



Inspection report

Gosforth West Middle School

**Better
education
and care**

Unique Reference Number 108520
LEA Newcastle Upon Tyne

Inspection number 273071
Inspection dates 7 and 8 March 2005
Reporting inspector Mr A Bennett HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Type of School	Middle-deemed secondary	School address	Jubilee Road Gosforth Newcastle Upon Tyne NE3 1DY
School category	Community		
Age range of pupils	9 to 13 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0191 285 3060
Number on roll	344	Fax number	0191 285 5189
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr P Black
Date of previous inspection	September 2003	Headteacher	Mr P Hugall

Age group 9 to 13 years	Published 22 April 2005	Reference no. 273071
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Introduction

When Gosforth West Middle School was inspected in September 2003, the school was judged to have serious weaknesses. Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools (HMI) subsequently visited the school on one occasion to monitor its progress, and reinspected the school in March 2005.

Description of the school

Gosforth West is a middle school of slightly less than average size, situated on the edge of a residential area north of the centre of Newcastle. The number of pupils on roll has fallen by more than 20 per cent over the last four years. The school draws its pupils from a large number of primary schools, some of which are in socially and economically disadvantaged parts of the city. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is twice the national figure. More than one in five of the pupils comes from a background where English is not the home language, although few are at an early stage of learning English. The pupils' attainment on entry to the school is generally below average; many have weak literacy skills, particularly in writing. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs, including those with a Statement of Special Educational Need, is slightly above the national average. There is a high level of pupil mobility in the school, especially in Years 7 and 8.

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Overall effectiveness of the school

In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

Effectiveness of the school

School leaders have not urgently addressed the serious weaknesses identified in the previous two inspections nor identified their root causes. Compared with national figures, standards in the 2004 end-of-Key Stage 2 tests were average and the pupils made reasonable progress in relation to their prior attainment. However, there were considerable variations between subjects and girls continued to outperform boys. Assessment is not used well enough to help the pupils improve their work nor to set challenging targets for those groups that are underachieving. The quality of teaching is unsatisfactory overall and the pupils' attitudes to learning are more often compliant than enthusiastic. Together, these factors hinder the progress the pupils make over time. The pupils behave well, but they are given too few opportunities to develop independence and show responsibility. Attendance has improved and is slightly above the national median for 2003-4.

Improvement since the last inspection

The inspection of September 2003 required the school to address areas for improvement, including standards in both key stages. Weaknesses were identified in some teaching. Behaviour was unsatisfactory, particularly among older pupils and at lunchtime. Some accommodation was inadequate; statutory requirements for collective worship were not met. With the help of the local education authority (LEA), improvements have been made in the accommodation. Behaviour is satisfactory and often good; strategies to provide daily worship have been implemented, although the quality is not good. Standards in art and design, design and technology and information and communication technology (ICT) are rising and are satisfactory. However, standards in English have declined and, overall, the gap between the performance of boys and girls has widened, particularly in English and science. The quality of teaching has declined; too much is unsatisfactory and not enough is good or better.

Capacity to improve

School leaders show too little shared direction or determination to secure improvement. Whole school planning does not address the key factors that underpin the school's continuing weaknesses. Modest overall improvements in test results at Key Stage 2 stem almost entirely from successes in mathematics; significant areas of underachievement remain and school managers have not devised convincing strategies to address these. Recently, the LEA appointed an associate headteacher to support senior managers; this additional capacity has been used to improve the effectiveness of middle management but

there has been little impact as yet on raising aspirations. The school's self-evaluation is over-optimistic, for example in judging the quality of teaching and the robustness of the monitoring. Senior managers are still at an early stage of holding teachers, middle managers and themselves to account for weaknesses that have existed for several years.

What the school should do to improve further

The school's development plan does not clearly prioritise those areas where improvement is most needed. The key priorities are to:

- establish strategic leadership and ensure that management at all levels is rigorous and consistent in its impact;
- eliminate unsatisfactory teaching and increase the proportion that is good or better;
- continue to raise attainment, through setting challenging targets;
- improve the pupils' attitudes to learning;
- develop the quality and impact of assessment.

Achievement and standards

Pupils who sat the end-of-Key Stage 2 national tests in 2004 made satisfactory progress overall in comparison with pupils in similar schools. The trend in the pupils' average points scores in recent years has been above the national trend, but this slight improvement masks significant and unacceptable variations between subjects and in the achievement of boys and girls. In mathematics, the proportion of pupils achieving at least the expected Level 4 was well above average in relation to their prior attainment; in science, the proportion was above average, but in English it was well below average. An average proportion of pupils achieved higher levels in mathematics and science, but in English the number was well below average. In the English tests, pupils achieved much better scores in reading than in writing, especially the boys. Girls outperformed boys at the higher levels in all three subjects. School targets, which were exceeded in all three subjects, were not sufficiently challenging. Some co-ordinators' analyses do not advance convincing reasons for underachievement but too readily accept average performance as good enough in the context of the school.

In lessons, standards are broadly in line with age-related expectations but higher-attaining pupils are not always sufficiently extended and some pupils who have special educational needs are allowed to repeat simple technical errors in spelling or punctuation over and over again. Measures to raise attainment, including booster classes and regular assessments to track individual progress, have not made enough impact; work is not always well matched to the specific needs of pupils and teachers' expectations are often too low. As a result,

achievement is seldom better than adequate and standards, even in higher sets, do not rise above the broadly average.

