

Blackminster Middle School

Station Road, South Littleton, Evesham, WR11 8TG

Inspection dates

7–8 November 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.

- By the time pupils reach the end of Year 8 and leave the school, they have made exceptional progress in mathematics and good progress in English. They are very well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- The quality of teaching is good with some that is outstanding. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge, explain new ideas clearly and often plan lessons that interest and challenge pupils.
- The dynamic new headteacher, together with the senior leadership team and governors, has been strongly focused on improving the school. Through their drive and ambition, they have been successful in improving teaching and pupils' achievement.
- The marking of pupils' work is done particularly well and shows them how to improve, engaging them in a dialogue.
- The vibrant curriculum includes a wide range of rich experiences and makes an excellent contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Behaviour is good, both in and out of the classroom. Pupils are friendly, caring and supportive of each other. They have no concerns about bullying and say that they feel very safe.
- The governing body is highly effective. Governors are fully aware of their leadership and management role, and have a very good understanding of the school's priorities.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Some teaching requires improvement, and not enough is outstanding.
- Pupils do not always have enough opportunities to develop their independent learning skills.
- Teachers do not always use assessment information well to plan activities that match pupils' different needs.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 23 lessons, four of which were seen jointly with senior leaders. They made additional visits to a whole-school assembly and registration periods, and also carried out a 'learning walk' with the headteacher across a range of subjects.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, the Chair of Governors and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils in lessons, at break and at lunchtimes. They spoke to three groups of pupils representing all year groups in the school.
- Inspectors heard a group of Year 6 and 7 pupils read and listened to pupils read in lessons.
- The inspection team looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation of how well it is doing, the school improvement plan, and statistical information about pupils' progress, achievement, behaviour and exclusions. They also looked at pupils' work in lessons.
- Inspectors took account of 16 responses to the online questionnaire Parent View, and the 20 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Christine Young, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Susan Thomas	Additional Inspector
Patrick Walsh	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized middle school.
- The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average. The proportion of pupils from Traveller backgrounds is above average.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is average. This is additional money allocated by the government for specific groups of pupils, including those looked after by the local authority and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported through school action is above average, as is the proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The school does not use any off-site, alternative provision for any of its pupils.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The headteacher was appointed in September 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so it is consistently at least good and more is outstanding by:
 - sharing good and outstanding teaching skills more widely across the school
 - giving pupils more opportunities to learn independently, think deeply and solve problems for themselves
 - making sure all teachers consistently use assessment information to assist them in matching learning activities to pupils' varying needs so that rapid progress is always made.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils achieve well throughout the school, regardless of their background or ability levels, thanks to good teaching and a rich curriculum.
- School data indicate that many pupils' attainment is below what is expected for their age when they join in Year 6. National tests show that Year 6 pupils have usually made less progress than expected nationally in English and mathematics in Key Stage 2. However, this is misleading because pupils only spend their final year of the key stage at Blackminster Middle, and make consistent and sustained progress during their three years at the school.
- By the time pupils reach the end of Year 8 they have made exceptional progress in mathematics and good progress in English. School data show that the majority of pupils are working at higher levels of attainment than expected nationally for their age.
- Pupil premium funds are well used to provide intensive teaching for small groups, one-to-one support and additional resources for learning. Consequently the attainment gap between eligible pupils and the others has closed significantly by the time they reach Year 8, reflecting good progress. In 2013, eligible pupils were on average two terms behind the others in English and mathematics.
- In 2013 disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs made better than expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics. This is because they are well supported by skilled teaching assistants who have a good understanding of their needs and how they learn best. Good teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants provides focused learning that enables these pupils to thrive.
- New approaches to teaching to improve standards in reading, and especially writing, are having a direct impact on pupils' progress. Pupils have good opportunities to apply their literacy and numeracy skills across all subjects to develop their standards in reading, writing and number.
- Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and Traveller backgrounds make similar progress to other pupils in the school.
- The Year 7 'catch-up' funding is used effectively to supplement support for the weakest readers. Pupils are now reading more often than they were; they have reading time allocated every day, and are now successfully reading with understanding and confidence.

The quality of teaching is good

- The majority of teaching observed by inspectors was good or outstanding, but some required improvement.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils' efforts and behaviour in class, and this provides an atmosphere where effective learning takes place. A good example of high expectations was seen in a Year 8 mathematics lesson focusing on theoretical and experimental probability. Pupils were thinking and talking about mathematics at a very high level, resulting in accelerated learning and exceptional rates of progress being made by all groups of pupils.

