

Middlehurst School

Turnhurst Road, Chell, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, ST6 6NQ

Inspection dates 8–9 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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.

- Friendly and harmonious communities provide a warm welcome to both centres of Middlehurst School.
- Achievement is good. Pupils mostly make good progress as a result of the generally good, sometimes outstanding teaching they receive.
- Reading, writing and mathematics are well taught and the focus on English last year has improved results.
- Communication skills develop well. Pupils gain confidence to try, which leads to greater independence. Literacy and numeracy skills are reinforced well in each lesson.
- Pupils with the most complex needs have sensitive support and learn to make their thoughts and wishes known with increasing confidence.
- Behaviour around the school and in most lessons is good. Pupils are well mannered, polite and respectful to each other and to staff.
- Pupils clearly enjoy lessons and say they feel happy and safe in school.
- The curriculum is outstanding. An exceptional range of activities underpin pupils' strong social and personal skills development.
- The school is well led and managed. From a difficult three-year period of substantial change it stands in a much stronger position to look more clearly to the future. It is an improving school.
- Senior leaders are committed to raising pupils' achievement and embrace innovative practice. Teaching and learning are managed robustly.
- The small post-16 provision is good and improving. It effectively provides new choice for those with more complex needs.
- Work to support other schools is good and the 'Inspire' unit successfully re-engages excluded pupils in learning.
- Governors challenge effectively and have good knowledge of pupils' needs and their progress.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all lessons focus sharply enough on learning, match individual abilities to lesson goals or stretch all pupils sufficiently.
- Some of the targets to develop the school lack sufficient precision. The school's planning for its extended future is too limited.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 26 lessons: 19 of which were at the larger Middlehurst site and seven at the smaller Heathfield site. They saw all teachers timetabled to teach on the inspection days and one lesson taught by a higher-level teaching assistant.
- All classes on both sites were seen and one lesson was jointly observed with the Head of Site (Heathfield) at Middlehurst.
- Older students conducted a tour of the Middlehurst Centre and on both sites inspectors met with representatives of the school council. Inspectors listened to pupils read and discussed their work with them at both centres.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, school staff and senior leaders, the school’s family liaison worker, the school’s physiotherapist, the school-based therapist from Child and Adult Mental Health Services and members of the governing body.
- A telephone call was made to a representative of the local authority.
- Informal discussions were also held with pupils and staff.
- Information from the school’s most recent parental questionnaire was taken into account, together with a telephone call from one parent and a letter submitted to the inspectors from another. Insufficient responses were available on the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) to be able to access them.
- Staff views were gathered from discussions and from the staff questionnaire.
- The inspectors looked at information about pupils’ progress, teaching and planning documentation. The school’s documents on safeguarding were scrutinised together with records of attendance and pupils’ behaviour.

