

Harrold Priory Middle School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	136472
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	382056
Inspection dates	27–28 June 2012
Lead inspector	Ian Middleton HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	388
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Hugh Carr-Archer
Headteacher	Hilary Dilley (Head of School) Michael Lavelle (Executive Headteacher)
Date of previous school inspection	18 March 2009
School address	The Green Harrold Bedford MK43 7DE
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Age group	9–13
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Introduction

Inspection team

Ian Middleton

Her Majesty's Inspector

Christine Fraser

Additional Inspector

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Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The number of lessons observed was 26 and the number of teachers seen was 24. Meetings were held with students, representatives of the governing body, and senior and middle leaders. Inspectors took account of the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work and looked at the plans for improvement, assessment information, lesson plans, the school's monitoring information, school policies and 81 questionnaires from parents and carers.

Information about the school

Harrold Priory Middle School is smaller than the average-sized secondary school, but of typical size for middle schools. The school is part of the Academy Federation of North Bedfordshire Schools, in partnership with Sharnbrook Upper School and two other middle schools, Lincroft and Margaret Beaufort. The school shares a specialism in the arts with the upper school. The federation has a single governing body. The middle schools share an executive headteacher and each has its own head of school. The head of school took up the post seven weeks before the inspection.

Most of the students at the school come from White British backgrounds and a small proportion are from minority ethnic heritages. The proportions of students identified with disabilities and those with special educational needs supported at school action or with a statement of special educational needs is below average. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is low.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school. It is well led, students behave well and standards are rising, but its overall effectiveness is not good because the quality of teaching is too inconsistent to ensure that students always make the best possible progress in all their lessons. Not all teaching builds sufficiently on students' strong personal qualities or on the keenness of parents and carers to support their children's progress. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Students attain above average standards. However, their progress is satisfactory because their starting points are high and their gains in knowledge, understanding and skills are inconsistent between years and subjects. Until recently, not enough students have reached the higher levels for their age, particularly in mathematics. Disabled students and those with special educational needs make good progress.
- Highly challenging teaching is common in history and geography, physical education, art and food technology. Teaching in English is now good or better following effective professional development and literacy is promoted well across the curriculum. However, students' learning in mathematics and the wider application of computer and mathematical skills across the curriculum are rarely better than satisfactory.
- Students demonstrate very positive attitudes to learning and school life. Boys and girls take their responsibilities seriously, use initiative, show leadership and respect for others. Their ability to use and refine these qualities consistently in lessons or by following up and preparing for lessons, is constrained by the limitations of some teaching, particularly in mathematics. Students feel safe and are confident that bullying and prejudice are rare.
- Senior staff and the governing body evaluate the school's strengths and

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weaknesses very accurately. Collaborative work across the federation is a strength, with demonstrable positive impact on curriculum and staff development, particularly for middle leaders. Strategic planning is well focused on raising standards and sharing best practice in teaching, which is proving effective.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of students attaining the higher levels for their age by:
 - strengthening work with lower schools in order to accelerate progress in all subjects in Years 5 and 6
 - sustaining students' improved attainment in mathematics, supported by stronger application of mathematical skills across the curriculum

- Encourage good and outstanding teaching to become more widespread by ensuring all teachers:
 - plan activities that stimulate students' curiosity right from the start of lessons and enable students to use their personal qualities to the full
 - use assessment information to prepare suitably challenging activities for all abilities and to re-shape planning based on students' responses
 - provide marking that makes clear to students how to reach higher standards still.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students' achievement is satisfactory overall. Boys and girls enter the school in Year 5 with attainment that is above national expectations and by the end of Year 8 standards remain above average. Until recently, the gap between students' performance at the school and schools nationally had narrowed because students' progress was slowing. However, results in optional tests taken by students in Year 8 in 2012 indicate that standards are now rising at a faster rate than in previous years. While progress accelerates as students move through the school, the proportion achieving the higher levels for their age is limited by their slower progress earlier on. Attainment in writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6 was below average in 2011. However, the school's progress data indicates that strategies to get students off to a stronger start are proving effective. Inspectors' own observations and evidence confirm this improvement and indicate that in reading, attainment is consistently well above expectations; students show high levels of understanding, fluency and expression. They are enthusiastic about widening their reading by using the recently developed library. Students reinforce their learning in English in the context of different subjects because teachers and support staff give good attention to promoting literacy where appropriate. Although recent results show that students'

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progress has improved significantly in mathematics, the development of their mathematical and computer skills across the curriculum remains satisfactory.

Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress because their individual needs are identified early, their progress is monitored regularly and support is tailored accordingly. The range of interventions for students showing signs of underachievement have improved due to more consistent use of assessment data, and there has been enhanced provision for more-able students. Monitoring records and inspectors' scrutiny of students' work indicate that different strategies are proving effective in many, but not all, subjects. The school is aware that there is insufficient use of ongoing subject assessment to adjust students' targets and increase the proportion of higher levels by the end of Years 6 and 8. The impact of the school's specialism is evident in its support for students' wider achievements, including impressive leadership skills in physical education, confident creative work in the arts and persuasive discussion in humanities subjects informed by deep reflection. Boys and girls excel when they are given opportunities to apply their strong personal qualities to their work.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Most parents and carers felt that their children were taught well but some commented on particular subjects or years where they felt provision and progress were not as good. Inspectors equally found some variation. There is much good teaching but the outstanding teaching is counterbalanced by some weaker teaching. The very best teaching is sufficiently well informed by knowledge of the subject and individual students to adapt planning confidently and creatively as a lesson progresses. Here, teaching not only results in students' good achievement but also promotes strong enjoyment in learning and successful acquisition of the skills required to succeed in the next stage of education, for example research. A project in art bridging Years 8 and 9 enabled the teacher to focus on the key subject skills required to succeed at GCSE.

