

Brooklands Middle School

Brooklands Drive, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire LU7 3PF

Inspection dates

1–2 May 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher, well supported by her senior team, has ensured that the quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection so that it is now good.
- Leaders have planned and implemented an imaginative curriculum across both key stages. Most pupils participate in the rich variety of extra-curricular opportunities on offer.
- Teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan challenging learning opportunities for pupils. They build positive relationships with pupils to ensure that there is a strong climate for learning across the school.
- Leaders ensure that pupils are well looked after and cared for. They have established a welcoming community in which pupils feel safe and enjoy learning.
- Pupils behave well. They are welcoming, polite and considerate. Their attendance is above average and continues to improve.
- The quality of careers advice and guidance that pupils receive is good.
- Most parents and carers speak highly of the school and would recommend it to other parents.
- The most able pupils are making increasingly rapid progress, because teachers have suitably high expectations of what they can achieve.
- Good leadership and management have led to good teaching. The impact of improved teaching has not yet been fully seen in pupils' progress. Although improving, pupils do not consistently make good progress, particularly in reading.
- The governing body has been strengthened. Governors challenge school leaders appropriately, but until recently they did not address sufficiently the progress of and support for different groups of pupils.
- The progress of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is improving, because of improved teaching. This progress is still weaker than that made by similar pupils nationally.
- Disadvantaged pupils make variable progress, but differences in outcomes to other pupils' outcomes nationally are diminishing.
- Leaders' improvement plans do not always outline with sufficient precision how they plan to improve pupils' achievement.
- Teachers do not always plan work that takes pupils' starting points into account well. When work is pitched incorrectly, pupils make slower progress.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve outcomes for pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities, by:
 - ensuring that planned actions are more precise and tightly focused on accelerating the progress these pupils make
 - ensuring that teachers plan lessons to meet the learning needs of all pupils, especially in reading.
- Further strengthen the quality of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that governors rigorously monitor and evaluate the work of school leaders so that they hold them precisely to account for the progress all groups of pupils make.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher has shown great resolve in establishing a culture where pupils can develop and grow in a risk-free and nurturing environment. She is well supported by the senior team and they ensure that Brooklands Middle School is a school where, in the words of one parent, staff 'go above and beyond'.
- Since the previous inspection, senior leaders have taken a number of successful measures to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and to eradicate weaknesses that existed previously.
- Senior leaders hold staff to account for the achievement of pupils and enable newly qualified teachers to develop their teaching skills well, by providing skilful mentoring and support.
- Subject directors increasingly ensure that stronger teaching strategies are shared among staff, while weaker teaching is identified and supported to improve. Against a backdrop of some difficult staffing turbulence, this group of middle leaders has ensured that teaching has improved.
- All pupils benefit from the rich and engaging curriculum that leaders have thoughtfully planned and implemented. Leaders have rightly ensured that there is a strong focus on improving pupils' core skills of reading, writing and mathematics in Years 5 and 6. Pupils in Year 8 told inspectors that they enjoy the extra option choices, including gardening and music technology, that they follow in preparation for their move to upper school. Across both key stages, the curriculum offers many opportunities for pupils to develop their creative skills.
- Pupils have extensive opportunities to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. Most participate in the wide range of extra-curricular activities, which include a chess club, sport and music clubs. Across the curriculum, as well as in assemblies, pupils are encouraged to consider issues such as moral guidance, racism in society and tolerance, which prepares them well for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders' self-evaluation is broadly accurate. They seek external quality assurance from leaders in other schools, alongside their own analysis of the school's strengths and weaknesses, to identify what needs to be improved. However, senior leaders' improvement plans do not set out systematically, and with clear interim targets, how they plan to raise levels of achievement rapidly.
- The headteacher and other leaders work closely with local schools to ensure a smooth transition from lower school and, then, on to upper school. They have forged positive relationships with the local community, and nearly all parents are very positive about the school and would recommend it to other parents.
- The physical education (PE) and sport premium funding has been used imaginatively to appoint a PE apprentice and introduce new sports including archery. Leaders also organise two annual sports festivals for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Consequently, sport continues to be popular among pupils.

