

Marston Vale Middle School

The Crescent, Stewartby, Bedfordshire MK43 9NH

Inspection dates

7–8 February 2018

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
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 school that requires improvement

- Pupils do not make consistently good progress across a wide range of subjects, particularly in geography and science, and year groups. Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are weaker than others.
- Teachers' expectations are not consistently high, and some weak teaching remains.
- Teachers do not follow the school's feedback policy consistently. In particular, they are failing to give pupils precise enough guidance on how to improve their learning as required by the policy.
- Some teachers do not plan activities that are matched closely enough to pupils' abilities, including disadvantaged pupils.
- Teachers do not routinely stretch and challenge the most able pupils to deepen their knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Poor teaching and disruption to staffing in the past have impacted on pupils' achievement. Pupils have not made the progress of which they were capable.

The school has the following strengths

- The recently appointed executive headteacher and other senior leaders show drive and determination. They have significantly increased the pace of improvement in teaching and leadership.
- Leaders have an honest and accurate view of the quality of education within the school. School improvement planning is sharply focused on the right priorities.
- The school has benefited greatly from the support and training provided by the trust.
- Governors challenge and support leaders well. This gives leaders the confidence to take the difficult decisions required to improve the school.
- Senior leaders now set high expectations for pupils' achievement. Their monitoring is thorough and well focused.
- The school has a strong team of subject leaders, particularly in English and mathematics, who know their departments well. They carry out rigorous checks on the quality of work in their areas and take effective steps to rectify any weaknesses.
- Leaders have worked tenaciously to improve pupils' learning and progress. Pupils now make better progress because the quality of teaching is improving.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. They show respect for the school's environment and conduct themselves sensibly around the site.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - ensuring that teachers plan more effectively for all groups of pupils
 - heightening teachers' expectations of what pupils can and should achieve
 - making sure that teachers routinely stretch and challenge the most able pupils in particular, so that they attain higher standards
 - making sure that teachers assess pupils' work in line with the school's policy and that they provide pupils with feedback that identifies clearly how they can improve their work
 - eradicating the remaining weak teaching.
- Improve pupils' outcomes by:
 - continuing to remove the barriers to learning for the disadvantaged and most able disadvantaged pupils so they make better progress across the curriculum
 - ensuring that additional funding is used effectively to support those in Year 7 who need to catch up with their reading, writing and mathematics
 - improving provision in geography and science so that pupils make better progress in these subjects.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The school has faced significant challenges since its last inspection but it is now improving rapidly. The trust, which provides an ambitious blueprint for success, has been instrumental in securing these improvements. The executive headteacher took up post in October 2017 on an interim basis and a new permanent headteacher will take up post later in the spring term.
- The executive headteacher and other senior leaders lead with determination and a sense of moral purpose. They have taken appropriate action to change the direction of this school by taking the steps necessary to reverse weak teaching and overhaul an ineffective curriculum. This has transformed the quality of education that the school provides, and pupils are now making more rapid progress, although there is considerable ground to make up.
- Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They adopt a robust approach to self-evaluation and they highlight candidly the areas which do not meet their high expectations. Their plans to bring about the necessary improvements are sharp, detailed and appropriate.
- Middle leadership has improved considerably since the last inspection and is now a strength. Recent appointments in English, mathematics and modern foreign languages have accelerated the school's work on improvement. These middle leaders have focused on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in their subject areas and have improved pupils' learning and progress.
- Teachers and other staff know the high expectations that leaders have of them. Leaders have established robust quality-assurance systems to improve teaching and leadership. These systems are having the desired effect on improving pupils' achievement across their subjects. Leaders' arrangements for assessing teachers' performance and for providing training are highly effective. Training is closely aligned to school improvement priorities and enables staff to make links to their own professional development.
- Leaders now seek to use the pupil premium funding more effectively to improve the progress that disadvantaged pupils make. A member of senior staff is accountable for the impact of this funding. To help pupils catch up quickly, they have funded a dedicated mentor and provided funding for learning resources and trips. As a result of this, as well as some smaller classes, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in most year groups is improving.
- Leaders have implemented thoughtful plans to use literacy and numeracy catch up funding to develop younger pupils' reading and numeracy skills more quickly. Their evaluation of these plans, however, lacks sufficient rigour.
- The primary physical education (PE) and sport premium is used well to increase pupil participation in sport and to improve the quality of physical education. Most pupils participate in the many sporting activities on offer and they have regular opportunities to represent the school competitively. Year 8 sports leaders, for example, help run

sports festivals with other schools.