Inspection team

Linda Clare, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Hilary Ward

Additional Inspector

Doreen Davenport

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Since its last inspection, Middlehurst has merged with another all-age special school and currently operates across two sites or centres as an interim measure until its new single site opens in January 2014.
- The vast majority of pupils attending the two sites have a statement of special educational needs. In addition, a small number of pupils attend 'Inspire' on the Middlehurst site, which caters for permanently excluded primary age pupils from Stoke, for assessment of their needs.
- The school provides for pupils with complex and profound learning difficulties, severe and moderate learning difficulties, autistic spectrum conditions and behavioural difficulties.
- The school covers six key stages and caters for pupils between the ages of 3 and 19. Pupils are able to join the school at any age but the majority of those not attending Inspire, start at usual school entry times.
- There were no pupils in the very small post-16 group or the small group for those with more complex profound and multiple difficulties in school at the time of the inspection as they were away on a residential visit to the Lake District.
- Half of the school's pupils are eligible for the pupil premium, which is above the national average. (The pupil premium is additional funding provided to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, children looked after by the local authority and the children of armed service families.)
- There are twice as many boys as girls in the school and the majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The school provides an outreach service for mainstream schools in the Stoke area and it enables a small number of links with mainstream education for its own pupils. Link courses are in place for older pupils at Reaseheath College, Stoke College, Newcastle College and occasionally with an external training provider.
- The school has achieved Artsmark, Sportsmark and Healthy Schools status.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and learning further by:
 - ensuring that lesson objectives focus clearly on pupils' learning and not on what the teacher intends to do in the lesson
 - sharing with pupils at the start of lessons what they are each expected to learn and what they need to do to make their work better
 - making sure that the work set in every lesson is at the right level of difficulty to challenge each and every pupil, as in the best practise already in the school.
- Extend the period of forward planning for whole-school improvement and ensure that all targets are precise and sharply defined, so that the school's progress can be even more accurately measured.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils enter school with skills that are typically much below those expected of pupils their age nationally as a result of their learning and complex needs.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage children learn to follow school routines and make good gains in acquiring appropriate social and communication skills. They make simple choices and enjoy practical experiences, such as cutting fruit into pieces, which are used well to reinforce basic vocabulary and develop counting skills. These skills provide them with a secure foundation on which to build as they go through school.
- Those with the most complex needs use picture exchange systems to develop good communication skills. Pupils with verbal language and letter blending abilities use structured schemes to acquire improved reading, writing and listening skills. Pupils use technology well.
- Effective systems help pupils achieve greater independence. Photographic sequences capture evidence of carefully structured steps for pupils with profound and multiple difficulties. Good use of physical therapy including 'rebound' work on trampolines, a life-skills focus and significant community involvement are central to their good progress.
- The needs of pupils with autistic spectrum conditions are well addressed in a new provision. Pupils make good progress in its secure environment, which provides structure through familiar sensory and communication routines that focus well on individual learning.
- Progress across year groups is equally good and pupils' work reflects this over time. Older pupils achieve a good range of nationally accredited awards and skills-based learning certificates. Mindful of ensuring equality, the school also enables some pupils to access GCSE courses on an individual basis, although due to generally lower starting abilities, these numbers are decreasing.
- Work to develop reading, initially for those in receipt of pupil premium funding has been extended well. Other activities funded this way focus on confidence and attendance, and overall progress in reading, writing and mathematics has improved in response. Staff and parents agree.
- Pupils have good attitudes to learning and recognise the good support they get from their teachers. As one pupil noted, 'We get lots of reminders about keeping finger spaces.' when doing writing tasks. Pupils try hard, participate well and enjoy lessons. This was seen clearly as some pupils practised ball control in a figure of eight around their legs with great concentration.
- Good levels of support, close attention to checking pupil achievement and increasing levels of self-esteem have resulted in very little difference between the progress of girls and boys, those from minority ethnic backgrounds, those known to be eligible for free school meals or in receipt of pupil premium funding.
- Extra help for those in need is timely and supports learning efficiently. Social and emotional support sessions and the very popular and innovative online learning programme motivate pupils particularly well in mathematics, science and French.

The quality of teaching is good

- Lessons are mostly well planned. They build on what pupils have previously learned and reinforce small steps in learning. In some lessons, goals focus less on what pupils are to learn and more on what staff are going to do.
- Lessons generally move at a fast pace and activities in the best lessons are matched well to pupils' abilities. Behaviour in lessons is usually good but suffers where teaching lacks attention to precise individual needs and pupils have to wait for others to catch up. This limits progress.
- Teachers use questioning well to draw out pupils' ideas and thoughts, and to extend their language and learning skills. Praise is used effectively to encourage, enhance learning and build self-esteem.

- Staff are creative in their approach. This was illustrated exceptionally well in an information technology lesson in which every pupil was emailed an individual lesson plan around their own interests. The teacher checked individual pace, skills learned and understanding as pupils progressed through their tailor-made tasks.
- Practical learning is used very effectively. In a science lesson, the inspector observed pupils set up a fair test to compare the gas content of different brands of cola with much enthusiasm, good collaboration and much attention to appropriate social and work skills.
- Reading, writing and mathematics are taught well across all key stages. Competent use of signing by staff supports spoken language effectively and large print formats or voice amplification systems help those requiring enhanced visual or hearing help.
- Teaching support staff are valued. Most share their expertise with groups of pupils, others lead full lessons effectively. Exchanging information with teachers about pupils' contributions in lessons provides rounded pictures of group progress.
- Pupils' work is checked well. Communication and behaviour are checked each lesson and in some classes teachers record observations for greater clarity. Life skills are woven through lessons and practised daily.
- Pupils generally know what lessons are about and use smiley faces to show how well they have understood them. They are less clear about how much they have learned, whether it was sufficient or what to do to improve it.
- Pupils are particularly well advised and prepared for their next stage of education through a comprehensive programme of visits, practical learning, life skills and work experiences. Effective college placements provide wider opportunities to try a range of vocational skills.