Personal development

The pupils' attitudes and behaviour were satisfactory or better in all the lessons. The pupils were calm and quiet, responding without fuss to requests from teachers and always aware of appropriate boundaries. However, the pupils' attitudes to learning were rarely better than satisfactory and were often compliant rather than enthusiastic. The pupils were used to being instructed and controlled rather than expecting to contribute their own ideas. Too often, the routine experience for the pupils, particularly in the higher-attaining groups, was boredom. In a few lessons, where they were encouraged to collaborate, the pupils acted sensibly and their learning benefited from a greater level of engagement with the tasks.

Around the school, the pupils behaved sensibly and were courteous to adults and visitors. At lunchtime, boisterousness was within acceptable limits and the pupils made the most of the recently introduced activities and games. The number of referrals from teachers to form tutors has dropped considerably, confirming that the school is much more settled and orderly than at the time of the previous inspection. The staff are clear about the importance of consistency in managing behaviour and apply the school code effectively. The school rewards good behaviour through its merit system.

Attendance has risen to 94.2 per cent in this academic year, compared with 92.6 per cent in 2003-4. The school has a range of effective ways to celebrate good attendance and to intervene where absence is a problem. Support from the education welfare service is good. Unauthorised absence is high at 0.9 per cent but the school records data rigorously.

Provision for the pupils' moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory, with some strengths, but for spiritual development it is unsatisfactory. Clear guidelines help the pupils know right from wrong; the school fosters an awareness of how the pupils might help those less fortunate than themselves. The school council provides a worthwhile opportunity for a small number of pupils to learn about decision-making and social responsibility. There are many sporting and artistic activities. The teaching in music plays an important part in enriching the pupils' experience. However, the pupils have few opportunities to make a spontaneous personal response or to enjoy their learning wholeheartedly in lessons. The whole-school assembly during the inspection included a perfunctory prayer but was a joyless occasion.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is unsatisfactory overall; it was satisfactory in ten lessons, good in seven and unsatisfactory in three. This is a decline since the previous inspection, when half of the teaching was good, very good or excellent.

The most effective teachers structured tasks so that the pupils could appreciate their progress during the lesson. Activities captured the pupils' interest, for example paired discussion and the use of interactive whiteboards. Teachers referred to assessment criteria so that the pupils understood the purpose of their work and knew where individual lessons fitted into longer sequences of work. While much of the teaching was satisfactory in general, it was often dull. Teachers frequently dominated, talking too much, slowing the pace and preventing the pupils from taking responsibility for their own learning so that insufficient progress was made. In the unsatisfactory lessons, tasks were poorly explained and lacked purpose, challenge or pace. Scrutiny of the pupils' exercise books showed limited evidence of appropriate challenge and progression in their work.

Assessment varied from good to unsatisfactory. Too often, pupils were not aware of the level at which they were working, or of what a challenging target would be. The quality of marking was similarly inconsistent; at its best, it provided helpful and precise guidance for pupils in improving the standard of their work but some books were marked infrequently and comments were generalised and unhelpful, focusing on effort rather than achievement. Despite training on National Curriculum assessment provided by the LEA, many teachers' understanding of planning to assist pupils in making rapid progress remains vague.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements. Improvements in timetabling include provision for the discrete teaching of ICT.

Leadership and management

The headteacher and other senior managers have increased their monitoring but have too optimistic a view of progress. They have not addressed serious concerns with sufficient rigour or urgency. They have an unrealistic view of the quality of teaching and learning and have not demanded that targets are sufficiently challenging or aspirational. Inconsistencies in the performance of different subjects and groups of pupils have not been interrogated robustly. Governors have become increasingly concerned to take a stronger lead in helping to identify the changes necessary to improve provision and standards and in evaluating their effectiveness.

The quality of middle management varies from very good to unsatisfactory; underperforming subject areas continue alongside others that are well run and successful, without apparent recognition of the situation at senior level and without clear expectations being established for managers whose performance is inadequate. Many subject reviews, while developing a more comprehensive and appropriate format under the guidance of the associate headteacher, lack specific strategies for improvement; some reveal too much readiness to blame external factors for the pupils' underachievement.

The school improvement plan prioritises four strategies that have little relevance to the school's underlying weaknesses. Although aspects of teaching, learning and standards are mentioned in subject development plans, there is no unequivocal statement of how leadership and management propose to move the school's performance to a higher level.

The LEA has continued to support the school's work, for example by providing welcome assistance to managers in monitoring the quality of teaching and also training for staff in improving the pupils' behaviour and in implementing national strategies. The LEA's increasing concern with the quality of senior leadership resulted in the deployment of an experienced associate headteacher to the school. This has been a welcome and timely move but as yet there is little evidence that the school's substantive leaders understand how to make the best use of this additional and valuable resource.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

Gosforth West Middle School was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in September 2003. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was judged to have serious weaknesses.

The school was visited by HMI in September 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of September 2003.

In March 2005, two HMI returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Twenty lessons and part lessons, one registration period and an assembly were inspected. The pupils' conduct was observed around the school and on the playground at break and lunchtimes, and samples of their work were inspected. Discussions were held with the headteacher, other nominated staff, a representative from the LEA, the chair of governors and informally with other staff. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and improvements needed in the inspection report of September 2003 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those areas for improvement.

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