

Ryecroft CofE (C) Middle School

Denstone Road, Rocester, Uttoxeter, ST14 5JR

Inspection dates 27–28 February 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.

- Pupils make good progress as they move through the school.
- School leaders are rigorous in making sure that no pupil falls behind for long. Good support is provided to help individual pupils catch up as soon as their standards begin to slip.
- The headteacher and governing body have been successful in improving the school by raising the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.
- Pupils enjoy learning. They are good at learning on their own and with each other. They reflect well on their own work and think about how to improve it.
- Pupils behave well and they attend school regularly. They are polite and friendly and show respect to each other and to adults in the school.
- All pupils have many opportunities to experience a range of stimulating activities in school and sometimes further afield. These enrich and extend their learning.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Although it is improving, progress is not yet outstanding.
- Most teaching is good rather than outstanding. Teachers sometimes set the same task for all pupils so that the work is too easy for some and too hard for others.
- Pupils do not learn enough about the different cultures that make up British society.
- Middle leaders do not identify clearly enough how to improve the subjects they are responsible for.
- Pupils do not always know the next step to take to improve their work, and marking does not always help them to improve as well as it should.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors visited parts of 20 lessons and looked at work in pupils' books. They listened to pupils read, visited an assembly and observed playtime activities. They walked round school with pupils to find out about aspects of the school beyond lessons.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, two members of the governing body, key staff and pupils. A telephone call was made to a representative of the local authority.
- Documents looked at included: the school's self-evaluation summary, information on pupils' progress, and documents relating to safeguarding, school management and the range of subjects taught.
- Parents' views were taken into account through the 23 responses to the Ofsted online survey (Parent View) and through meeting parents before school and during a parents' evening.
- Inspectors considered 13 questionnaires completed by staff.

Inspection team

Mary Le Breuilly, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Christina Page

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than an average-sized middle school.
- Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- A higher-than-average proportion of pupils across the school are known to be eligible for pupil premium funding (additional funding provided by the government to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, those in local authority care and those from service families). There are no pupils in the school from service families or in the care of the local authority.
- A small number of pupils are eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium. (This is to help those pupils who did not achieve Level 4 in English at the end of Key Stage 2 to improve in the subject.)
- The proportion of pupils who are supported through school action is average as is the proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, that set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- Pupils in the school do not attend any alternative provision offsite.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Move more teaching from good to outstanding, by:
 - setting work that varies in difficulty so that all pupils are always given challenging work at the right level for their abilities
 - making sure individual pupils know the next steps they need to take to improve their work
 - building on recent improvements to marking so that it always meets the standards of the best marking seen in the school to direct pupils' improvement of their work
 - working more closely with partner first schools to ensure there is a shared view of standards when pupils enter the school so that teachers are able to set the right level of challenge in learning for all pupils from the start.
- Provide more support and challenge to middle leaders to help them know the strengths and weaknesses of their subjects and use this knowledge to make improvements to teaching and learning.
- Help pupils to prepare better for life in the multicultural society of the United Kingdom.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- The school's judgements of standards at the start of Year 5, confirmed by the local authority and the inspectors, show that pupils enter the school with levels of attainment that are, generally, below those typical for their age.
- Pupils in Years 5 and 6, including those eligible for free school meals, make progress that is at least similar to that seen nationally and, sometimes, better.
- By the end of Key Stage 2, standards in English and in mathematics rise to be broadly average. Attainment in Key Stage 2 in both English and mathematics is rising steadily.
- Only a few pupils were eligible for the pupil premium in Year 6 in 2012, making firm comparisons on attainment unreliable. However, in 2012, the few pupils in Year 6 eligible for free school meals attained similar standards to those of similar pupils nationally at the end of Key Stage 2. Their attainment in English and mathematics was lower than that of other pupils in the school. However, their progress increases as they move on to Year 7 and the gap between their attainment and that of other pupils in the school narrows by the end of Year 8.
- In Years 7 and 8, all pupils, including those eligible for free school meals, leave the school with standards in most subjects, including English and mathematics, that are above those often found by Year 8. They are well prepared for high school.
- Pupils make good progress in mathematics in Key Stage 3. Teachers are careful to build systematically on pupils' skills and to fill any gaps in their knowledge.
- Progress in Key Stage 3 in English is at least good and, sometimes, outstanding, particularly in writing. By the time they leave, pupils reach standards above those often found by Year 8. Those eligible for free school meals achieve as well as others because the extra funding from the pupil premium is well directed to provide support that is helping them learn well. Year 7 pupils who receive extra help from the catch-up premium make good progress in English and narrow the gap between their attainment and that of other pupils.
- Improving has been a priority for the school and standards in writing have risen. More pupils are reaching higher levels.
- Most pupils read well and the school has encouraged them in their wider reading. For example, authors and poets are brought into school to meet them, and World Book Day is celebrated by pupils dressing up as book characters. Standards in reading have risen for the last two years.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress across the four years they are in the school. This is because of the good support given by teachers and teaching assistants in class, in small groups and in one-to-one teaching sessions.
- Progress has improved during the past three years. The headteacher and senior leaders have taken action to improve teaching and they track pupils' progress carefully and take action as soon as any pupil begins to fall behind in learning. Pupils' improved achievement was noted in the Ofsted monitoring inspection of March 2012.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers have strong subject knowledge and they use good questioning techniques to develop pupils' thinking and extend their learning. The good relationships they have with pupils help to provide a positive learning atmosphere in classrooms.
- Most teaching seen during the inspection was good, including the teaching of literacy and mathematics, and the work in pupils' books shows that they are generally well taught over time. There is, however, too little outstanding teaching.
- In the best practice seen, teachers have high expectations and the work challenges all pupils, whatever their ability. Teachers use a range of activities and approaches that engage pupils' interest and carefully build on previous learning. They encourage pupils to consider how their work could be improved.
- Where teaching is less effective, work does not challenge all pupils in the class because the more and least able are given the same tasks. This weakness results, partly, from a mismatch between the views of the school and those of some of its partner first schools regarding standards at the point where pupils move up to the middle school. This means that it is more difficult for teachers to set the right level of challenge when pupils start at the middle school.
- Some of the marking in pupils' books is outstanding. Teachers' comments show pupils how to improve and also require pupils to comment on their own work. However, some work, for example in mathematics folders, shows little written guidance, and teachers rely too heavily on verbal comments – which are easily forgotten by pupils. In pupils' work in some other books, the comments are not sufficiently challenging to prompt pupils to learn from their mistakes.
- The school works hard to help pupils become independent learners. Many of the lessons seen show that pupils no longer rely only on their teachers for help with learning but can help themselves and each other. Pupils work well in pairs and small groups and are confident in discussing their work with each other.
- There are some good examples in books and lessons seen of pupils reflecting on their own work and on that of other pupils. Recently introduced sheets for this purpose are providing good opportunities for this to happen.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils are polite, friendly and helpful. They are proud of their school and love to show it to visitors. They enjoy learning and coming to school, and this is evidenced by their good attendance and punctuality.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They trust the adults in the school and feel that they could always find somebody to talk to if they have a problem.
- They say that there are few incidents of bullying and that these are quickly dealt with. They appreciate the reporting system that allows them to share concerns anonymously. Older pupils enjoy acting as mentors to younger pupils, and the younger pupils appreciate the support provided.

