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education
and care**

Inspection report

Brewers Hill Middle School

Unique Reference Number 109659
LEA Bedfordshire

Inspection number 275000
Inspection dates 23 and 24 May 2005
Reporting inspector Mr R Blatchford 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	Aldbanks
School category	Community		Dunstable
			Bedfordshire
Age range of pupils	9 to 13 years		LU6 1AJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01582 666668
Number on roll	324	Fax number	01582 672708
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr R Wildsmith
Date of previous inspection	June 2003	Headteacher	Mr M Grafton

Age group	Published	Reference no.
9 to 13 years	4 July 2005	275000

Introduction

When Brewers Hill Middle School was inspected in June 2003, it was judged to require special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education. Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools (HMI) subsequently visited the school on four occasions to monitor its progress, and reinspected the school in May 2005.

Description of the school

Brewers Hill Middle School has 324 pupils on roll, with significantly more boys than girls. The vast majority are of white British origin. A growing minority of pupils has English as an additional language. Twenty per cent of the pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is above average. About a quarter of the pupils have been identified as having special educational needs, including five who have a Statement of Special Educational Need. The attainment of the pupils when they join the school in Year 5 is below average overall. There is some mobility in older year groups.

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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 no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils.

Brewers Hill Middle School has been beset by difficulties for a number of years, largely arising from recurrent problems with recruiting and retaining teachers. However, with measured and patient leadership from the headteacher, and persistence from most of the teaching and support staff, the school is now providing a sound education for its pupils. Standards are below national averages but they are rising steadily as a result of teaching that is generally satisfactory and sometimes good or very good. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour are much improved and the majority enjoy their studies and want to succeed in school. Attendance has improved but remains below national averages. Generally the curriculum complies with national requirements and the pupils benefit from a diverse range of clubs and visits, home and abroad.

Improvement since the last inspection

The inspection of June 2003 required the school to address key issues concerned with the pupils' achievement and attendance, teacher recruitment and training, the provision for music and for those pupils who have special educational needs, and leadership and management. The school has made satisfactory progress with these issues, although the pupils' attainment and attendance need to rise further.

Capacity to improve

The school has demonstrated that it can make improvements and sustain them. The pace of change and improvement has gradually accelerated, the quality of the school's self-evaluation is sound, and procedures to monitor progress are increasingly secure. The headteacher, staff and governors have shown their concerted determination to provide the quality of education the pupils deserve, and recognise the key priorities for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

The key priorities for the school's emerging development plan are to:

- continue to improve the quality of teaching so there is more that is good and very good;
- ensure assessment data is accurate and improve the day-to-day use of assessment to improve learning;

- clarify anew the roles and accountabilities of the leadership team;
- improve provision for science.

Achievement and standards

The school is well aware that, despite improvements, standards remain too low for many pupils. On entry to the school the pupils' attainment is below average. The school's 2004 Key Stage 2 results were well below those found nationally, and showed a decline from 2003 in all three core subjects: 54 per cent of the pupils achieved the national target of Level 4 or above in English, 65 per cent in mathematics and 70 per cent in science. However, standards in lessons continue to rise from a low base and are broadly in line with national expectations in classes where the higher attaining pupils are taught together. With more sharply focused teaching and tracking of the pupils' progress, the school has justifiable confidence that the 2005 Key Stage 2 results will show improvements. Standards in English and mathematics are better than those in science, in which there remains much underachievement in both key stages.

Personal development

The pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is satisfactory. The staff have taken decisive steps to promote good behaviour, although there remains a minority of the older pupils who are careless towards their school mates and their surroundings. Positive attitudes to learning are an increasingly consistent feature of the school, and in most lessons the pupils were attentive and keen to learn. Relationships within the school community are good. In the playground and courtyard the pupils respected each other's spaces, and the pupils in all year groups reported that they feel safe and secure. There have been 39 fixed-term and four permanent exclusions this academic year, in comparison with 42 and five respectively in 2003–04. Despite the school's determined efforts, the pattern of exclusions over two years indicates that too many pupils from time to time exhibit antisocial behaviour.

The school promotes attendance well, and the pupils' attendance has improved, albeit slowly. It is now just below the national average, at 92.3 per cent for this academic year. The school has taken appropriate action with a core of chronic poor attenders. Punctuality to school and to lessons is good.

The provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory, with some strong elements. The programme of 'buddy' reading, involving Year 8 and Year 5 pupils, continues to afford rich opportunities for the pupils to enjoy sharing books together and to show positive attitudes, with the older pupils welcoming their positions of responsibility. Registration sessions were used productively and provided a meaningful thought for the day. The Key Stage 2 assembly offered opportunities for the pupils to reflect on local, national and international issues, and included a visitor from a nearby business with which the school has forged effective links. The pupils valued their

certificates of achievement. Displays and murals around the corridors further reflect the school's efforts to celebrate a range of cultures and achievements by the pupils.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching has improved since the inspection of 2003. It is satisfactory overall although there is not enough good or better teaching. At least satisfactory teaching was seen in seven out of eight lessons, but teaching was only good or better in just over one third of the lessons. Strong teaching was observed in English, mathematics, French, religious education and textiles. However, there were still significant weaknesses in some teaching in science and information and communication technology (ICT).

