small minority of pupils could improve their punctuality to lessons by moving more quickly to classrooms across the school site, an issue that staff were tackling before the inspection.



## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Leighton 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 162 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 457 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	85	52	70	43	5	3	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	85	52	75	46	1	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	63	39	92	57	6	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	61	38	94	58	7	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	52	32	104	64	6	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	42	26	98	60	17	10	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	40	25	105	65	13	8	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)	49	30	98	60	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	54	33	95	59	9	6	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	51	31	83	51	21	13	3	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	40	25	104	64	8	5	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	60	37	88	54	7	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	73	45	82	51	6	4	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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.

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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



13 June 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of Leighton Middle School, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 1EX**

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your school on 9 and 10 June, I would like to thank you for welcoming us into your school. We valued the opportunity to share your achievements and talk to you in discussion groups and lessons.

We think that Leighton Middle is a good school and thought you might like to know why. We particularly liked these features of your school.

You make good progress, achieving high standards in a range of subjects.

Your attendance has improved and is now good.

You participate enthusiastically in extra-curricular activities.

Your lessons are good, containing varied tasks and teaching styles.

You receive good care, guidance and support that prepares you well for the future.

Your school is well led and managed by staff and governors.

You work cooperatively with staff and other pupils, and work particularly well in pairs.

Your school is a stimulating environment for learning.

You contribute well to the school as a community through the responsibilities that you take.

We have asked the school to show how it plans to become outstanding, by first:

- removing inconsistencies in the quality of marking
- creating cross-curricular opportunities for you to develop, refine and apply your skills, knowledge and understanding
- finding ways to help you understand more about the diversity of the United Kingdom, such as links with other schools working in different contexts.

The inspection team wish you well for your continued enjoyment and success.

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton

Her Majesty's Inspector

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