- Pupils' behaviour in lessons, around school and at break is almost always good. There are few instances of poor behaviour that slow learning down. Playtimes are happy and lively and well supervised. Pupils play well together and have ample opportunity for social development.
- The school helps pupils learn how to keep themselves safe and healthy, teaching them about road safety, internet safety, healthy eating and exercise. There are opportunities for pupils to take responsibility, for example, acting as sound engineers in assembly.
- Pupils have many opportunities for prayer, reflection and spiritual development. They know the difference between right and wrong.
- There are some opportunities for pupils to learn about other cultures, for example, through the letters they receive from their twin school in Kenya. However, they do not have enough opportunity to learn about the range of cultures that make up society in their own country today.
- Most parents are happy with the behaviour of pupils in the school. They say that their children enjoy coming to school and that they and their children can approach the school with problems.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher provides strong leadership. He has driven improvements that have resulted in better teaching and improved standards. The school's improvements to achievement and teaching indicate that it has a strong capacity for further improvement.
- Senior leaders monitor the quality of teaching regularly. They check pupils' books and teaching and learning in lessons and give constructive feedback to individual teachers so that they know how to improve.
- The school has provided good opportunities for teachers to develop their teaching skills. There are regular staff meetings to discuss teaching and learning, teachers are given helpful opportunities to attend training and outside support is bought in to help teachers improve their professional skills.
- Middle leaders do not evaluate frequently enough the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning in their subject areas to decide what improvements can be made. As a result, their planning for improvement is not always clearly focused and, therefore, less effective than it could be.
- The range of subjects taught is very helpful to pupils' learning and is enriched by clubs and activities that take place at lunchtimes and after school. Pupils spoke warmly about these activities and appreciated the time the teachers and other staff give to them. However, the learning opportunities they receive do not give them a good understanding of cultural diversity in modern United Kingdom society.
- The local authority, rightly, regards the school as good. It has been heavily involved with supporting the school in the past but, with the school's increasing improvement and self-sufficiency, has scaled back its support and now provides it only at the school's request. The school continues to buy support for some aspects, including ensuring that its judgements relating to standards are accurate.

- The impact of funding from the pupil premium is very carefully monitored, and is explained in considerable detail for parents on the school website. Funding is allocated to a range of support, including one-to-one teaching, small-group work and a number of additional learning opportunities. This support is helping almost all of the pupils eligible for the additional funding to make good progress.

■ The governance of the school:

- Led by an experienced Chair of the Governing Body, governors have a good knowledge of the strengths and priorities for the continuing development of the school. They challenge leaders and hold them to account for the school's performance and have ensured the school has improved. They are rigorous in setting annual performance targets for the headteacher. They have a clear understanding of the policy guidelines for the pay of other staff, especially relating to the quality of teaching in the school, and the achievement of pupils as compared with national data as far as possible. They know how good the teaching is. Governors know how funds are allocated, in particular those for the pupil premium, and the impact they have. Governors ensure that regulatory safeguarding requirements are met, and that school policies are reviewed regularly.

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	124450
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	406245

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 controlled
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Number of pupils on the school roll	185
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	
Number of boarders on roll	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pat Curtis
Headteacher	Stephen Bardon
Date of previous school inspection	16 November 2010
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