Effective teaching was underpinned by warm relationships and well-considered management of the pupils' behaviour. Carefully structured lessons, a brisk pace, a range of activities, and considered planning to link assessment tasks to the desired learning outcomes characterised the best teaching. Teachers and learning assistants encouraged the pupils with praise when it was merited and provided constructive advice sensitively. Learning was enhanced in those lessons where there were high expectations of the pupils, as in a mathematics lessons for a Year 5 group on probability and in a Year 8 English lesson on travel writing.

In less successful lessons, the teachers' planning did not consider fully enough how to assess the pupils' learning. The teachers' classroom assessment practice was not effective in ensuring that pupils of all levels of attainment made at least satisfactory progress. Other shortcomings in the teaching included: the teachers' unsatisfactory management of the pupils' behaviour; the slow pace and lack of challenge in some tasks; the absence of focus on those pupils not engaged in learning; the poor visibility of some resources.

Where the pupils made effective progress, they had a clear picture of how one lesson fitted into a sequence of lessons. They were willing to come to the front of the class and present ideas, confident that fellow pupils would support and not mock their efforts. The pupils particularly enjoyed subjects where practical work was involved. Progress for some pupils continues to be hindered by unsatisfactory listening and concentration skills, and weak independent learning habits.

The school has established sound systems for tracking the pupils' progress, which build on baseline data from the previous key stage. However, there are gaps in the school's database so that the tracking of each pupil's progress is not secure. Targets are set for the pupils' longer-term attainment and their progress is recorded at regular intervals. Between the progress reviews which are conducted each term, the assessment in different subjects is inconsistent; there are often long periods during which the pupils' learning is not assessed in sufficient detail. Marking has improved generally and many teachers give pupils advice on how to improve.

The school has made steady progress in reviewing its curriculum since the previous inspection and has addressed the noted statutory requirements. All pupils now have access to music and to a greater range of experiences within design and technology. However, in

Years 7 and 8, there is no provision for citizenship and that for personal, social and health education is very limited. External agencies, such as the police, support some work on drugs, sex education and healthy living, but this is underdeveloped. Cross-curricular themes are not well managed and improvements in this area have been too slow. Literacy is better promoted across most subjects, for instance through the use of keywords, but fostering numeracy and ICT throughout the curriculum is unplanned. The school is right to review the daily timetable in the light of more stable staffing so that the pupils can benefit from a greater range of creative and practical subjects.

The school provides well for pupils who have special educational needs, although at times not enough is expected of them. Provision for the increasing numbers of pupils for whom English is an additional language is not planned coherently, although the school recognises the imperative to put in place structures and staffing to meet their distinct learning needs. The higher-attaining pupils make reasonable gains in their learning, although the work they are given is not always challenging enough.

Accommodation is satisfactory overall. Investments in the internal and external environment have had a positive impact on the way the pupils move around the building and grounds. The pupils report a growing pride in their environment, particularly the newly refurbished library, art room and reception area. However, they also voiced continuing concerns with the state of the changing facilities for physical education and some toilet areas. The pupils commented favourably on the expanded range of extracurricular visits and clubs, with music, cheerleading and sporting activities proving especially popular. The parents report that communication, including a useful text-messaging service, between home and school is effective, although there are missed opportunities for the school to celebrate its various activities. The newsletter has further potential to help build the profile of an increasingly confident school.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has shown dedicated leadership, and has addressed some longstanding issues with staffing and with the pupils' underachievement. He has improved the profile of the school and forged effective links with the wider community and neighbouring schools. He has a clear understanding of the issues which the school is poised to address in its emerging development plan. Members of the leadership team have made some notable contributions to improvements, but are not clear enough as to their accountabilities for ensuring the school's rapid improvement. While procedures for monitoring the school are in place, the team does not pursue them with sufficient robustness; for example, key deadlines affecting the pupils' progress are not routinely followed through.

The newly appointed and longer established subject co-ordinators and heads of year provide good leadership overall. They have ensured that schemes of work are regularly reviewed, the setting of targets is more secure, and the pupils' work is scrutinised at appropriate intervals, although practice is not embedded consistently. Staff training has been suitably tailored to meet the school's priorities for improvement. Procedures for child protection and relevant staff training are in place.

The governing body, particularly through the offices of its school improvement group, has grown in stature and confidence, and is well informed about the pupils' attainment relative to other schools locally and nationally. The newly appointed chair of governors has adopted a thorough and supportive approach to holding to account the leadership team.

The local education authority (LEA) has provided reasonable support over the past two years and is pledged to monitor the school's progress assiduously over the coming period. The LEA and governors have recognised the urgency of managing carefully the budget deficit faced by the school. The LEA is confident that the school has the capacity to sustain improvements and raise further the pupils' attainment.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

Brewers Hill Middle School was inspected in June 2003 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in January, May and September 2004, and in January 2005 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of June 2003.

In May 2005, one HMI and one Additional Inspector 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 four lessons, two registration sessions 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, nominated staff, the student council, a group of governors, a representative from the LEA, and informally with other staff. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of June 2003 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.

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