

Walton Priory Middle School

Beacon Rise, Walton, Stone, Staffordshire, ST15 0AL

Inspection dates

17–18 November 2015

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils in Key Stage 2 are not making enough progress, especially in reading and mathematics. As a result, too few reach the standards expected of them.
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 2 have fallen over recent years and leaders' actions have only recently begun to stem the decline.
- Leaders' plans to improve the school are not clearly prioritised to reflect the urgency of raising standards of achievement in Key Stage 2. As a result, the work of staff is not well focused on the school's overriding improvement priority.
- Leaders at all levels do not effectively evaluate the impact that teaching is having on pupils' learning. They focus too much on teachers' actions rather than pupils' progress.
- Governors lack the expertise to challenge leaders effectively about pupils' performance, achievement and the quality of teaching.
- Teachers in Key Stage 2 do not plan work well enough to ensure that pupils, especially the most able, are stretched and challenged.
- Teachers do not check carefully enough on pupils' progress in lessons. As a result, mistakes and misunderstandings go uncorrected and pupils make less progress than they should.
- Teachers do not use assessment information effectively to identify when pupils are falling behind, and so do not put in place extra support to help them catch up.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 3. This is especially true for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs and for disadvantaged pupils.
- The executive headteacher, supported by the deputy headteacher, provides a clear vision for the school, which is shared by governors, staff and parents.
- The school's thoughtfully planned curriculum is supplemented by a rich variety of extra-curricular activities.
- Pupils are confident, courteous and well behaved. A culture of mutual respect, tolerance and understanding pervades the school.
- Governors, leaders and staff are relentless in their determination to ensure that pupils are safe and well cared for.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, particularly in Key Stage 2, so that all pupils make at least good progress, by ensuring that teachers:
 - plan activities that are well matched to pupils' abilities and that offer the right level of challenge, especially for the most-able pupils, and that help them to think hard and deepen their understanding
 - carefully check pupils' work and understanding in lessons and provide correction and extra help when pupils make mistakes or do not understand
 - use assessment information to identify pupils who are falling behind and then provide support to help them catch up.

- Strengthen leadership at all levels by ensuring that:
 - improvement plans prioritise the need to raise standards in Key Stage 2 and contain sharp actions that galvanise the whole staff team and governors to address this priority
 - all leaders' evaluations of teaching focus on pupils' progress and identify teachers' strengths and weaknesses that are then addressed with targeted guidance and support
 - all middle leaders have the skills and capacity to improve teaching and raise standards in their areas
 - governors use the school's assessment information and published progress data about pupils to hold leaders to account for standards in their areas of responsibility.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