■ The behaviour and safety of pupils ■ are good

- Behaviour is consistently good around school and contributes well to the calm and purposeful atmosphere on both sites. The breakfast club sets a good start to the school day.
- Pupils are polite, well mannered and are very proud of their school. They take responsibility seriously and happily take registers, serve on the school council or become prefects to help staff check behaviour around school. Pupils have recently created a new code of conduct which they will take with them to their new 'Water Mill School'.
- Pupils know about bullying and, although there have been a small number of incidents, they say that behaviour is generally good. They are confident that if bullying does occur it will be very well sorted out by staff. Behaviour is managed well and records show a very positive picture of two schools learning to work collaboratively and developing pupils' opportunities to work side by side.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are positive and strong. Pupils feel secure and cared for in school and understand to the best of their ability about boundaries and how to keep safe. They trust and have good confidence in staff and feel valued. Attendance is improving.
- Parents and staff feel that behaviour is good. Pupils are respectful, tolerant and show understanding of the difficulties and points of view of others. This was demonstrated very emphatically by older pupils in a lesson on the rights of children to a childhood, where their new awareness of the plight of some children was thoughtfully discussed.
- Rewards and sanctions are well understood and appreciated. Good work and behaviour are reinforced by generous applause in regular 'celebration' assemblies'. The school's 'Stop, Think, Do' approach is physically supported by strategically placed 'Think' chairs which offer opportunity for reflection.
- Behaviour and care plans are implemented where required and the school checks individual progress against these at monthly meetings. A family liaison worker on site coordinates contacts between home and school very effectively. Regular support from external agencies is good and pupils and parents are able to 'drop in' at Mac's Place in school where multi-agency support is offered.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher's effective management of significant change since the last inspection has been crucial to the pace and quality of the school's good and improving progress. The complementary skills of the headteacher and the Head of Heathfield site have ensured pupil progress has remained clearly the school's focus throughout.
- Staff morale is good and expectations for the future are high. The leadership of Inspire is good and the pilot post-16 group is well managed and expected to grow further.
- Professional development for all staff is bringing about cohesion and common ways of working, supporting staff who will be teaching pupils with a wider range of difficulties well. Performance management is linked appropriately to pay progression and current improvement goals.
- The management of teaching and learning is a strength of the school and, as a result, teaching is of a good quality. A new lesson planning format provides continuity of practice and pupils' progress is improving, most rapidly in reading. This good progress is due to well organised and structured programmes originating in the school's effective use of pupil premium funding.
- Pupil targets are set against national figures for pupils starting from similar levels and most provide good challenge. The relatively new scheme to record and check pupils' progress is developing well into a useful whole-school system.
- The school's view of itself is accurate. However, as a result of its changing situation, planning for its extended future is limited. Senior managers are also aware that some targets lack precision in order to show how much they have contributed to the school's improvement.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and promoted well across all subjects. European visits raise awareness of the wider world, while sessions such as extra-curricular boxing contribute well to social and community links.
- The school has equality of opportunity at its heart and tackles any discrimination that may arise swiftly. The Inspire unit provides an excellent programme to enable young people to re-engage with education and the vast majority return to mainstream schools after a period of intensive work at the school. The programme closely involves parents in learning and inspires pupils to have hope for the future.
- A range of family support, social, nursing and therapy staff provide valuable additional support services for parents, and partnership is good.
- Links with the local authority are good and there has been much collaborative work to facilitate the recent merger and new build. The authority provides a light touch service, providing support on request. It recognises the very positive work of the Inspire unit and the school's extensive outreach programme to support staff and pupils in mainstream schools.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are keen to be involved and monitor the school's progress thoroughly. They understand the school's strengths and areas for development well and take good care to ensure that pupils' progress and teaching are regularly checked. Governors meet termly with subject leaders, receive headteacher reports and extend their knowledge through focussed away days with senior staff. Finances are managed well. Governors are knowledgeable on the allocation of pupil premium funding and its positive impact. They ensure that arrangements for safeguarding meet current requirements. Governors share the ambition of the headteacher and senior leaders to provide the very best for the pupils of this newly combined school.

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	124501
Local authority	Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number	402262

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	160
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	3
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Katrina Smart
Headteacher	Jonathon May
Date of previous school inspection	10 May 2010
Telephone number	01782 234612
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