

Stowmarket Middle School

Walnut Tree Walk, Stowmarket, IP14 1JP

Inspection dates

17–18 January 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good		2
Quality of teaching	Good		2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good		2
Leadership and management	Good		2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The vast majority of pupils make good progress in their studies and especially in their English and mathematics. There is a clear trend in improvement to above-average standards by the end of Year 8 when the pupils leave the school. This is good achievement given the pupils' broadly average starting points.
- Teaching has improved well since the previous inspection and contributes well to the pupils' good achievement.
- Strategies to develop pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy are good. Most pupils make at least good progress in these areas.
- Pupils behave well, enjoy school and say they are safe. They feel valued and respected, and enjoy the range of activities that are available.
- The headteacher sets high aspirations for the school. She leads well and by example. She is very well supported by the senior team and all other members of staff.
- Governors know the school well. They are highly supportive and fully involved in the running of the school. They know its strengths and where further improvements might be made. They hold staff to account for the quality of the school's performance, including its teaching.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In a small number of lessons, teachers do not consistently plan activities that hold pupils' attention. Some work lacks challenge and there is a tendency for the teacher to do too much, thereby limiting the extent to which pupils learn through their own efforts and initiative.
- In some lessons, especially outside of English and mathematics, opportunities to hone the pupils' skills in mathematics and especially reading and writing, are not always fully seized.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 27 lessons, each involving a different member of staff.
- Meetings were held with four different groups of pupils, the Chair and two other members of the Governing Body, a representative from the local authority and a wide variety of staff including senior and middle leaders and support staff.
- Inspectors took account of the 30 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and one letter from a parent. The views of 63 staff who responded to questionnaires were also considered.
- Inspectors scrutinised examples of pupils' past and present work and looked at various documents. These included the school's self-evaluation and planning, information on pupils' academic progress and records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding. Documentation about how additional funds provided through the pupil premium are allocated was also considered.

Inspection team

Bill Stoneham, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Michael Stanton

Additional Inspector

June Cannie

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This middle deemed secondary school is smaller than the average secondary school.
- Most pupils are of a White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who are from minority ethnic backgrounds and the proportion who speak English as an additional language are both well below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is below average. This is additional funding provided to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, those in local authority care and pupils with a parent in the armed services.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is below average. The proportion with a statement of their special needs is above average.
- All pupils are educated on site. The school does not use alternative provision to support any of its pupils.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum level expected for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The arrangements for primary and secondary education in this part of Suffolk have recently been reviewed. This particular school will close to pupils at the end of the summer term 2015.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement further so that, by the end of the current academic year, learning in all lessons is at least good, by ensuring that:
 - teachers have consistently high expectations of their pupils and set work that is always challenging
 - pupils are given every possible opportunity to work independently and collaboratively so that they learn well and mainly through their own efforts
 - opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in mathematics, reading and writing are fully seized in all subjects.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- When pupils join in Year 5, their starting points are broadly average. The school works well to develop their skills in reading, writing and mathematics and, as a result, they make good progress across a range of subjects and in all years.
- The emphasis on improving skills in reading, writing, communication and mathematics has been successful. Different groups of pupils, including those who are disabled and those who have special educational needs, make good progress in their work. Thus, standards by the end of Year 8 are above those expected for pupils of this age.
- Occasionally, the progress pupils make in developing their literacy and mathematical skills are hindered. This is because a minority of staff offer insufficient opportunities for such skills to be fully honed. Overall, however, pupils achieve well because of the challenges presented.
- Additional funding available through the pupil premium has been used effectively to improve achievement. Support through intervention and the sensitive deployment of staff have been successful in helping various groups of pupils to improve their overall levels of work, and in English and mathematics in particular.
- Results for those pupils who qualify for additional funding are now above the national average. This demonstrates the school's success in tackling discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity for all its pupils.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has successfully revamped its approaches to monitoring pupils' work and their progress. Target-setting has improved considerably and is now far more robust and challenging. These changes have made a significant contribution to improving the progress made by different groups of pupils and raising levels of achievement.
- Pupils are aware of their targets and, if targets are not being met, they know what they need to do to improve.
- The overwhelming majority of parents who replied to the online inspection questionnaire believe that their child is making at least good progress. Inspection evidence fully supports this view.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching has improved well over time. It is good overall, with a significant minority of lessons resulting in outstanding learning.
- In the high number of lessons that are taught at least well, teachers plan work that is challenging and provides a variety of relevant activities. These include scope for pupils to work independently, in pairs or groups, and being given opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning.
- This was particularly evident in an outstanding Year 6 English lesson where pupils had to peer assess the creative writing of their partner. The work was based on the novel, *Goodnight Mr Tom*. Pupils were encouraged to select an extract from the story and then compose their own account creatively and with empathy. The standard of the written work was very high. It was

impressive that most pupils knew, and could accurately explain, the difference between 'empathy' and 'sympathy'.