requires improvement

- Although leaders at all levels have correctly identified the areas in which the school needs to improve, the plans that they have drawn up are not clearly prioritised and so the urgency of raising standards in Key Stage 2 is not understood by all. As a result, the energies of governors, leaders and staff are spread too thinly rather than focusing on the most important issue, which is ensuring that the school improves.
- Checks that leaders make on the quality of teaching are too focused on what teachers are doing in lessons and not on how much progress pupils are making. As a result, leaders do not have a forensic view of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and of individual teachers. This makes it difficult for senior leaders and governors to target training, support and guidance where it will have most impact on improving teaching.
- The executive headteacher, ably supported by the deputy headteacher, relentlessly communicates her vision of care for, and development of, each pupil in the school. Staff, parents and pupils share her infectious enthusiasm and, as a result, Walton Priory's values of 'work hard, respect each other and look after the environment' are evident throughout the school.
- Middle leaders are hard working and committed to securing the best possible education for all pupils. However, the many checks that they carry out are not focused enough on the progress of pupils to sustain improvements to the quality of teaching.
- Leaders have skilfully designed a curriculum that has the school's shared values running through it. They also regularly evaluate the curriculum, making changes whenever they perceive a weakness. For example, extra time has recently been dedicated to English and mathematics in Key Stage 2 in order to accelerate pupils' progress. Weekly 'respect lessons' see visiting speakers helping pupils to learn about topics such as the police, democracy and online safety.
- The taught curriculum is supplemented well by a wide variety of clubs and activities. These include many sporting, artistic and subject-based activities ranging from athletics to computer coding and from street dance to gardening. A large and increasing number of pupils take advantage of these opportunities which contribute positively to their personal development.
- In this school where most are from White British backgrounds, pupils develop a good understanding of people of different races and religions because of what they are taught in lessons and through specially planned activities. For example, the school recently held a 'refugee day' where pupils learned about the European Declaration of Human Rights and considered what it would be like to be displaced from their home.
- Leaders carefully plan and track the spending of the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for pupils in local authority care and those known to be eligible for free school meals. As a result, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils is improving and their attendance has improved markedly.
- The primary school sport funding is used very well on improving sporting facilities and on training teachers to teach sport more effectively. Leaders have ensured that this money will lead to lasting and sustainable improvement in sport at the school, and its impact is visible in the increased number of pupils taking part.
- The local authority has provided effective support to the school through a recently retired headteacher, focusing on support for the relatively new senior leaders and the school's middle leaders. The local authority has also recently commissioned further support for the school with a specific emphasis on improving attainment in Key Stage 2, but it is too early to judge its impact.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - lacks the expertise to challenge leaders effectively about pupil outcomes and the quality of teaching
 - has recognised this weakness and sought to recruit additional expertise, but it is too early to judge its impact
 - does possess significant expertise in other areas of school life, such as safeguarding and pupil well-being, and very effectively supports and challenges leaders in these areas
 - ensures that financial resources are spent carefully.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Governors and leaders have successfully created a culture of safeguarding and care across the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching in Key Stage 2 is weaker than in Key Stage 3 and, as a result, pupils make less progress in Years 5 and 6 than they do in Years 7 and 8.
- In too many Key Stage 2 lessons, pupils are not challenged to think and work hard. Time is wasted with unnecessary repetition of work that they can do easily or with over-explanation of tasks from the teacher. As a result, pupils, especially the most able, find the work dull and too easy and do not make sufficient progress.
- Teachers do not check pupils' work carefully enough during lessons, so that errors go uncorrected and misconceptions are not tackled. Inspectors saw examples of pupils repeatedly making the same mistakes in their books and not learning from their previous errors. Inspectors also saw examples where pupils had failed to master mathematical techniques and their lack of understanding had not been addressed by their teacher.
- Although the school is rich in information about pupils' progress, teachers do not routinely use this information to identify those pupils who are falling behind with their work. As a result, some of these pupils do not receive the extra help that they need in order to catch up with the rest of the class and they fall further behind.
- In the best lessons, in all years, teachers use their strong subject expertise to set challenging tasks that stretch pupils. In these lessons teachers skilfully question pupils, helping them to think about their work and so deepening their understanding. Pupils respond with enthusiasm and energy to such teaching. Indeed, they respond sensibly even when teaching is dull and lacking challenge.
- The work in pupils' books reflects the quality of teaching and progress across the school and so is stronger in Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 2, but also varies in quality between subjects. Where expectations are highest, for example in English and science, pupils' work is well presented, of a high standard, marked in accordance with the school's policy and it is clear that pupils are acting upon teachers' comments to improve their work. In other subjects, including mathematics, history and geography, the quality and presentation of work are more varied. Marking remains in line with school policy but pupils make much less use of teachers' feedback.
- The teaching of reading is improving because leaders have taken robust action to address the weakness identified by school assessment information. All pupils have a reading record that confirms that they read regularly and to an appropriate standard. Pupils are also now reading more non-fiction texts in their English lessons and through tutor time.
- Teaching assistants are used effectively to support pupils with special educational needs, often in small groups, and this is one of the reasons that these pupils are now making better progress.
- Relationships between adults and pupils are strong across the school. Teachers consistently reinforce the school's expectations that all should 'work hard, respect each other and look after the environment' and, as a result, lessons make a good contribution to pupils' social and moral development.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The pupils of Walton Priory are confident, articulate young people who are proud of their school. They are keen to do well and most are very self-motivated learners who respond with enthusiasm to challenging teaching.
- Pupils in all years work towards 'Beacon Pupil Status' where they have to demonstrate resilience, reflection, participation, resourcefulness and collaboration, and this helps them to take responsibility for their own learning. Similarly, teachers are expected to work towards 'Beacon Teacher Status'.
- Opportunities for pupils, such as being a form representative or a 'young leader in service', help pupils to develop self-confidence, leadership skills and a sense of service to their school.
- Pupils have a well-developed understanding of how to keep themselves safe from a range of potential threats. They eloquently discuss topics such as racism, bullying in all its forms and extremism, and they demonstrate knowledge, respect and empathy when doing so. This is because leaders have carefully crafted the school's curriculum to develop pupils' understanding of these issues.

