

# Holmemead Middle School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	109646
<b>Local Authority</b>	Central Bedfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	356596
<b>Inspection dates</b>	28–29 June 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Stephen Abbott 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>	484
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Gary Waghorn
<b>Headteacher</b>	Stephen Phillips
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	12 March 2008
<b>School address</b>	Mead End Biggleswade SG18 8JU
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. They observed 37 lessons, involving 30 teachers, including five that were jointly observed with senior leaders. They also looked at other aspects of the school's work including samples of pupils' work, the after-school club and the specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs, a provision for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder (The ASD provision.) Inspectors met with senior leaders, groups of pupils, governors and staff, and the School Improvement Partner, who is employed by the local authority. They examined many documents, including the school's single central register of safeguarding checks, various record books, policies and plans. The inspectors also received questionnaire responses from 116 parents and carers, 108 pupils and 33 members of staff.

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

- Are pupils making enough progress in Years 5-6, particularly in mathematics?
- Does pupils' behaviour make a strong contribution to good learning in lessons?
- How well do learning support, assessment and academic guidance help each pupil to make good progress?
- How well does the school promote equality for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those in the ASD provision?
- How effectively has the school responded to the disappointing 2010 Key Stage 2 test results, especially in mathematics?

## Information about the school

Holmemead Middle School is an average-sized middle school, situated on the outskirts of Biggleswade. The school has achieved the International Schools (Intermediate) award and has Healthy Schools status. In September 2010, an eight-place specialist provision was opened at the school for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder. This is managed by the school and currently has 3 pupils. In addition, there is a well established arrangement for pupils from a nearby special school to join in with activities at Holmemead. The Holmemead After School Club, which is based at the school, is managed by the governing body. The present headteacher took up his post shortly after the last inspection, at which point he was the fourth headteacher in five years. The school is a member of the Biggleswade Community Union of Schools, which includes several lower, middle and upper schools. Very recently, the school has gained specialist status for mathematics and computing in a joint arrangement with a nearby upper school. The two schools are now consulting on a proposal to apply for academy status.

The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. A very large majority of pupils are of White British ethnicity and very few pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average, but the proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs is above average.

**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

Holmemead Middle School is a good school that has improved since its last inspection. While this has been a team effort, much credit must go to the headteacher for his dynamic leadership and vision, and unwillingness to settle for second best. Pupils now make good progress. Improvements have been made without losing the school's inclusive and community-focused ethos. Pupils' contribution to the community is outstanding, because a high proportion of them participate in the wide range of opportunities the school offers for voluntary work, fundraising, sporting and cultural activities, leadership roles and work with community groups. Pupils' attendance is average for middle schools and few pupils are persistently absent. The Holmemead After School Club provides a safe and enjoyable environment for a small number of pupils. The provision for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder is well managed. The pupils concerned are making good progress because they are well supported both in the provision and when integrated into mainstream lessons. Some outstanding teaching was seen in the provision during the inspection.

Self-evaluation by the school is accurate and rigorous. Senior leaders know the school's strengths and they are unremittingly honest about the remaining areas of weakness. Change has been rapid since the last inspection. Much of the initial work was successfully designed to prepare the way for future improvement. Many of the senior leaders are new and the school's leadership has been restructured to improve accountability. The school has invested in an electronic management information system that has transformed senior leaders' ability to monitor and evaluate the work of the school. The system holds comprehensive assessment information on every pupil.

The Chair of the Governing Body works closely with the headteacher. While there are links between members of the wider governing body and specific areas of the school, these are not consistently well established. Consequently, the governing body is not always well placed to cross-check the information it is given. At present, no governor has a link with the after-school club.

The leadership changes have been accompanied by action with a more immediate impact on pupils. Regular lesson observation by senior leaders provides precise feedback to staff. Inadequate teaching has largely been eliminated through enhanced training and new appointments. Good leadership of teaching and learning, including clear guidance for staff on what an effective lesson looks like, has resulted in just over half of lessons being good or better. Challenging targets are set for all pupils, based on their prior attainment. Staff training has sharpened the accuracy of teachers' assessments of pupils' work. As a result, the school is now able to identify any dips in progress at an early stage and intervene with appropriate support. This successful track record demonstrates the school's good capacity for further improvement.

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However, it has not all been plain sailing. There is still too much satisfactory teaching and some aspects of assessment are not consistent across all lessons, including the quality of marking and guidance to pupils on how to improve their work. One of the main differences between satisfactory and good lessons is the extent to which the teacher uses assessment to support learning. In good lessons, teachers provide engaging activities that pupils can work on independently. As the pupils work, the teacher moves around the classroom to check that all pupils are making progress and to identify any individual needs. Subsequent teaching is then adapted, based on the information obtained. Pupils make slower progress in satisfactory lessons because they spend more time listening to the teacher and complete less independent work for the teacher to assess. Although teaching is satisfactory, pupils still make good progress because of the strong intervention programme for those not meeting their targets.

