



Marston Vale Middle School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109653
LEA BEDFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 278232
Inspection dates 5 July 2006 to 6 July 2006
Reporting inspector Ms. Margaret Jones HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary	School address	The Crescent
School category	Community		MK43 9NH
Age range of pupils	9 to 14		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01234 768224
Number on roll	475	Fax number	01234 768224
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs. Adele Moore
Date of previous inspection	10 January 2000	Headteacher	Mr. Jim Godfrey

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Marston Vale Middle School is located in the village of Stewartby and takes pupils from many surrounding villages in Bedfordshire. Most pupils travel to school by bus. The school has been oversubscribed for a number of years. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. There are very few pupils for whom English is not their first language. The proportion of pupils identified with learning difficulties, including those with statements of special educational need, is above average. The school plays an active role in the local learning community.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with outstanding features. The school's self evaluation is accurate, it sees itself as a good school and inspectors agree. Most parents think that it is a good school too. The school is led and managed well. The headteacher has created a calm and orderly atmosphere in which pupils concentrate on their work. There is a strong team spirit among the staff and governors, all of whom are well motivated and want to do their best for the school and its pupils. Effective teaching, excellent relationships and high standards of care ensure that all pupils' personal development is good. They enjoy their learning and make good progress. As a result standards are above average and all pupils achieve particularly well in relation to their capabilities. Pupils behave very well, in and out of lessons, because of an excellent approach to behaviour management based on clear rules and high expectations. The school has an imaginative approach to the curriculum and is willing to listen to new ideas and to take risks. This provides pupils with a good curriculum and an outstanding range of enriching experiences, both during and after school. Teaching is monitored regularly but there is insufficient emphasis on checking the quality of learning and achievement in lessons. Assessment and tracking of pupils' progress is improving but is not consistent across the school. The school has been successful in securing external funding to improve accommodation. It provides good value for money. There has been good improvement since the last inspection and there is good capacity for standards to improve further. The school has strong working arrangements with local schools, despite uncertainty about the future of the three-tier system.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the capacity of the senior management team to monitor learning as well as teaching by using classroom observation more effectively.
- Work towards a more streamlined and more consistent assessment and target-setting system which is better understood by staff and pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils start school in Year 5 with standards that are broadly as expected. They make good progress during their time in the school. They exceed their challenging targets. The most recent national tests show that, by the age of eleven, standards are above average in English, mathematics and science. More-able pupils reach the higher levels in the tests. The good progress that pupils make in Years 5 and 6 is continued in Years 7 and 8, with the result that standards remain above the expected level. The work produced by pupils is impressive. They present interesting and imaginative writing in English, such as that produced by Year 6 pupils on the footballer Billy the Kid, and they successfully tackle challenging problems in mathematics. High standards are also achieved in other subjects, and the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection have been successfully addressed. The specialist teaching provided throughout the

school, together with the outstanding facilities that are available, enable pupils to achieve well in all subjects including a range of practical subjects. Pupils really enjoy their work in these subjects and this contributes significantly to achievement. The school makes careful allowance for the needs of pupils with learning difficulties. Their individual learning plans are now better than at the time of the last inspection, and the successful use of these in lessons contributes well to the good progress that pupils make towards their personal targets. Pupils from other backgrounds, looked-after children and Travellers' children are fully involved and supported in all activities. This ensures that they achieve well during their time in the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy their education very much. This is shown by attendance which is above the national average and good punctuality. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour in tutor groups, in lessons and around the school are good. Pupils feel safe and secure and appreciate the good teaching they receive. Their moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils treat each other and adults with respect. However, there are too few opportunities for spiritual reflection relating to multicultural Britain. Pupils are very willing to become involved in school activities that include helping younger children with reading and sports coaching, raising money for charity and taking responsibility through the Pupil Council. Two pupils from each class participate in regular council meetings, and the planned mufti days helped to raise over 1000 pounds for tsunami victims. Physical education lessons, the wide range of extra-curricular sports activities and the emphasis on healthy eating have helped pupils to adopt healthier life styles. Good links with local companies help pupils improve future economic well-being, although there is potential for more activities to develop enterprise skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching is good. Teachers have excellent relationships with pupils and manage behaviour so well that pupils feel that they are equal partners in the learning process. Teachers have good specialist subject knowledge and this enables them to clearly explain new things to pupils. They use an interesting range of resources and practical applications, which take account of different learning styles, to help pupils to learn. For example, Year 7 pupils in a cookery lesson made spaghetti Bolognese. They were allowed to choose their own ingredients to suit their family's preferences. They worked safely, independently and with great enjoyment and concentration to produce delicious and healthy meals. Computers and interactive whiteboards are used effectively and frequently to enhance learning. Sometimes the pace in lessons drops a little when pupils are not entirely clear about what they are expected to do. Pupils with learning difficulties receive effective support from teaching assistants, and more able pupils are given tasks which challenge them. Teachers use effective assessment

