

Holywell CofE VA Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109712
Local Authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	356610
Inspection dates	5–6 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Trevor Riddiough 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 aided
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	526
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Elaine Cook
Headteacher	Peter Haddon
Date of previous school inspection	12 March 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 28 teachers in 33 lessons including six joint observations with members of the senior leadership team, four tutor groups and four assemblies. Inspectors carried out a learning walk incorporating a further five lessons, involving eight teaching assistants, and held meetings with senior leaders and other staff, groups of pupils, and members of the governing body. They observed the school's work and looked at the tracking of pupils' progress, performance data, pupils' work, whole-school and subject development plans, numerous policies, school documents and case studies. Completed questionnaires from 106 pupils, 266 parents and carers and 34 staff were received and analysed.

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

- Are all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those entitled to free school meals making sufficient progress by the time they leave in Year 8?
- What are the reasons for the variations in pupils' achievement in Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3?
- Has the relative decline in achievement in English and mathematics been successfully resolved?
- How effective are leaders at all levels and governors in monitoring and improving progress of all pupils?

Information about the school

Holywell is in the Diocese of St Albans. It mainly serves children from the two villages of Cranfield and Wootton. A significant number of pupils come from overseas each year to be with their parents at a local university. The school is larger than most other middle schools. It is part of the three-phase system that serves central Bedfordshire. Most pupils are White British and very few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below the national average, as is the proportion of those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Amongst its awards, the school has achieved Healthy School Status and Sportsmark.

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

An unusually large number of parents and carers contacted inspectors to tell of their overwhelming support and appreciation for Holywell Middle School. One parent of a pupil summed up the views of many when she said, 'All of the staff are keen and interested in teaching, supportive and caring of the children.' Inspection evidence endorses these conclusions of parents and carers and the school's self-evaluation: Holywell is a good and improving school. The school fosters pupils' enjoyment and enthusiasm for learning well and this is reflected in pupils' outstanding attendance and in their good behaviour. These positive attitudes contribute positively to pupils' good progress over time in the school.

While pupils' progress is good overall, there is a dip in progress at Key Stage 2 and acceleration at Key Stage 3. Teaching, too, is variable but good overall. Pupils particularly enjoy lessons where they can play an active part, are engaged in interesting activities and are sufficiently challenged. Pupils' progress is further supported by the enrichment activities provided during and after school. In the less successful lessons, assessment procedures are not fully embedded in day-to-day practice, which hinders the planning and delivery of good learning for all pupils in the class. Marking in books and feedback in lessons is variable and in a minority of lessons do not give useful pointers for further development.

The school is a cohesive and inclusive community. Pupils are proud of their school; they typically say, 'this is a really friendly school' and 'everyone is really helpful.' They also say that they feel very safe in school. School records and pupils' own observations confirm that incidents of any bullying are extremely rare, and that when anything happens that concerns them, pupils know exactly who they can turn to for help or advice. Leaders at all levels have worked hard to ensure that all the staff share a common philosophy which places learning at the heart of its work. There is a good sense of teamwork and mutual respect between staff and pupils. Staff display high levels of commitment towards every pupil, reflecting the school's caring and inclusive ethos.

The school has improved since it was last inspected because school leaders at all levels have a good understanding of the quality of their provision and are held accountable for the outcomes. They have successfully tackled most aspects of underperformance and any remaining weaknesses are being picked up. For example, they are aware that target setting and tracking have not always been as strong in Key Stage 2 as in Key Stage 3. Self-evaluation is accurate and thorough and has identified clear priorities for further improvement. The capacity for further sustained improvement is, therefore, good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the rates of progress of pupils in Key Stage 2 by:

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- setting challenging targets based on assessment information from the very start of Year 5
- making sure that pupils' progress is tracked consistently across the key stage to identify and address any underachievement.
- Strengthen teaching further by:
 - using assessment information to plan and deliver lessons that challenge all pupils
 - providing consistently clear advice and guidance to pupils through the day-to-day marking of their work and regular feedback in lessons focused on the next steps to learning.