- Leaders have recently reviewed the school's curriculum to ensure that it properly meets the needs of pupils at Marston Vale. Pupils now benefit from a greater level of challenge across the full range of national curriculum subjects. Over two thirds of pupils also participate in the wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer, which includes computing, music and drama clubs.
- The recently appointed leader for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is very effective. Her expectations of the achievement of this group of pupils are high and she ensures that funding is spent well.
- Leaders have worked effectively with the local high school to improve transition arrangements into Year 9. Pupils in Year 8 are therefore better prepared for the GCSE courses they will start next year. They have also benefited from careers information and advice, which has included visits to and from local employers.
- Leaders acknowledge that in the past, the school's communication with parents and the wider community has not been good enough. They have taken action recently to improve the quality and regularity of information that the school provides. Through events such as a recent Valentine coffee morning, they have also successfully enhanced the school's relationship with the local community.
- Teachers promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well overall, although the spiritual aspect of this is not as well rounded. They provide opportunities during form time, assemblies and lessons for pupils to discuss challenging issues such as immigration and social equality. Alongside their personal, social, health, citizenship, and economic well-being education, this prepares pupils increasingly well for life in modern Britain.

Governance of the school

- The effectiveness of governors has improved significantly over the last twelve months. Governors now have a secure knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Consequently, they are able to challenge and support school leaders more effectively regarding pupils' outcomes. Similarly, they are in a better position to hold staff to account for teaching and learning, and the progress that pupils make.
- Governors monitor the allocation of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and the physical education and sport premium. They are developing their procedures to evaluate the impact of this spending on improving learning opportunities and raising pupils' achievement.
- Governors fully understand their responsibilities with regard to the safeguarding of pupils within the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders take pupils' safety and welfare extremely seriously. They have defined key roles and responsibilities clearly to ensure a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. Regular training means that teachers and support staff are up to date with

changes to government legislation and requirements and are confident in their duties regarding child protection.