When the improved academic monitoring and intervention programme were first set up, the school gave priority to older pupils, to ensure that they were well prepared for the next stage of their education. The effect of this decision became apparent in the 2010 test results at the end of Key Stage 2, where pupils' attainment in mathematics and English was considerably lower than expected. To the school's credit, it has taken swift action to prevent any repetition. For the pupils concerned, who are now in Year 7, prompt attention has made sure that they are now back on track. Senior leaders have also looked closely at staffing and at the leadership of the core subjects, making changes to avoid any repetition among the current Years 5 and 6 classes.

Key Stage 2 results in mathematics have been disappointing for some time. Lesson observations show that some teachers lack subject-specific expertise. They do not always use the best approach to teaching a topic; make appropriate links with other areas of mathematics; or detect common misconceptions.

The school plays an important role in the local community. Its new provision and its hosting of pupils from a nearby special school help to break down barriers and promote pupils' understanding of disability. Its international links are recognised by an International Schools award. More recently, pupils have exchanged emails with an English school serving a multi-ethnic community, giving them more experience of cultural diversity. The headteacher has played a leading role in the Biggleswade Community Union of Schools, working with headteacher colleagues to promote an integrated approach to education for young people aged 0 to 19.

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

- Ensure that pupils have the best chance of making good progress by
  - strengthening teaching, particularly in Key Stage 2
  - ensuring that pupils receive consistently good feedback in each subject that shows them how to improve their work
  - improving their attendance to at least 96%.
- Increase the proportion of good and better teaching by:
  - ensuring that all lessons devote sufficient time to independent work by individuals or groups of pupils, during which teachers assess pupils' understanding and progress so they can adapt later teaching to meet the needs they identify

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- improving the subject expertise of non-specialist teachers of mathematics.
- Make the governing body more effective in holding the school to account by:
  - developing a wider range of ways for governors to inform themselves about the work of the school
  - appointing a link governor for the Holmemead After School Club.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****2**

Pupils join the school with above average attainment. In recent years, pupils in Key Stage 2 have made satisfactory progress in English but their attainment in mathematics has dropped back to average by Year 6. They have then made good progress in Key Stage 3, so that their attainment in mathematics, English and other subjects is well above national expectations for the end of Year 8. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well because they are well supported in the classroom without compromising their independence, and because their education is carefully planned to meet their needs. Pupils with autistic spectrum disorder who are not part of the ASD provision are benefiting from the expertise the provision brings.

Pupils' satisfactory learning and progress in lessons is not good enough to fully explain their good achievement over time. The difference is made up by the school's extensive programme of additional support. In a significant minority of lessons, pupils are given a passive role that involves too much listening and not enough independent work. In these less interesting lessons, some pupils lose their concentration and fidget or speak while the teacher is talking. This low level disruption is not always well managed, with repeated ineffectual requests for quiet, and a small minority of pupils, parents and carers expressed legitimate concerns. Nevertheless, there is clear evidence that behaviour is improving in lessons and around the school. Defiance or deliberate disruption is unusual.

Pupils make good progress in the majority of lessons where teaching is good. Their behaviour contributes to good learning because they are inquisitive and keen to learn. In the better lessons, pupils apply their literacy and numeracy skills well, for example in making notes in a geography lesson, writing extended answers in history and drawing graphs in science. When given the opportunity, pupils work well in groups, learning teamwork and leadership skills that stand them in good stead for their future lives. When questioned skilfully, pupils give reasoned answers that go beyond simple recall to include explanations based on clear thinking.

Most pupils say that they enjoy school and feel safe. They know how to ask for help and how to keep themselves safe. They like the 'Holme Zone', which provides a refuge for those feeling potentially vulnerable, and the 'Big Buddy' system of peer counselling. Bullying and racial incidents are rare and pupils report that they are usually, but not always, tackled effectively. Pupils understand the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and many support programmes designed to improve their health. Their take-up of extra-curricular sports and other physical activities is good. Many willingly accept responsibilities such as membership of the school council or focus groups, as peer counsellors or as junior network administrators. These contribute to their good preparation for their future working lives. Pupils have a good understanding of right and wrong and a sense of fairness. A large majority of pupils participate in the range of cultural opportunities offered by the school.

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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>1</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>	3
<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?

Teachers plan their lessons conscientiously and make clear to pupils what they are expected to learn. The majority of lessons are stimulating and enjoyable for pupils, making good use of learning resources, including interactive whiteboards, to get pupils thinking for themselves. For example, Year 8 pupils had to interpret information and choose the mathematics needed to work out the running costs of different-sized swimming pools. Some teaching is outstanding: an important feature of this is the excellent use of assessment by the teacher and by pupils to identify how to improve their own and others' work, as seen in art, English and physical education. In contrast, weaker assessment practice typifies satisfactory lessons. Examples include question and answer sessions where a minority of pupils answered all the questions, and lessons where teachers did not ensure that all pupils understood the work. Learning support assistants provide effective support in most lessons, but are occasionally left underemployed when teacher talk dominates.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements. It is well organised through six key cross-curricular areas with a focus on helping pupils to become independent learners. Cross-curricular activities, visits and other enrichment help to support pupils' personal development but opportunities to promote spirituality are sometimes missed. The school has liaised well with its partner lower and upper schools to

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ensure a smooth academic progression as well as good care and guidance on transition. Partnership working also supports musical activities such as the recent 'Fiddle Fiesta' and wind-band days; pupils' learning about sustainability, through the gardening and eco club; and enrichment for able mathematicians. The recently acquired specialism is at an early stage of development and its impact to date is limited.