- The school's behaviour records show that bullying is rare. Pupils confirmed this to inspectors, as well as their confidence in staff to deal effectively with any bullying, or indeed any other problem they might encounter.
- Policies and procedures to keep pupils safe in school are highly effective. This is because governors, leaders and all staff understand their responsibilities and contribute to a culture of keeping pupils safe. Governors bring considerable expertise and scrutiny to this area of school life. Pupils feel safe, and are safe, in school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- In almost all lessons, pupils are polite, well behaved and very keen to do well. In a few lessons, pupils become inattentive and chat because the work is repetitive or mundane.
- Around school, between lessons, at break and lunchtime, pupils are friendly, courteous and respectful to adults and each other. The school is calm and orderly, as observed by inspectors, even during a wet and windy lunchtime.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school. Attendance, which was below the national average, has improved for two consecutive years and is now above the national figure. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils, which was low, is much improved and is now close to that of other pupils.
- The number of fixed-term exclusions from the school is low and repeat exclusions are very rare indeed because staff successfully help pupils to think about their behaviour and to learn from their mistakes.
- Parents, staff and pupils all rightly believe that behaviour in the school is good and managed well.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Pupils' progress is weak in Key Stage 2, especially in reading and mathematics, and standards in the most recent national test results declined compared with the previous year. These tests show that attainment was broadly in line with national averages by the end of Year 6 in writing but below average in reading and mathematics. School assessment information and pupils' work seen during the inspection confirm that pupils are now beginning to make better progress during Key Stage 2.
- The most-able pupils are not making sufficient progress in Key Stage 2 because they are not consistently stretched and challenged in lessons. As a result the proportion of pupils achieving the highest levels in the most recent national tests was below national averages. As with all pupils, some improvement is now evident for current pupils in Key Stage 2 and their progress is much stronger in Key Stage 3.
- Pupils make good progress across a range of subjects in Key Stage 3 and therefore catch up much of the ground lost in Key Stage 2. As a result, pupils leave the school at the end of Year 8 having achieved standards that are broadly in line with those expected given their starting points.
- Disadvantaged pupils make less progress than others in Key Stage 2, but these gaps are closing, especially in reading and mathematics. By the end of Year 8, disadvantaged pupils have overtaken others in English and the gap in mathematics is small, so that over their four years in the school, these pupils have made similar progress to their peers.
- The progress made by disabled pupils and those with special educational needs closely mirrors that made by all pupils. Historically weak progress in Key Stage 2 is now improving rapidly because of skilful and targeted extra help and support. By the end of Year 8 most of these pupils are making at least expected progress in both English and mathematics, because they catch up in Years 7 and 8.
- Pupils make good progress across most subjects in Key Stage 3 because teachers have high expectations and use their subject-specific expertise well to question and challenge pupils. This is especially evident in English and science, where pupils consistently produce work of a high standard.

School details

Unique reference number	124426
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10005650

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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	364
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Chris Frid
Executive headteacher	Nicola Gilman
Telephone number	01785 814930
Website	www.waltonpriorymiddleschool.co.uk
Email address	office@waltonpriory.staffs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	15 March 2012

Information about this school

- Walton Priory is smaller than most middle and secondary schools.
- Walton Priory Middle School and Manor Hill First School form the Stone Community Federation. The two schools share an executive headteacher and a single governing body.
- The executive headteacher and the deputy headteacher both took up their posts in April 2014.
- Most pupils come from White British backgrounds.
- The percentage of pupils who are supported through the pupil premium (which provides additional funding for looked after pupils and those known to be eligible for free school meals) is below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is approximately average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school makes no use of alternative provision for pupils.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 35 lessons; several of these observations were carried out with members of the school's senior leadership team. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour between lessons, at break and at lunchtime.
- Inspectors scrutinised the books from a selection of pupils and looked at pupils' work in lessons.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior and middle leaders and governors. The lead inspector spoke with a representative of the local authority over the telephone.
- Inspectors considered 51 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire, met with one parent and spoke with another over the telephone.
- Inspectors considered 14 responses to the online staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors met formally with two groups of pupils and had numerous informal discussions with pupils.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and plans, school policies, school information about outcomes, teaching, behaviour and attendance, and minutes of governing body meetings.

Inspection team

Alun Williams, lead inspector

Charalambos Loizou

Graham Tyrer

Her Majesty's Inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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