- The quality of careers information and guidance that pupils receive is good. For example, a careers morning for pupils in Years 7 and 8 was attended by local employers, universities and schools.
- Some of the additional pupil-premium funding for disadvantaged pupils has been used to appoint a dedicated support worker whose work has had a positive impact on outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in Year 6. Leaders make effective use of the additional funding they receive for pupils in Year 7 who need to catch up in English and mathematics, by planning additional intervention.
- With the recent improvements in teaching, disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities are beginning to make more rapid progress. From their low starting points, however, they still lag behind their peers nationally.
- Leaders presented a clear picture of the progress being made by some pupils, notably in Year 6. However, the different assessment procedures they use to track and monitor pupils' progress sometimes make it difficult to pinpoint how much progress pupils are making.

Governance of the school

- Governors are ambitious for pupils, and proud of the school's achievements. They recognise the school's strengths and acknowledge the key priorities leaders face, in particular the need to improve outcomes for pupils.
- The capacity of the governing body to help meet these improvement priorities is growing, as it rebuilds with the recent addition of new governors.
- Scrutiny of the minutes of recent governors' meetings confirms that governors now provide the headteacher and her senior team with a growing level of challenge and support. This is particularly the case in determining the progress being made by pupils.
- Governors are fully aware of their responsibilities to safeguard pupils in the school and have reviewed the school's practices in this regard. Until recently, however, they have not sought effectively to ensure that disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make better progress and achieve well.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Senior leaders have established a strong safeguarding culture. Staff understand their responsibilities in relation to keeping pupils safe, receive regular safeguarding training and understand the procedures to follow if they have concerns.
- Leaders meticulously log and review any concerns about pupils. They maintain comprehensive records of the work that they undertake to support pupils and work well with representatives from external agencies. They are tenacious in following up the referrals they make.
- Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in the school and know who to speak to if they have any worries. They say that teachers help to resolve quickly and effectively any concerns that they have.

