

Combs Middle School

Lavenham Way, Stowmarket, IP14 2BZ

Inspection dates 21–22 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
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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 throughout the school because teaching is good.
- Pupils like school and are keen to do well.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. They say they feel safe, that bullying is rare and that it is dealt with well.
- The headteacher provides good leadership. He works well with other leaders and governors to improve pupils' progress and raise standards.
- Leaders provide good training to help teachers improve their skills.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils do not consistently spell commonly used words accurately.
- Pupils do not have enough opportunities to write independently and at length so that they improve their writing and fully explain their ideas.
- Teachers do not always make it clear to pupils precisely what they should do to reach the standards expected of them.
- Teachers do not always tell pupils exactly how to improve their work, or give them opportunities to follow the guidance they are given.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 20 teachers in 32 lessons or parts of lessons. Four of these were observed jointly with senior leaders to check how accurately they evaluate teaching.
- Meetings were held with staff, pupils, governors and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors examined documents about the school's work, including information about the achievement of pupils, development planning and the school's self-evaluation.
- They took account of the 29 responses to the Parent View online questionnaire, and the school's own survey of parents' and carers' views.

Inspection team

Edward Wheatley, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Jean Samuel	Additional Inspector
Rachel Hobson	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is much smaller than similar schools. It is due to close in July 2015 as part of the local authority's reorganisation of schools.
- Very few pupils speak English as an additional language and a very small number are at the early stages of learning English.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is well below average and the proportion supported at school action plus or through a statement of special educational needs is broadly average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is broadly average. This is additional government funding for children looked after by the local authority, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children who have a parent in the armed forces.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- Since the school was last inspected, a new headteacher has taken up appointment.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement by making sure that:
 - there is a consistent approach to teaching accurate spelling
 - pupils have opportunities in all subjects to write independently and at length, so that they improve their writing and express their ideas in detail
 - pupils know what is required to meet the challenging levels of attainment expected of them
 - when teachers mark work they always tells pupils how well they are achieving and how they can improve their work, and they provide opportunities for pupils to carry out improvements and check that pupils follow the guidance they are given.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Pupils' progress over time from their below-average starting points is good. In lessons in all years, pupils' learning is good.
- Standards are average overall by the end of Year 6 and broadly as expected by the end of Year 8. The improvement in standards has continued from 2012, after a fall to below expected levels in 2011. Leaders accurately identified the reasons for the fall in standards and made improvements that have led to rising levels of attainment in all years.
- Although standards in writing are improving and are average by Year 6, they are still below expectations by the end of Year 8. This is because pupils sometimes spell commonly used words incorrectly and do not produce enough extended writing across all subjects to help improve their writing skills and to clearly explain their understanding and knowledge.
- Standards of reading are broadly as expected for pupils by Year 8. Those who find reading difficult link sounds to letters accurately to read unfamiliar words. Pupils enjoy reading, and the school is making sure that there is a wide range of books to catch and keep pupils' interest in reading.
- Pupils' attainment in mathematics is in line with expectations by Year 8. Pupils have good mental calculation skills and use accurately the basic calculation processes of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. The most able pupils solve equations and draw line graphs from which they can extract information. The least able pupils learn about budgeting and use ratios to allocate money to different aspects of household spending.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress. Classroom assistants provide good, and improving, support and guidance for pupils so that they gain the skills they need. They encourage pupils to work independently and with others.
- The small number of pupils who are at the early stages of learning English make good progress. They are well supported, and are rapidly gaining the English language skills they need to work and learn at the same pace as other pupils.
- Pupils supported by the pupil premium funding make good progress. In Year 8, these pupils' attainment is less than one term behind other pupils in English, and about one term behind other pupils in mathematics. The school uses its funding well to provide support for pupils to help them to catch up on the attainment of other pupils, and then to support them if they need further help. It also purchases special resources to promote their learning in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The most able pupils make good progress because, most of the time, work is well matched to their specific learning needs.
- The small number of pupils who join the school with low levels of English and mathematics make good progress to catch up to where they should be because they are well supported by teachers and learning assistants.

