

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



7 December 2015

Mr Keith Simpson
Headteacher
Middlewich High School
King Edward Street
Middlewich
Cheshire
CW10 9BU

Dear Mr Simpson

Short inspection of Middlewich High School

Following my visit to the school on 24 November 2015 with Paul Chambers HMI, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Most of the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report have been tackled effectively. Relatively new to headship at the time of the last inspection, you have quickly established a sharp culture of accountability and aspiration, and as a result, outcomes for pupils are improving apace.

You have taken the lead in encouraging all members of the school community to look outwards from their immediate environment and learn from the experience of other schools. Productive partnerships have been forged with a wide range of institutions, both locally and further afield. As a result, the school has won well-deserved recognition and has also been instrumental in improving the practice of other schools, for example in the promotion of pupils' emotional well-being.

A particular strength of the school is the highly effective system to track pupils' progress that has been developed in the wake of the previous inspection. Precise analysis of the progress of different groups of pupils and of their achievement across subjects ensures that senior leaders, including governors, have a very accurate view of the school's strengths and remaining weaknesses. For example, last year you identified further areas in which the school could improve, such as the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Timely, appropriate action has been taken, and as a result, the achievement, behaviour and attendance of these pupils are improving rapidly.

You have ensured that subject leaders now take a much more active role in checking up on the quality of teaching in their areas of responsibility. There is a clear 'line of sight' through from senior leadership down to the work of individual teachers that has sharpened practice, for example in marking, shining an unforgiving light on any underperformance. You have shown tenacity in challenging weakness, leading to some difficult decisions having been made. This has been a defining factor in moving the school forward.

The school has become a beacon for the local area in its specialised provision for pupils with autism or those with a hearing impairment, as well as pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. School leaders also work positively with families of the Traveller community to help their children get the most out of education. In this way, a spirit of inclusion pervades the school; the prevailing ethos is one of harmony and respect for others.

You have communicated your vision for the future development of the school clearly and there is a discernible drive for further improvement. School leaders are not complacent and frankly acknowledge that aspects of teaching and learning, particularly in mathematics, still need to improve.

Safeguarding is effective.

School leaders, including governors, have made sure that safeguarding arrangements are effective. Pupils spoken to during the inspection say they feel safe and appreciate the fact that they can report problems they are having online, via the school's website. The large majority of parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, said that their child is happy at this school and that they would recommend Middlewich High School to other parents.

Inspection findings

- The proportion of pupils achieving five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, improved markedly in 2015 and is now slightly above the national average. Pupils who took examinations at the end of the last academic year made good progress in a number of subjects, including English and science.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics was more mixed. A lower proportion of pupils than is seen nationally gained the top grades of A* and A in this subject. Inspection evidence confirms that the most-able pupils are not always challenged effectively in this subject.
- The information school leaders gather on the progress pupils are making is considerably more reliable than it was when the school was previously inspected. This is because school leaders have used their links with staff in local outstanding schools to verify that this information is accurate.
- Current information on pupils' progress indicates an improving trend across most subjects, including mathematics. In the past, girls have tended to make better progress than boys in most subjects. These gaps have narrowed considerably and boys' progress overall in English, mathematics and science is catching up with that of the girls, particularly in Key Stage 3.

- School leaders commissioned reviews of governance and of the effectiveness of pupil premium funding, both of which have been instrumental in driving improvement. The pupil premium is additional government funding designed to support pupils who are eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority.
- Over the last two years, gaps in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and others nationally have narrowed substantially in both English and mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils make just as good progress as other pupils in the school in English on the whole, but they do not do as well in mathematics. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved markedly since the previous inspection and their rate of exclusion has fallen.
- Pupils with special educational needs and those with disabilities generally make good progress from their individual starting points. School leaders acknowledge that there is still work to be done to improve the attendance and reduce the rate of exclusion of this group of pupils.
- Monitoring of the quality of teaching is more effective than it was at the time of the previous inspection. Performance management procedures have been used successfully to challenge underperforming staff.
- Improvements to the overall quality of teaching have been at the heart of the school's work for a number of years. A programme of training has supported teaching staff in 'raising their game' so that a greater proportion of teaching is consistently good. The school is not simply reliant on 'quick fixes' to sort out underachievement; as a result, the improving trend in outcomes appears sustainable.
- School leaders engage well with parents and the local community. The long-serving governing body is approachable and well informed. Governors take their responsibilities seriously and are actively engaged in both the academic and wider life of the school. Governors have a strong focus on the key priorities for school improvement and they challenge school leaders effectively.
- The school's website meets requirements, is highly informative and very easy to navigate. It provides a host of useful information for pupils and parents alike.
- This is a school where diversity is celebrated and all pupils, whatever difficulties they may face, are encouraged to succeed. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is supported well. For example, during the inspection, a Year 7 pupil explained convincingly how the school had helped her to appreciate the importance of fundamental British values, such as freedom of speech.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- outcomes for all pupils improve quickly in mathematics by rigorously adhering to the current action plan for improvement in this subject, regularly reviewing its impact and amending the plan accordingly, if required
- attendance improves and the exclusion rate reduces for pupils with special educational needs.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Cheshire East Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Joan Bonenfant
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in a number of lessons, some of which were joint observations with the headteacher. Inspectors examined samples of pupils' work in a range of subjects and across year groups.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and other governors, a representative of the local authority, and pupils.
- A telephone call was made to the executive headteacher of a local school with which the school works in partnership. In addition, a telephone call was made to Tyrewise, a local company that provides work-related training for a pupil currently at the school. A conversation also took place with a parent who had contacted Ofsted during the inspection.
- Inspectors considered a range of documentation including: the school's self-evaluation of its work; information on pupils' progress; analyses of examination performance; minutes of meetings of the governing body; information on attendance; records relating to behaviour management; and a number of policies, particularly those relating to safeguarding.
- Inspectors considered the 35 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and also the free-text responses that were received during the inspection. Inspectors also took into account the 28 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.