The school has maintained its good standard of care, guidance and support. Form tutors play an important role as the initial point of contact for parents and carers. A new behaviour policy, with higher expectations on behaviour, has reduced the need for warning cards and fixed term exclusions. The well-organised provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is evident in the impact on their learning and personal development. Pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties benefit from patient work to tackle their specific needs.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</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>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

**How effective are leadership and management?**

Since his appointment three years ago, the headteacher has successfully raised expectations of what the school can achieve. He is well supported by the other senior leaders and the Chair of the Governing Body. However, governance is only satisfactory, because there are weaknesses in how the governing body informs itself about the work of the school. Any hint of complacency has been weeded out as middle leadership has been transformed. The school improvement plan sets out very clearly how teaching, assessment and behaviour management will continue to be improved. All concerned now accept that pupils' outcomes are the best way to judge their own and the school's effectiveness. There is a good team spirit: staff are proud to work at the school and almost all feel involved in the school's self-evaluation, which includes careful consideration of the outcomes of different groups of pupils. Members of the governing body speak highly of the quality of information they now receive, and increasingly know how to hold the school to account.

The school's commitment to equality of opportunity is evident in the way it supports all pupils to achieve well, through its various intervention strategies. Racial harmony is strongly promoted, but the school recognises that racial incidents have not entirely been eliminated. The school understands its religious, ethnic and socio-economic context and is involved with the local, national and global communities through a wide range of activities. Parents and carers are consulted regularly and kept well informed through reports on pupils' progress, newsletters, the school website and electronic mail.



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Procedures for child protection and vetting are robust. Risk assessment is very thorough and the school is proactive in building good relationships with other agencies to ensure pupils' well-being.

*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>3</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>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## Views of parents and carers

Parents' and carers' views are mostly positive, but a small minority have concerns about the consistency of behaviour management and the quality of teaching in a few lessons. One wrote, 'The teaching at school is great but one or two teachers we have had this year have not met the usual standards.' Inspectors found that low level disruption of lessons sometimes occurs when the teaching is uninspiring. The efforts of staff are appreciated: 'I think it is fantastic that staff are willing to undertake organising trips with all the relevant paperwork that has to be completed.' A few parents and carers are frustrated by problems in communicating with the school or by the new report format. The reports now give precise numerical information about pupils' attainment and progress, but lack the personal element of written comments. The school is working to improve its response times for parents and carers who need to speak to a specific member of staff.

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

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Holmemead 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 116 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 484 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	36	31	72	62	7	6	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	46	40	66	57	3	3	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	25	22	76	66	13	11	2	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	35	30	71	61	7	6	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	28	24	71	61	10	9	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	22	19	66	57	19	16	2	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	23	20	77	66	8	7	2	2
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)	40	34	66	57	3	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	22	19	80	69	10	9	2	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	18	16	61	53	24	21	8	7
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	19	16	70	60	14	12	6	5
The school is led and managed effectively	34	29	71	61	5	4	3	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	38	33	67	59	9	8	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.**



30 June 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of Holmemead Middle School, Biggleswade SG18 8JU**

I am writing to tell you about your school's recent inspection. First, on behalf of the inspection team, I would like to thank you for giving us a warm welcome, answering our questions and completing our questionnaires.

Holmemead Middle School provides you with a good education. Mr Phillips leads the school very well. The strong support he receives from the senior leadership team and the whole staff has resulted in several improvements. Pupils now make good progress between joining in Year 5 and leaving in Year 8. Teaching is satisfactory overall, but it is good in many lessons and outstanding in some. The school tracks your progress carefully and is quick to give extra help for anyone who is falling behind. Your personal development is good, but attendance is only average.

The school is well organised to care for you and to give you a wide range of experiences. Most of you feel safe and know how to stay safe. You make an outstanding contribution to the school and local community in all sorts of ways. Some of you are worried about behaviour. We think you behave well most of the time, especially in interesting and enjoyable lessons. Sometimes, when the lessons are a bit dull, some of you get restless and begin to disturb others.

We have made a few suggestions about how the school should improve.

Help some teachers to improve their skills in checking your work during lessons, especially in mathematics.

Make sure that you get good advice in all lessons on how to improve your work. (You already get very good advice in some lessons.)

Improve the way that the school's governing body works.

You can help by improving your attendance to above average and by trying your best to learn even if the lesson is not very exciting.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Abbott

Her Majesty's Inspector

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