Less effective teaching takes too little account of students' responses, often continuing with worksheets or textbook tasks with little adaptation. This is reflected in students' questionnaire responses which, while very positive about the school, include a quarter that felt that their views were not always valued in lessons. There are particular inconsistencies in the use of stimuli to engage students actively, the quality of questioning and the use of assessment. There is some effective use of computer technology by teachers, including in assembly, to inspire students. Although all lessons are supported by comprehensive tracking of students' performance, the use of assessment information to design suitably challenging activities varies widely. History is an example where this is a strength. Overall, there are too few opportunities taken to capitalise on students' initiative and leadership skills.

Disabled students, those with special educational needs and students whose circumstances make them vulnerable receive good support from teachers and

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assistants. Their individual needs are identified early, are shared clearly with staff across the school, and are addressed effectively through support tailored to their needs. All students value their discussions with staff and their peers about their work and how improvements could be made. The involvement of parents and carers in evaluating students' work in food technology shows what is possible when assessment approaches are adapted well to the subject. However, though good in English, the quality and usefulness of marking is inconsistent. This limits opportunities for students to respond independently or for parents and carers to support their children's learning.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' behaviour is good. Attendance is consistently above average. Boys and girls have very positive attitudes to learning, with rare exceptions. They collaborate well when working in mixed-ability groups, work independently and conscientiously when set time-limited challenges, and articulate their views confidently and thoughtfully when questioned. When given open-ended problems to solve, for example in science, students formulate and test hypotheses by sharing different ideas and solutions cooperatively. Their contribution to the school as a community is a strength. For example, form representatives take an active part in planning and organising form time. Students take responsibility seriously and show leadership through a wide range of roles. In addition, those that represent the school externally are excellent ambassadors. Although at an early stage, the focus of the school council on helping to evaluate and improve the quality of learning at the school shows that students can use their maturity and pride in their school to good effect. The thriving gardening club is a busy, calm and cooperative enterprise.

While students, parents and carers are generally positive about behaviour, a quarter of student and parental questionnaires were less confident about behaviour in lessons. Inspectors visited lessons, analysed records and also spoke to a range of students. These activities confirmed that behaviour is generally good. Inspectors observed very few occasions when lessons were affected by off-task behaviour but these exceptions were linked to the quality of teaching and inconsistent use of the school's behaviour policy. Outside the classroom, students behave courteously to each other and to adults. Students consider the school's anti-bullying and anti-racist initiatives to be effective and show a good understanding of different types of bullying and prejudice. Strong pastoral support, enhanced by the development of the 'yellow room' in school, and links with a wide range of services and external agencies, are effective in helping all students, including those whose circumstances make them vulnerable, feel safe and supported.

Leadership and management

The school has improved since the federation reviewed provision towards the end of 2011. Monitoring records and reports indicate that the more rigorous leadership and management of teaching, supported by strong strategic planning by the governing body, has improved the quality of students' learning and achievement, for example in

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English. Students' improved attainment in mathematics also demonstrates the impact of challenging leadership and supportive management. Collaborative work across the federation of middle and upper schools contributes to strong subject-specific support, some of which is provided by subject leaders based at Harrold Priory. Since the previous inspection, several middle leaders have flourished, becoming inspirational role models to others. More improvements are planned which focus on priorities that are very well informed and which are supported by a comprehensive programme of professional development. Senior leaders work decisively to eliminate any discrimination or inequality within or between schools in the federation. Students and their parents and carers made very positive comments about the visibility, approachability and impact of the Head of School in the short period since her appointment. The decisive actions, coordinated vision and high expectations of the federation, led by the executive headteacher and supported by a challenging governing body and many committed teachers, support staff and middle leaders based at the school, indicate that the school is well placed to improve further.

The curriculum provides students with a wide range of rich experiences that prepare them very well for the next stage of their education and contribute to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural growth. It meets the needs and interests of a wide range of students, including through intervention programmes in English and mathematics. Enrichment challenges include opportunities for students to meet and work with more-able students from other schools. The quality of curriculum planning is good, underpinned by knowledgeable middle leaders. The use of homework is a weaker aspect; students said that their ability to prepare for lessons is limited because they are not often made aware of what is planned next. Despite an increase in progress meetings for parents and carers and news bulletins a small number of parents and carers also thought that communication could be further improved. However, the parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire, including 'Parent View', were positive about many aspects of the school and all thought their children felt safe at school. The arrangements for the safeguarding of students comply with regulations.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



29 June 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Harrold Priory Middle School, Bedford, MK43 7DE

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your school on 27 and 28 June, I would like to thank you for the welcome you gave us. We valued the opportunity to share your achievements and talk to you in discussion groups and lessons. This letter is to share our conclusions following the inspection.

Your school provides a satisfactory education. We particularly liked these features.

- You show positive attitudes to learning and your attendance is above average.
- Your standards reached by the end of Year 8 are above average.
- You behave responsibly, contributing to all students feeling safe and supported.
- Your lessons are often good, particularly when your interest is stimulated, activities are planned for students of different abilities and interests and feedback to you includes helpful advice.
- You are part of a federation of schools that is working very well together.
- Your contribution to the school as a community is a strength.

We have asked the school to make improvements and become consistently good by:

- helping students to progress equally well in all subjects, from the start of Year 5
- enabling more students attain the higher levels for their age
- ensuring that your work is marked equally well across all subjects so that you, supported by your parents and carers, can act on the advice that is given
- making the best lessons more widespread, for example by increasing opportunities for you to use your personal qualities and skills in lessons.

You can help by responding to the advice you are given about how to reach higher standards still, and by supporting the school council's work to inform improvements.

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector

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