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

By the time pupils leave the school at the end of Year 8 attainment is above average in most subjects. Pupils make expected progress from Years 5 to 6, accelerating to good or better progress in Years 7 and 8. This is because teaching in some subjects has not been as strong in Key Stage 2, due to variation in teaching quality and subject expertise. Progress in mathematics at Key Stage 2 has been particularly slow; however, the school has put into place systems to address this and current data is showing improvement. Another reason that progress has been comparatively slow is that pupils are not set challenging targets from the very start of Key Stage 2 nor has the school tracked them in sufficient detail to enable progress to be checked as rigorously as it is done in Key Stage 3. Good progress was seen in most lessons during the inspection. Classrooms are characterised by a good learning atmosphere resulting from the good quality relationships that teachers have established with their pupils. Pupils show they can reflect on their learning and work well with each other. When given the opportunity they also enjoy working independently.

In the recent past pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities made satisfactory progress. The school's data indicate that this progress has risen rapidly following recent improvements to the teaching quality for this group of pupils, coupled with improved support arrangements. Inspectors' own observations confirm this view. The school operates a programme of small withdrawal groups using a team of teaching assistants. It has made good use of one-to-one tuition funding to provide additional booster work to support targeted pupils. The number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is low in each year group; while some of these pupils make less than expected progress, the school is well aware of this and is tackling it. Their progress is monitored by school leaders who support those who are behind with their work.

The school provides a safe, caring environment which is warm and friendly. This can be seen, for example, in the creation of the outside play and social areas which have been thoughtfully designed to integrate the less confident and younger pupils with the others. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and develop a healthy lifestyle, especially through understanding the importance of exercise and sports. Pupils show care and consideration, courtesy and respect through their charity work and through helping others. This is exemplified by the work done by pupils on the school council, the Bedfordshire Youth Parliament, the mentoring of younger pupils and through their support of the local churches.

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Pupils' development of spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is particularly good. School assemblies, tutor time and other associated curriculum programmes support pupils' ability to see the world through others' viewpoints. As a result, pupils learn to take responsibility for their actions and know what is expected of them. Through activity days, visitors and the work in their personal and religious education, they gain insights into the diverse nature of our society. While pupils gain good literacy and numeracy skills, wider skills in information and communications technology (ICT) are less strong because cross-curricular provision of ICT is still under development. Nevertheless, pupils are prepared well for their futures and for the next stage of their education.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	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
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
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	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?

The quality of teaching is good and is still improving. Teachers are now generally knowledgeable about their subjects and use a good range of learning activities to promote pupils' progress. Good use is made of resources to enhance learning. Teaching is often stimulating and well paced. In the better lessons teaching provides a fine-tuned level of challenge for different learners, and teachers provide pupils with useful feedback on how to improve their work. As a result, pupils respond well, work hard, and make good progress. In the few satisfactory lessons, challenge is not always as well judged. For example, pupils are led too much by their teacher, which reduces the opportunities for them to develop their skills in learning independently. Similarly, in some lessons, teachers

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do not take as much account of what pupils can already do, so do not plan to extend and develop key lesson objectives; where this is the case pupils show some disengagement and make less progress. In some lessons, guidance given through teachers' feedback throughout the lesson and in marking on how to improve is too variable to have a full impact on pupils' progress.

Throughout the school, pupils experience a subject-based curriculum and the subject-specific skills of staff are used wherever possible. The curriculum is modified as appropriate, to meet the needs of all pupils. Great emphasis is placed on the development of literacy and numeracy and additional support is provided in a number of ways for pupils who need it to enable them to progress. A distinctive feature of the curriculum is a series of subject options in Year 8 which enable pupils to investigate their preferences in preparation for the next key stage. The school provides a wide variety of enrichment activities, especially in sports and the arts which enhance pupils' experiences and prove to be highly popular.

The school is justly proud of the good care, guidance and support that it provides for all pupils. Pupils know that they can receive help at any time from their teachers, form tutors, year heads and senior leaders. As a result, pupils have great confidence in the school to advise and support them with any needs or concerns. Pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable benefit greatly from the highly effective work the school carries out with external agencies. For example, the school has worked well in helping some pupils with challenging behaviour to engage in and enjoy their lessons again. Case studies exemplify the effectiveness of the school in helping individual students to overcome significant barriers to their education. While targeted support is provided for most pupils in the school, those in Year 5 do not receive such close attention because of the delay in setting realistic targets, based on robust assessments, makes it difficult to provide such support from the outset. Pupils' transition from their lower schools is managed well as is their induction into the partner upper school. This is illustrated by a comment made by a pupil in Year 8 who said 'we already know our upper school and we are really looking forward to going'

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
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?