The quality of teaching is good

- In most lessons teachers make good use of accurate assessment information to provide challenging work, extension activities for pupils who learn fast, and support and appropriate activities for those who learn more slowly.
- Teachers' questioning is usually demanding and makes sure that all pupils have opportunities to discuss what they are learning. In the best lessons, teachers expect pupils to explain their understanding in detail. This is good because it helps pupils to consolidate their learning and assists teachers in recognising where pupils have gaps in their knowledge or understanding.
- Teachers provide many opportunities for pupils to work together. In this way, pupils learn how to share and collaborate over learning, and to take responsibilities for what they do. This promotes pupils' social and moral development well.
- Where teaching is best, teachers provide activities that capture pupils' imagination and sense of wonder. For example, pupils were amazed at a film clip showing a metal burning in liquid oxygen, and, in another lesson, fascinated at their own ability to produce a wide range of coloured patterns on fabrics using inks and oil pastels.
- Links between subjects are good and improving. The school's aim for pupils to develop their writing skills by having opportunities for independent writing in all subjects is at an early stage of introduction.
- Classroom assistants work well with pupils. They have a good understanding of the learning needs of pupils they support, and usually encourage them to make some of their own decisions on how they work, and to work with other pupils.
- Teachers' marking is often good, and gives pupils accurate information about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work. Sometimes, however, teachers do not tell pupils exactly how well they are doing or how to improve their work. In addition, pupils are not always given the time to follow the advice given, and teachers do not always check that they have.
- Teachers are not consistent in how they check that pupils spell correctly and in teaching them to spell accurately.
- While teachers plan lessons to include work that challenges pupils according to their abilities, they do not always make it clear enough to individual pupils exactly what they must do to achieve as well as they should.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils have good attitudes to learning and behave well. They enjoy school and being challenged in lessons.
- Relationships are good. Pupils and teachers respect each other, and pupils are friendly and polite to each other and to visitors.
- Pupils feel safe, and they behave safely in practical lessons and around the school. They know about the risks of using the internet, and behave safely and know who they would tell if they

were worried about any problems they might have.

- Pupils are ready to take on responsibilities and, when they do, they carry them out well. For example, some Year 8 pupils are 'sports leaders' and make sure that games at lunchtimes proceed safely and that pupils do not become over excited and forget that there are other pupils around on the playing areas.
- Pupils' attendance is average and improving. Persistent absence has fallen, and the school works closely with external agencies and families to encourage regular attendance.
- Pupils have a good understanding of the different forms of bullying. They say bullying does occur, but only rarely, and then they know who to go to for help, and that it is then dealt with effectively.
- Pupils' attention to work only wanders to other things on the rare occasion that teaching is not demanding enough or activities do not catch their interest.

The leadership and management

are good

- The headteacher provides good direction for the school to improve. He works closely with other leaders to plan improvements and introduce actions to improve teaching and the progress pupils make. All leaders have a good understanding of what needs to be done to raise standards, and they work closely with all staff to take action quickly to deal with weaknesses.
- Leaders have eliminated inadequate teaching. They see to it that the school provides a good range of training to ensure that all teaching is at least good. Teachers welcome training and professional development. They have targets to help them improve their work. These are linked to pupils' progress, school priorities for improvement and to personal professional development.
- Leaders are well supported to help them improve their professional skills. They support staff and provide training for classroom assistants to improve their skills of working with pupils.
- The local authority supports the school well. It works with leaders to evaluate the school's effectiveness, and provides training for leaders and to help teachers improve their teaching.
- The school organises the subjects it teaches well and supports pupils with a wide range of trips and activities that make learning interesting. It provides a good personal, health and social education programme that promotes pupils' emotional, social and physical development. This contributes considerably to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Parents and carers are pleased with the school. The school is responsive to parental comments and works hard to engage more parents in pupils' learning. As a result, parental involvement is slowly increasing.
- The school is effective in its actions to raise standards, to improve progress and to eliminate inadequate teaching. It ensures that the progress made by all groups of pupils is good. Attendance is improving and teaching is improving. The school demonstrates that it can take effective action to drive improvement, and its capacity for further improvement is strong.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is well informed about the school, and provides considerable support for

leaders in preparing staff for their future careers and for the school's planned closure in 2015. Governors challenge the headteacher and other leaders about pupils' performance. They are fully aware of how well pupils achieve in relation to achievement nationally, and of the achievement of different groups of pupils within school. They check how well funds are spent on promoting pupils' progress, and know how well pupils supported through the pupil premium funds make progress. They have a good understanding of how the school checks the quality of teaching, and a detailed understanding of how teachers' progression on salary scales is linked to pupils' progress, teachers' professional development and how well staff contribute to the achieving the school's priorities. Governors make sure that the school's safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements, and that the school has secure systems to check the suitability of staff who are appointed.

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	124820
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	412233

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	365
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Simon Ginns
Headteacher	Mark Cresswell
Date of previous school inspection	16–17 September 2009
Telephone number	01449 674666
Fax number	01449 775 282
Email address	admin@combs.suffolk.sch.uk

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