

Inspection of a good school: Leighton Middle School

Church Square, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire LU7 1EX

Inspection dates:

30 April and 1 May 2024

Outcome

Leighton Middle School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thrive at this happy and welcoming school. Staff know pupils exceptionally well. Strong relationships are at the heart of the school. There is a culture of high expectations and mutual respect. Pupils are well looked after and safe here.

In lessons, pupils are enthusiastic, engaged and work hard. Pupils benefit from specialist teaching and facilities from Year 5. They work effectively with their learning partners. Staff encourage pupils to aim high. Pupils achieve well in external assessments in Year 6. By the end of Year 8, they are well prepared for transition to upper school.

Pupils quickly adapt to the school's routines when they join. Their behaviour is exemplary in lessons and around the school. They are friendly, kind and supportive, and they get on very well together. Bullying rarely happens, and pupils say that the school deals with it quickly.

The school is very strong at supporting pupils' personal development and building their character. Pupils thoroughly enjoy the high-quality offer of clubs, trips and wider opportunities. They relish the many leadership positions they can apply for, such as librarians, play leaders or peer supporters. Pupils know that staff take their views and opinions seriously. They are influential in helping to make the school even better.

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

The school has created a broad and ambitious curriculum, which prepares pupils well for upper school. Leaders have carefully considered where pupils start in Year 5 and where they need to be in Year 8. The important knowledge that pupils will learn is clearly set out across all subjects. It is sensibly organised so that pupils build on what they already know.

Teachers use their subject expertise to teach the curriculum well. They explain new ideas clearly. They use careful questioning to identify and close gaps in pupils' understanding.

Effective approaches to teaching and learning are well established across the whole school. For example, pupils are trained to use their learning partners for focused discussion. Lessons start with recall questions that help pupils remember the key knowledge they have learned. In a few areas, more recent refinements to the curriculum and how it is taught are still being embedded by leaders. These refinements need more time to become established.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have their needs identified accurately. Teachers skilfully adapt their teaching to help pupils with SEND access the full curriculum. Skilled adults provide well-judged and effective additional support. These pupils therefore achieve well.

A strong culture of reading is promoted across the school. Staff know how to help pupils learn to read effectively. Staff quickly identify pupils who need extra help to improve their reading. They give valuable support. The positive impact of the programme to accelerate reading skills is seen in key stage 2.

Staff care deeply about the pupils and know them very well. Strong relationships underpin the universally positive and respectful atmosphere. Across the school, a calm and orderly environment is the norm. Pupils behave impeccably in lessons. They show very positive attitudes towards their work and attend well. The school deals quickly and sensitively with any attendance or behaviour issues.

Pupils' personal development is especially strong. The personal, social, health and economic education curriculum is well designed. Pupils learn a wide range of topics to help them stay safe, including when online. There is a rich range of enrichment activities and leadership opportunities. Pupils regularly attend and enjoy a broad and carefully planned range of clubs. The comprehensive careers programme helps pupils focus on future pathways and the importance of employment skills.

The school is very well led and managed. Staff are very positive about working in the school. They feel that leaders are considerate of their workload. They appreciate the combination of professional autonomy and support they have. Governors know the school well and are increasingly effective in holding leaders to account. Parents are very supportive. In the Ofsted survey, a significant number of parents expressed very positive views about the culture of the school and how much their children enjoy being there.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a few areas, more recent improvements to the curriculum are still being embedded across the school. Some leaders are new to their roles and require continued training.

The school should continue to support all leaders as they refine and embed the delivery of the curriculum.

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 an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in February 2013.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

Further information

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

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	109689
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10318572
Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9 to 13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	598
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Robert Jefferis
Headteacher	Claire Vallance
Website	www.leightonmiddle.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	8 June 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school does not use any alternative provisions.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other school leaders. The lead inspector met with the chair of governors and other members of the governing body and held a telephone conversation with the local authority school effectiveness adviser.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics and French. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also observed a sample of pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors discussed the curriculum and visited lessons in some other subjects. They also reviewed school policies, leaders' evaluations and development plans.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at social times.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors spoke with a wide range of pupils to understand what it is like to be a pupil in this school and reviewed responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.
- Inspectors met with members of staff to discuss the school's work and considered responses to the confidential Ofsted staff survey. To consider the views of parents, inspectors reviewed 276 responses and 148 free-text comments submitted to Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

John Constable, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

James Fuller

Ofsted Inspector

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