procedures to check on pupils' learning and to guide their teaching but this practice is not consistent across departments.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good because it meets the full range of pupils needs and enables them to study a broad and interesting range of subjects. The quality of many of the school's specialist facilities enhances this provision. Teachers cater for different ways of learning. This ensures that pupils find the work in the majority of subjects exciting and interesting. The current provision for French is less effective and does not engage pupils as well. Good, thoughtful links are made between subjects when appropriate. The curriculum benefits from being innovative. For instance, the introduction of single-sex teaching groups for English and mathematics has helped to boost standards in those subjects. Learning difficulties are identified carefully and accurately, and pupils are provided with a range of relevant and varied work. This helps to ensure that they achieve well. There is a very strong emphasis throughout the school on developing pupils' personal and social skills, and the citizenship programme is well thought out and well taught. Lessons in citizenship make an effective contribution to pupils' safe and healthy lifestyles. There is also an exceptional range of educational outings and extra-curricular activities, such as the Toe-to-Toe Club for pupils with learning difficulties, which the pupils enjoy and which they and their parents support in great numbers. Careers education has been a focus for pupils in Year 7, and they have been on well planned visits to local work places.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Requirements for child protection are firmly met and staff are alert to individual needs. Risk assessments are undertaken regularly for subjects and trips. Teachers and support staff know pupils very well; areas of concern, including occasional incidents of bullying, are dealt with promptly. Pupils feel safe and secure in school, though not always on the buses to and from it. The harmonious atmosphere in school helps pupils to behave and achieve well. An outstanding feature is the brain gym, (fun activities to enhance performance), which helps pupils overcome barriers to their learning and achieve more highly. Assessment for learning involves a great deal of self-evaluation by pupils. Teachers are beginning to use many sources of data well to help pupils set themselves targets. However, practice is inconsistent across subjects. Although most pupils know the levels at which they are working, not all know or understand the targets they are set. Procedures in lessons to deal with behavioural problems are very consistent and thorough. Pupils with problems are often referred to a visiting counsellor for help and support. Pupils are given some understanding of possible careers in Year 7 and this is to be extended into Year 8. Pupils are very well prepared for their move to the upper school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher promotes high expectations and is passionate about learning. He is a driving force for innovation and creativity within the school. The senior teachers do their jobs effectively and the team is developing its ability to use data to track and improve the performance of individual pupils. Middle management is strong and is enhanced by well focused training and development. The governing body challenges and holds the school to account effectively. The views of parents are taken into account appropriately through surveys run by a private company and from feedback following open evenings. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and the senior management team and governors have correctly identified areas for improvement. Teaching is systematically monitored through classroom observation but the present format is not sufficiently focused on pupils' achievement and progress. The school development plan is clearly set out and presents a shared vision for improvement. As a result of the implementation of an effective range of strategies, pupils of all abilities are succeeding and the potential for further improvement is good. The school has been active in securing sponsorship funding from local industries and charities. This has been very well spent on improving specialist facilities for science, music and PE. The accommodation, inside and out, is well-maintained and provides a stimulating learning environment.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for all the help you gave the inspectors when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking with you. We learned about your enthusiasm for your school and how much you enjoy and value all that it has to offer. It is a good school with several aspects which are outstanding. We thought you would like to know what was good about your school and how we thought it could get even better; - You work hard and do very well in your national tests. Years 7 and 8 do very well and achieve very good results when they move on to the upper school. - You behave very well because teachers have clear rules and high expectations for you. You are well looked after and feel safe. - Teaching is good and you enjoy practical learning with fun activities. - The school is led and managed very well and there is a very good team spirit among the staff and governors, all of whom are well motivated and want to do their best for all of you. - There is an exciting curriculum with some different aspects such as single sex groups for English and maths. - You enjoy the wide range of activities that are provided for you, especially the sport, music and cooking. We thought that the following things could be improved. - The school could keep a more careful check on your learning in lessons. - Target setting could be made clearer so you know your targets and understand what you have to do to get better. We wish all of you success in your studies and thank you once again for your help with this inspection.