

Inspection of a good school: Middlewich High School

King Edward Street, Middlewich, Cheshire CW10 9BU

Inspection dates:

5–6 November 2019

Outcome

Middlewich High School continues to be a good school.

However, inspectors have some concerns that standards may be declining, as set out below.

What is it like to attend this school?

Until very recently, pupils have not had a good enough deal at this school. Examination results have fallen year-on-year. Some teachers do not have high enough expectations of pupils.

A new headteacher was appointed in April 2019. She has acted quickly, to halt the school's decline and begin the much-needed improvement. Pupils value the changes she is making. For example, leaders have reviewed what is taught at key stage 3. However, there is still more to do so that pupils know and remember more in all subjects. The headteacher also recognises that the current key stage 4 curriculum is not ambitious enough.

Pupils enjoy coming to Middlewich High School. They told us the school welcomes everyone. Pupils say they feel safe and confident to be themselves. Pupils respect each other's differences. They say that bullying is rare, and that staff sort any issues that might happen.

Pupils behave well and work hard in lessons. Almost all pupils take care to move around the school sensibly. This includes when corridors become crowded before and between lessons.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported. This includes those who attend the specialist resource provision. Pupils with SEND take a full part in the wider life of the school. They are well prepared to move on their next steps in education and training when they leave the school.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Until more recently, governors have not held leaders sufficiently to account for pupils' outcomes or the quality of education that the school provides. They have overseen a poor-quality curriculum and declining outcomes for pupils.

The recently appointed headteacher has an honest and accurate evaluation of the school. She is making the necessary changes to improve the school. For example, senior leaders have taken swift action to implement a new key stage 3 curriculum. The previous curriculum lacked depth and ambition. In some subjects, there was too little time to teach pupils what they needed to know. The headteacher rectified this shortfall soon after her appointment. It is, however, too soon to see the full effect of this on pupils' learning.

The key stage 4 curriculum, which the headteacher inherited, was also not ambitious enough. The English Baccalaureate uptake remains low. The headteacher and her leadership team have begun the task of overhauling the key stage 4 offer. The headteacher is determined that more pupils should follow an academic curriculum, including modern foreign languages. The new leadership team has effective plans to revamp the curriculum. This is so that it meets pupils' needs and challenges them to achieve highly. However, leaders need more time to bring about the full range of changes planned.

Staff also realise there is much more to do to ensure that pupils' achievement improves across the curriculum. This is because some teachers' expectations of what pupils can and should learn have been too low. By the end of key stage 4, pupils' outcomes have not been good enough. Provisional outcomes in 2019 remain weak in some subjects, including English.

The headteacher expects staff to provide a well-planned and ambitious curriculum. She is providing appropriate ongoing training for staff and she cares for their well-being. Staff work hard. They are positive about the support and time they are given to make the changes needed. However, subject leaders' plans to secure ambitious curriculums are at different stages of development.

Leaders in some subjects, such as art, have well-thought-out curriculum plans in place. These help teachers to ensure that pupils know what they need to know and then move on to more challenging work. Disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND achieve well in these subjects, as do all pupils.

In other subjects, including English and mathematics, curriculum plans are less well developed. In these subjects, the quality of the pupils' curriculum varies depending on which year group they are in. This limits pupils' learning, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. Middle leaders have begun to ensure that lessons are generally planned in a more logical order than previously. However, pupils still need more opportunity to think hard and move on to more challenging work when they are ready to do so.

In the current Years 9, 10 and 11, all pupils study a qualification course in iMedia. On

appointment, the new headteacher recognised that this course was not appropriate for all pupils. She has already taken steps to address the issue. She has a clear action plan in place to make the changes required at the pace required.

The school supports pupils' personal development well. Behaviour is good, and bullying is rare. Pupils value their opportunities to learn about the community and world in which they live. They appreciate the better organisation of extra-curricular clubs, which were introduced by senior leaders. There are more, and better publicised, artistic, academic and cultural activities on offer. This means more pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, know about and take part in these events.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff take the time to know pupils well. Staff training means they know what to look out for if pupils are at risk and what to do if they have any concerns. The safeguarding team refers cases to social care when necessary. Leaders complete all required checks on new staff. They keep accurate records of their checks.

Pupils are taught how to stay safe, including from potential dangers, when using the internet and social media platforms. Pupils have a good understanding of these issues. They told us they like the restrictions on using mobile telephones in school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some subject leaders are making the changes needed at key stages 3 and 4 to help pupils learn well. Other subject leaders recognise that more work is needed to ensure that teachers plan and sequence lessons effectively. These changes are needed so that pupils know and remember more. Leaders should continue to build on the recent improvements they have made to curriculum planning. This is to ensure that knowledge and learning are sequenced consistently well for pupils. It is also so that pupils have regular opportunities to think hard and apply their learning equally well across all subjects.
- Leaders have begun to make the changes needed to improve the curriculum at both key stages 3 and 4. They have plans in place to ensure that the courses offered at key stage 4 match the needs of all pupils. Leaders must ensure all pupils have an ambitious and appropriate curriculum at key stage 4 so that outcomes for all pupils improve.
- Disadvantaged pupils' achievement is not as good as it should be. Leaders recognise that there are gaps in these pupils' learning. Leaders must ensure that teachers recognise and address the gaps in disadvantaged pupils' knowledge prior to a new concept or topic being started.
- Until more recently, governors have not acted quickly or effectively enough to halt a declining quality of education at the school. Governors must continue to strengthen

their expertise and tenacity to support and challenge school leaders in order to secure a good quality of education at the school.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged Middlewich High School to be good on 24 November 2015.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	111410
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	10087763
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	709
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andrew Gibson
Headteacher	Heidi Thurland
Website	www.middlewichhigh.cheshire.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	24 November 2015

Information about this school

- The school has a specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND. The designated special educational needs are autistic spectrum disorder and hearing impairment. The provision has 20 local authority funded places.
- Since the last inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed.
- A small number of pupils attend alternative provision at Changing Education Limited, Cheshire East Virtual School and Reaseheath College.

Information about this inspection

- We held meetings with the headteacher, senior and subject leaders, governors and a representative from the local authority.
- In considering the quality of education, we concentrated on English, history, mathematics and physical education in depth. We discussed the arrangements for the curriculum with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders and teachers. We visited lessons and talked with pupils about what they had been learning. We looked at pupils' exercise books and folders in these subjects.
- We reviewed the school's records of safeguarding checks and referrals to the local authority. We spoke with staff about how they keep pupils safe. We also asked the

pupils about how they keep themselves safe and what to do if they have concerns.

- We considered the views of the 97 pupils who responded to Ofsted's pupils' questionnaire.
- We considered the views of staff from the 56 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff.
- We considered the views of the 61 parents who completed Parent View, Ofsted's online survey. This included 41 free-text responses. We also considered the views of parents who contacted or spoke to inspectors during the inspection.

Inspection team

Stephen Ruddy, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Craig Yates

Ofsted Inspector

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