- In a Year 7 technology lesson, pupils developed a highly professional attitude to the process of working in a real kitchen environment. The expert planning of the lesson built in opportunities for all groups of pupils to make rapid progress and enjoy a motivated learning experience.
- In a Year 6 French lesson the teacher's high expectation and high levels of challenge resulted in substantial progress being made by all pupils. Pupils were confident in their use and understanding of spoken French and this was reinforced by the teacher's excellent use of the target language to support achievement.
- Literacy skills are taught well across the curriculum, with the result that pupils are making good progress in reading and writing. Numeracy is also taught effectively, with the result that pupils are able to apply their skills well and make good progress across a range of subjects.
- The quality of marking is excellent, and is applied consistently across subjects. This is a strength of the school. Teachers and pupils engage in written and verbal commentaries that identify what pupils need to do to improve their work as well as identifying current good and accurate practice in how well they have done. Parents and carers are also able to make comments regularly about the progress their child has made and how they can support learning at home. This three-way dialogue results in pupils making good progress.
- Qualities of teaching that were seen in the best lessons included: good use of questioning to probe and deepen pupils' understanding; good use of pace to motivate pupils in their learning; pitching lessons at the right level so all groups of pupils could access the subject and make progress; and challenging the most able pupils while effectively supporting pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium.
- Teaching makes a positive contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This helps to ensure that pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Teachers link subjects together well to provide a range of exciting experiences to develop learning across all year groups.
- Some teachers do not have a sufficiently accurate and up-to-date knowledge of pupils' achievement and their individual needs to plan work at the right level of difficulty for them. This slows their progress.
- Teachers do not always give pupils sufficient opportunities to learn independently, think deeply and solve problems for themselves.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils are proud of their school. Teachers have strong, positive relationships with pupils and use praise effectively so pupils thrive in an atmosphere where there are high levels of mutual respect.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons is consistently good. They enjoy learning and work very hard to succeed, and cooperate extremely well when given opportunities to work together.
- The school's caring and vigilant staff always make sure that pupils feel safe in school. Parents responding to the online survey are extremely positive about behaviour and safety in the school.

- Pupils have a very good understanding of the different types of bullying and how to respond. They told inspectors that bullying rarely happens, and if it does it is dealt with quickly by staff.
- Pupils have a clear understanding of sanctions and rewards and the school's behaviour logs indicate that incidents are followed up rigorously.
- Most pupils described the school as a happy place to be, and appreciate the support and advice provided by their teachers and heads of house. The strong emphasis placed on personal development is developing pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem.
- The school checks attendance carefully and works effectively with families to ensure it does not stop pupils from learning. Attendance is above average and the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has reduced.
- Behaviour is not outstanding because pupils' attitudes to learning are not yet of an equally high standard across all subjects, years, classes and with different staff.

The leadership and management are good

- The newly appointed headteacher and other school leaders have taken effective action to raise pupils' achievement and standards of teaching. Staff, managers and governors share the headteacher's commitment and drive to improve all aspects of the school and ensure there is a consistency in approach.
- Leaders' assessment of the school's strengths and weaknesses is accurate. They have introduced a more rigorous performance management system for teachers, which is accurate and clearly identifies the skills that need to be improved. The training provided is good; there is a strong focus on the development of subject leaders and improving teaching.
- The pupil premium funding has been used extremely well to support pupils' progress through enriching the curriculum, specific tuition in the summer term, and the employment of teaching assistants and specialist support for pupils. This has resulted in much improved rates of progress and improvements in behaviour and attitudes to learning by eligible pupils.
- The leadership team has shown that it has the capacity for bringing about further improvements in the quality of teaching. The monitoring of teaching is good and the school has plans to use the very best teachers to share their teaching practice across the staff to raise standards so that all teaching will be good or outstanding.
- The leadership team has introduced the 'Data Road Show', which visits first schools in the summer term to look at Year 6 progress data. This has been very successful in supporting all groups of pupils through their transition to the middle school. Some Year 5 teachers from the first schools work with pupils in the autumn term to help pupils settle well into the new school and quickly make progress.
- The curriculum provides a wealth of opportunities for all pupils to take part in academic, cultural, sporting and artistic experiences across all year groups. Pupils develop their self-confidence and self-esteem through working in teams and groups, and by taking on responsibilities that result in external qualifications. For example, pupils can follow the bronze and silver Arts Award, the Sports Leadership Award, first aid qualifications and many more.

- Through the curriculum, the school has built very successful partnerships with local businesses. Projects enable pupils to learn about life skills and develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding exceptionally well.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body takes an active and successful role in the life of the school. Governors know clearly from data how well the school is doing and what it needs to do to improve.
- A series of well-planned meetings help governors to maintain a thorough yet balanced overview of the effectiveness of the school.
- The governors use formal meetings to help monitor any emerging issues identified through the headteacher's reports and decide how best to deal with them.
- The governing body is fully aware of how the school spends the pupil premium and the Year 7 'catch-up' funding, and the impact this has on pupils' progress.
- Governors have a very good understanding of how well teachers are doing in terms of the progress that their pupils make. This helps governors to assess accurately teachers' performance against the pay they receive. They know what the school is doing to tackle any underperformance.
- Governors are up to date on training and are keen to refresh their knowledge when new initiatives come about.
- They make sure that safeguarding policies and practices and child protection arrangements meet current national requirements.

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	116960
Local authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	429545

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	10–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	252
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Parfitt
Headteacher	Lorna Button
Date of previous school inspection	14 March 2011
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