- A feature of many lessons was the impressive quality of marking and assessment that was evident in the pupils' books. Such high-quality marking and assessment contributed significantly to the good learning seen.
- In the small minority of lessons where improvement is needed, teachers do not always plan learning activities that sufficiently stretch the pupils and command their attention. In such cases, the work is inclined to be too easy and there is a tendency for the teacher to do too much of the work and provide answers too readily. Opportunities to develop the pupils' skills in mathematics and, especially, reading and writing, are not seized with consistency. Such characteristics restrict the scope for pupils to learn and make good progress.
- The learning of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is good because of the support offered by teaching assistants. It was clear that the success of many lessons was based on the careful planning for learning undertaken by the teacher in association with teaching assistants.
- In many lessons, pupils across the ability range were heard to read aloud. Most are confident readers. They enjoy reading and do so with feeling and with accuracy. In the less effective lessons, pupils were not encouraged to read with any consistency.
- An overwhelming majority of parents responding to the online inspection questionnaire said that teaching is at least good. This is a view supported by inspection evidence. A small minority cast doubt about the appropriateness of homework that is set. Inspectors concluded that the quality and quantity of homework is pitched at an appropriate level.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour over time, around the school and in lessons is good. Where lessons are especially effective and engaging, behaviour can be outstanding, with all pupils keen and eager to learn.
- Although a minority of respondents to the staff questionnaire expressed concern about pupils' behaviour, inspectors found pupils to be polite and courteous, showing respect towards adults and towards one another. Pupils co-operate well with staff and work well in teams and individually. These qualities contribute significantly to the good progress they make and to their good personal development.
- Attitudes to learning are positive. Pupils enjoy attending school and say that it has improved well over the last couple of years. They feel safe and well catered for.
- Tutor time and specialist lessons inform pupils about how to stay safe and lead healthy lives. Ample attention is given to the dangers of alcohol and substance abuse.
- Pupils know about different forms of bullying, including racism. They have a good understanding of e-safety and they know about the nasty consequences of cyber-bullying.
- Pupils told inspectors that bullying is rare and that if any incidents do occur they know which members of staff to consult. This view was also endorsed by parents. Pupils describe the school as happy and harmonious, adding that they have considerable confidence in staff to deal with

bullying, or any other examples of anti-social behaviour.

- Good behaviour is reflected in the improving and above-average attendance figures and the low rate of fixed-term exclusions. Pupils attend regularly and punctually. This makes a significant contribution to their good levels of achievement.

The leadership and management are good

- The school is well led and managed by the headteacher and an effective senior team. Together, they have worked hard to raise achievement and improve teaching. They are well supported by the main body of staff, who are keen for the school to continue improving.
- Though the recent notice of closure has caused anxiety, staff morale and commitment remain high. As one teacher commented: 'We work hard and expect high standards. Staff are dedicated. Though our jobs are not secure, this does not lower our expectations or standards. We will continue to put our pupils first.'
- Self-evaluation has improved well since the previous inspection. Senior staff and governors know the school well. They are aware of its strengths, and know where improvements can be made.
- Monitoring and evaluation procedures are robust and have improved well since the previous inspection. These improvements have played a key role in improving pupil outcomes and ensuring that achievement for all groups is at least good.
- Teaching and learning are managed well. The provision for staff development is effective. This is reflected in a profile of teaching that is mostly good, with a significant amount that is outstanding.
- Senior staff meet regularly with all other staff to discuss progress towards reaching their annual objectives. Training is closely linked to ways to support staff to improve and strengthen their effectiveness. Any underperformance is quickly addressed. No members of staff are given salary increases unless their performance over time justifies it.
- The range of subjects on offer is managed well and has been adapted so that the pupils' transition to high school at the end of Year 8 is as straightforward as possible. Additional support has been used effectively to help pupils who have struggled with English and/or mathematics.
- There is a range of out-of-school activities for pupils to enjoy. These cover sport, music and drama, as well as a variety of clubs. A number of residential visits are planned annually, including to St Omer in France. Such a rich array of activities promotes responsibility well and makes a particularly positive contribution to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Arrangements for safeguarding are thorough, including the risk assessments undertaken for all educational visits.
- The school works closely with the local authority and this partnership work has been given a higher priority following the recent closure notice served on the school. The school has found aspects of the partnership work helpful and informative.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors have a good understanding of how well the school is performing, and the quality of teaching and learning. They hold the school to account well for its performance and rightly judge that it offers a good level of education. They know its strengths and where improvements are needed. They analyse outcomes, including test and examination results; they are aware of the strengths that exist in teaching and are involved in ensuring that there is a close link between performance and salary progression. Through the training they have received, they are aware of how performance management works. Expenditure is closely monitored, including the way extra funding through the pupil premium is spent.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	124821
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	406274

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	494
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lesley Mayes
Headteacher	Sally Holmes
Date of previous school inspection	9 March 2011
Telephone number	01449 742510
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