- Leaders are committed to supporting pupils in staying safe online. They also take effective action to educate pupils about the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Historically, poor-quality teaching has left wide gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. Leaders are acutely aware of this and have introduced a wide range of support programmes to remedy the situation. Teachers now share good practice as a matter of course through 'Give and gain' sessions and some team teaching.
- Not all teachers plan learning effectively to meet the needs of different groups of pupils. Their expectations are not always high enough and their planning does not take sufficient account of what pupils already know and can do. As a result, pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, do not make consistently good progress across all year groups and across the curriculum.
- Sometimes, teachers ask pupils to assess each other's work. When this is well planned, it enables pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding, and they make progress. Often, though, teachers do not explain effectively what they expect pupils to do. This means that pupils' mistakes are compounded and their progress is limited.
- Feedback to pupils varies considerably in its impact because not all teachers are skilled in implementing the school's assessment policy. Teachers routinely plan FIX IT time into their lessons, when pupils are expected to refine their work once it has been marked. When this time is used most effectively, pupils understand clearly what they need to do to improve. In other lessons, however, the feedback does not demand enough. This is contrary to the school's policy and means that pupils, especially the most able, do not know how to improve their work.
- While the support given to lower-ability pupils is increasingly effective, the strategies teachers use do not stretch and challenge the most able. As a result, these pupils make less progress than they should do.
- Teachers routinely set homework which is increasingly effective in deepening pupils' learning and challenging their thinking.
- Most teachers create a calm and positive learning environment. This is because they establish clear and effective routines, underpinned by the school's behaviour policy and its core offer.
- Teaching is effective in mathematics and English, and other subjects including history, PE, art and computing. Teaching in science and geography is not as strong because teachers do not routinely engage pupils' interest in these subjects.
- Where teaching is most effective, teachers have a thorough understanding of their subjects. They use this to plan appropriately for pupils' learning over time, and to question pupils skilfully, so that they deepen their understanding, apply new skills and make the progress of which they are capable.
- Teachers use other adults well in the classroom to support pupils' learning and progress.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are well-mannered and articulate, and express themselves confidently. They hold doors open, are willing to help one another and are thoughtful about the needs of their peers.
- Pupils feel safe in school and have confidence that staff will help them if they have any concerns. Vulnerable pupils are well cared for. The vast majority of parents agreed that pupils are well looked after and are safe in school. This is because the school's pastoral team works effectively to create an inclusive and positive learning environment. They deal quickly with any behaviour issues that arise and make clear that they expect pupils to conduct themselves sensibly and maturely.
- Pastoral support is a key strength. Pupils have access to a range of professionals within the school should they have any concerns. Inspectors identified particularly strong provision for the significant number of pupils who are registered as young carers.
- A pastoral support worker provides effective support for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs.
- Leaders ensure that values such as kindness, tolerance and respect feature as part of the weekly assembly programme. Pupils are punctual to school and take full advantage of the extensive range of after-school activities, which they value greatly.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders have taken decisive and successful action to improve behaviour. Pupils understand the high standards that are expected of them and say the new behaviour system works. Relationships between pupils and staff are characterised by mutual respect.
- The school routinely celebrates pupils' achievements and pupils' work is on display in all areas of the school. The site is maintained well, litter is rare, classrooms are tidy and there is no graffiti.
- Lessons are calm and pupils engage purposefully with their learning. They enjoy school and feel well supported.
- Pupils can describe the different types of bullying, including online bullying. They say bullying is rare and that concerns of that kind are dealt with rapidly and effectively by staff.
- Leaders take effective action to ensure that the few pupils with low attendance are supported, so that persistent absence is declining. Attendance is in line with national figures.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- The school meets the Department for Education's definition of a coasting school based on key stage 2 academic results in 2015, 2016 and 2017.
- The school met the floor standards set by the Department for Education for the achievement of pupils in 2017.
- Pupils' starting points in Year 5 are slightly above average but standards at the end of Year 6 in both 2016 and 2017 were low. Progress for pupils from the end of key stage 1 to the end of key stage 2 in 2017 was in the lowest 10% nationally for reading, writing and mathematics.
- Work in pupils' books and the school's robust tracking system indicate that a higher proportion of pupils in Year 6 are currently working towards the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics than at this time last year. Additionally, a greater proportion of pupils are working confidently in English and mathematics at key stage 3.
- 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. They are now making steadier progress but leaders recognise it is too slow compared to other pupils in the school. The difference in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and others has not diminished. Leaders are working hard to overcome barriers to learning more quickly so that the disadvantaged and most able disadvantaged pupils achieve higher standards.
- Pupils in all years who have SEN and/or disabilities are now supported more effectively. Their progress is being monitored well by leaders, who have introduced personal provision plans for each of these pupils. Teaching assistants support these pupils effectively in class and pupils are consequently making the expected progress.
- Previously, the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, have not achieved well enough. Most of the pupils in this group are now making progress towards achieving age-related expectations by the end of Year 6. However, too few of them have recorded work at a higher standard in their English and mathematics books. Leaders have recently acted to address this issue, but it is too early to assess the impact of their actions.
- The most able pupils do not achieve highly enough in science because not all teachers are sufficiently skilled in deepening pupils' sense of scientific inquiry.
- Pupils make slow progress in geography because some teaching does not enable them to develop and share their understanding of key concepts.
- Teachers have raised the profile of reading across the school. The library, with its wide range of books, is supporting pupils' enjoyment of reading. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 read with fluency and confidence. They enthusiastically discussed the electronic quizzes they complete when they have finished a book to show their understanding of the text. This reading programme is improving pupils' reading standards across the school.
- Pupils are now making more progress in art and in design and technology because teachers plan highly effectively and have expert subject knowledge.

School details

Unique reference number	145861
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	10041772

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	528
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Jim Bryce
Executive Headteacher	Adrian Rogers
Telephone number	01234 768224
Website	www.marstonvalemiddle.co.uk/
Email address	school@marstonvalemiddle.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	26–27 January 2016

Information about this school

- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish about the Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up premium.
- The school opened as an academy in January 2013 and joined the Chiltern Learning Trust in February 2017.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium funding is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, with a statement or an education, health and care plan, is above national average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities without a statement or an education, health and care plan is also above national average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 33 lessons or parts of lessons in both the core and foundation subjects. Most of these observations were undertaken jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Meetings were held with the executive headteacher, senior leaders and middle leaders. Inspectors also met with advisers from the Chiltern Learning Trust and governors from the local governing body. The lead inspector spoke to a representative from the local authority.
- Pupils' views were sought between classes, during lessons and at break and lunchtimes. Groups of pupils also met formally with inspectors. Inspectors listened to pupils in key stage 2 read, and discussed their reading experiences with them.
- Inspectors scrutinised work from across different key stages, including in English, mathematics, science, history, geography and modern languages.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, development plan, safeguarding records, pupils' progress information, and school policies and procedures.
- Inspectors spoke to staff about their understanding of the most up-to-date safeguarding guidance and school procedures and protocols.
- Inspectors analysed 103 responses to Parent View, the online survey provided to parents by Ofsted, and 69 responses from pupils to an online Ofsted survey.
- Inspectors scrutinised the various forms of communication the school uses, including the website and information sent to and from parents and other stakeholders.

Inspection team

Peter Whear, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Sean Powell	Ofsted Inspector
Bruce Clark	Ofsted Inspector

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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. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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