- Nearly all parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey Parent View said that their child feels safe at school. 'My son feels happy and safe at the school,' is typical of many comments made by parents to inspectors.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Most teaching is now consistently strong across the school. This is because leaders have secured improvements in science and in English. Pupils now make more consistent progress across a wider range of subjects than at the time of the previous inspection.
- Teachers build logical sequences of lessons to help pupils consolidate their understanding. For example, this was observed in a Year 7 mathematics lesson where pupils responded well to the challenge of solving equations in small groups
- Leaders have appointed specialist teachers in some subjects, including science, French and music. Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to plan effectively activities that challenge most pupils, including some who are disadvantaged or have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Pupils develop their writing skills effectively across a wide range of subjects and are often required to write at length. In a recent Year 8 project in history and art, for example, pupils wrote creatively and compellingly about the Russian Revolution.
- Teachers use an effective range and depth of questioning to explore pupils' answers and extend their thinking. In a Year 8 English lesson, for example, the teacher's carefully considered questions enabled pupils to interpret the challenging language of some First World War poetry.
- Most teachers set homework regularly and use it well to enhance what pupils have learned in their lessons.
- The quality of teaching in reading is not quite as effective as it is in writing and mathematics. Pupils enjoy the regular opportunities they are given to read aloud, whether it is in front of the class or to an adult. Although leaders are able to point to a slow improvement in pupils' higher reading skills, they recognise that there is still a long way to go.
- Most teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve, and this is reflected in the pride that pupils take in the presentation of their work. Some teachers, though, do not rigorously ensure that pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, take care over the completion of work in their books.
- Teachers ensure that pupils listen attentively to instructions and to their explanations. Learning support assistants help pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities to overcome any misunderstandings, so that they can participate and understand the lesson fully, and begin to make stronger progress. Even so, some of these pupils, and some disadvantaged pupils, do not make the rapid progress required to catch up with other pupils nationally.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Leaders are fully committed to ensuring that Brooklands is an inclusive community school. 'They really do care here,' one pupil commented, which reflected the sentiment of many. The house system is a well-established part of school life; pupils are keen to collect house points and older pupils enjoy the responsibility of distributing house awards.
- Pupils use well the opportunities they are given to express their views about the school and wider issues. This is illustrated by pupils' regular school council meetings, led by the pupils themselves, and the fact that two pupils have recently been elected to the local youth parliament.
- Pupils' achievements are routinely celebrated, and well-maintained and impressive displays of their work, particularly in art, are a feature of the school.
- Teachers and other staff understand the complex and challenging issues that the school's vulnerable pupils face and ensure that they are well cared for. The carer of a child who is looked after said that her child was now 'always happy to go to school'. The vast majority of parents agreed that pupils are looked after well and are safe in school.
- The school's 'Den' provides first-class assistance for pupils who require additional support with learning. Specialist staff ensure that pupils receive highly effective support for their social and emotional needs in the 'Reach Up' room.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils enjoy school and say that they feel well supported. They know how to report any concerns about bullying, but say that it is very rare and that it is dealt with rapidly and effectively by staff.
- Most pupils, parents and staff agree that behaviour at the school is good. Pupils behave well in lessons and work confidently together. They demonstrate a commitment to their learning by supporting one another when they are tackling something new or tricky. At break and at lunchtime, pupils in all years socialise well together.
- Leaders have robust systems and work well with external agencies to ensure that pupils attend school regularly and arrive on time. Punctuality is good at the beginning of the day and at the start of lessons.
- Attendance is above average and improving. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities is improving, while persistent absence for these groups of pupils is falling.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils' skills in reading, writing and mathematics are below age-related expectations when they enter the school in Year 5. In 2017, pupils did not make sufficient progress to catch up by the end of key stage 2, particularly in writing and mathematics. They also made slower progress overall than pupils at the same stage in the school in 2016.
- Despite recent improvements in teaching, pupils have not made consistently good progress across all year groups to catch up with other pupils nationally. Leaders acknowledge that pupils' achievement has not been good enough, but their plans to address this are now leading to a consistent improvement in pupil outcomes.
- Pupils' reading skills are weaker than their skills in other subjects. Leaders have implemented several appropriate interventions to address this, and their most recent assessments of pupils' reading indicate a slow improvement.
- In the past, disadvantaged pupils have not made the progress necessary for them to achieve as well as others nationally by the end of key stage 2. Leaders have sought to use the pupil-premium funding to overcome barriers to learning more quickly so that disadvantaged pupils achieve higher standards.
- Disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 now receive specific, additional support which has enabled them to make more rapid progress than their peers in mathematics. Across other year groups, some differences remain in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and the others, but these differences are diminishing.
- Some pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are making slower progress from their starting points than that made by similar pupils nationally and by other pupils in the school. Teachers are becoming increasingly skilled in meeting the needs of this group of pupils, but this has not yet been reflected in a rapid improvement in pupils' outcomes.
- The most able pupils are starting to make more rapid progress, because teachers have higher expectations of what they are able to achieve and plan learning that is more challenging. This is especially the case in English and mathematics in key stage 2.

School details

Unique reference number	137636
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10048960

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

Type of school	Middle-deemed secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	9 to 13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	514
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gary Harper
Headteacher	Julie Hodgson
Telephone number	01525 372018
Website	www.brooklandsschool.co.uk
Email address	brooklands@cbc.beds.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	2–3 November 2016

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is in line with the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is above the national average. The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan is above the national average.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum requirements for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of key stage 2.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 26 lessons across a wide range of subjects and in all key stages. Some lessons were jointly observed with senior leaders. Inspectors also observed tutor time and looked at pupils' work in lessons across all year groups.
- The lead inspector met with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. He also had telephone conversations with the chair of the local governing body, a local authority adviser and the carer of a child looked after.
- Inspectors held meetings with the school's leaders who have responsibility for safeguarding, teaching, behaviour, attendance and additional funding. An inspector met a newly qualified teacher.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at breaktimes and lunchtimes. They listened to pupils reading and spoke formally with pupils from key stage 2 and key stage 3. Over the two days, inspectors spoke informally with pupils about their learning and their safety.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, the school's development plan, minutes of meetings of the local governing body, information about the attainment and progress of all pupils, records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding, and information on the school's website. They also checked the school's single central register.
- Inspectors evaluated 96 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire.

Inspection team

Peter Whear, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Paul O'Shea	Ofsted Inspector
Kathryn Herlock	Ofsted Inspector

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