The headteacher, together with the senior team and governors, has developed a clear vision for the school, which places learning at the heart of its work. As a result there is a sense of urgency to drive the improvements that are needed, there is growing confidence amongst the school community and morale is high. Middle leaders have benefited from

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support from the senior team coupled with helpful arrangements which enable them to meet and support the teachers for whom they are responsible. This has resulted in many improvements, notably in achievement and teaching and learning. The brief decline in English has been resolved, and that in mathematics is showing improvement. Through its detailed, thorough and accurate self-evaluation the school is well aware of its strengths and areas for further development. As a result, it has identified the correct priorities.

The school communicates effectively with parents and carers. It regularly asks parents and carers for their views and is happy to respond to these. The school's promotion of equality of opportunities is central to its pastoral provision as well as to its efforts to raise achievement. Regular monitoring ensures that any potentially underachieving group of pupils is carefully targeted to ensure that they catch up, for example, in the recent drive to support the achievement of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school engages with a wide range of partnerships that enhance learning. The programme of links with partner lower schools and the upper school enable resources, facilities and teachers to be shared to the benefit of all pupils. Community cohesion is good and is promoted well at school, local and international levels.

Governance is good. The governing body is well-informed, supportive and maintains a critical eye on the future as well as on the day-to-day aspects of school life. Governors are very knowledgeable of the school, understand it well and are committed to meeting the needs of all pupils. The governing body appropriately challenges school leaders to account for its actions and outcomes. Robust systems are in place to ensure that safeguarding is effective. There is comprehensive training of all staff, and governors and the school staff work well with other agencies to reduce the risk of harm to pupils.

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	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
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	2
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	2

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Views of parents and carers

Around 50% of parents and carers returned the inspection questionnaire. While the response was overwhelmingly positive, a small minority of parents and carers commented about behaviour in the school. Inspectors followed up these comments and they judged that the school has effective policies and procedures in place with regard to behaviour. Procedures are followed consistently, contributing to the good behaviour in the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Holywell CofE VA 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 266 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 526 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	83	31	159	60	17	6	4	2
The school keeps my child safe	102	38	147	55	9	3	1	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	83	31	163	61	14	5	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	83	31	142	53	30	11	4	2
The teaching is good at this school	64	24	178	67	12	5	1	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	54	20	155	58	36	14	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	59	22	182	68	15	6	3	1
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)	88	33	155	58	7	3	2	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	71	27	160	60	19	7	4	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	55	21	155	58	25	9	8	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	40	15	155	58	30	11	7	3
The school is led and managed effectively	69	26	153	58	17	6	9	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	81	30	155	58	17	6	3	1

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).

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">■ 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.



7 July 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Holywell CofE VA Middle School, Bedford MK43 0JA

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we inspected your school. Your views were very helpful and we enjoyed our discussions with those of you we spoke to in lessons, in meetings and around the school. The school provides you with a good quality of education. You clearly enjoy school and are enthusiastic in your lessons and this is shown in your outstanding attendance and in the good behaviour that we saw in and around school. We particularly enjoyed meeting you while you were using the various outside areas of your school at breaktimes and lunchtimes.

Your teachers work hard to support you and they care for you well. They monitor the progress that you make and take action to support you whenever it appears that you may be falling behind with your work. As a result, you generally make good progress and achieve well in most of your subjects although most of the progress that you make is during Key Stage 3.

Your school has a strong leadership team which is committed to giving you the best possible education. It recognises that, as in all good schools, there is still more that can be done to improve further, and so we have identified some areas to work on. These are:

- speed up your progress in Key Stage 2
- ensure that your lessons always challenge you so everyone in the class makes the best possible progress
- provide you with clear advice and guidance through the marking of your work and feedback during lessons on to how to improve.

You all have a part to play and you can really help your school by ensuring that you do not settle for anything other than your best and that you follow up the comments and suggestions that your teachers make to help you to improve your work.

Yours sincerely

Trevor Riddiough

Her Majesty's Inspector

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