

Droitwich, Westacre Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116778
Local Authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	290631
Inspection dates	8–9 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Alison Grainger

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

Type of school	Middle deemed primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9–12
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	350
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Judith Aldridge
Headteacher	Donna Evans
Date of previous school inspection	2 December 2002
School address	Ombersley Way Droitwich WR9 0AA
Telephone number	01905 772795
Fax number	01905 795537

Age group	9-12
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Pupils come from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds. Almost all are of White British heritage. A very small number of pupils have English as an additional language. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. Most of these pupils have moderate learning or behavioural difficulties. The percentage with a statement of special educational need is a little above average. Taking the intake as a whole, most year groups enter the school with average standards.

Since the last inspection there has been a significant turnover of staff, including two changes of headteacher. The present headteacher has been responsible for the school since September 2007. The local authority has been providing intensive support to improve pupils' achievement. This support will continue during the next school year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school. It has improved significantly during the last year and is providing pupils with an acceptable standard of education. Many parents recognise that the school is moving forward well and so do the pupils. The headteacher sets a strong and clear educational direction. This is widely shared and understood by staff and governors, who are strongly committed to further improvement.

A strength, appreciated by many parents, is the attention to pupils' personal welfare. This has been a significant factor in improving behaviour so that it is now good. Numerous parents told inspectors that they feel comfortable approaching the staff with concerns and that they see the school as very responsive. One parent commented, 'I find the staff at Westacre kind, caring and understanding of the children's needs.' Another observed that, 'There is a real air of friendship throughout the school.'

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. There are good features not only in their behaviour, but also in their adoption of healthy lifestyles and safe practices. The school does much to develop pupils' awareness of the importance of a healthy diet and gives them good opportunities for physical exercise. Pupils say that they feel safe and secure at school. They also know a lot about how to stay safe in school and outside, such as when using the internet.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall and standards are broadly average in Year 7. However, not all pupils have done as well as they should throughout their time at the school and the school has had to address some significant pockets of underachievement. While pupils are now making progress at an adequate rate, there is variation in how well they move on in different classes. There is not enough good progress and some classes or groups within classes are progressing at an only just adequate rate.

Determined action by the school, with the intensive support of the local authority, has brought substantial improvements in teaching. As a result, teaching is currently satisfactory. However, this quality of teaching is not good enough to support better than adequate progress overall and to ensure that pupils who underachieved in the past catch up really quickly. There is little good teaching and too much that is only satisfactory, with some that is barely adequate. The school is taking well-focused and effective action to improve teaching further. Currently, not all teaching is matched closely enough to all pupils' needs and teachers' expectations of pupils are not always high enough. This is the main reason why pupils' progress is only satisfactory.

The curriculum and academic guidance contribute satisfactorily to pupils' learning, although aspects require improvement. Pupils do not have enough opportunities in different subjects to solve problems together and to develop independence as learners, particularly in science. There are inconsistencies in how well targets and marking are used to give pupils clear guidance about how to take responsibility for improving their performance.

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall and gaining in strength. This, together with the school's recent track record of development, shows that it has the necessary capacity to become more effective.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all pupils consistently progress as well as they should in all classes.

- Make sure that teaching is always closely matched to all pupils' needs and that expectations of pupils are high enough.
- Increase opportunities for pupils to work together to solve problems and develop independence as learners, particularly in science.
- Provide all pupils with clear guidance, through targets and marking, to help them to improve their performance.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory overall and standards are broadly average in Year 7. The vast majority of pupils in Year 7 have moved on steadily in building on their attainment at the end of Year 6. There are examples of some pupils making good progress, particularly those taught in the upper ability classes for English and mathematics. The present Year 6 started in Year 5 with standards significantly below average and the school's data indicate that their standards remain well below average now and weakest in science. The quality of provision has not been good enough to raise the low standards of this year group, although their progress is satisfactory now. Pupils in Year 5 are also making acceptable gains in relation to their average starting points.

There is some inconsistency in how well pupils in different classes progress and this is directly linked to variations in the quality of teaching. Pupils with learning difficulties progress at a similar rate to other pupils. The few with English as an additional language move on at a reasonable pace.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Their moral development is good, as seen in the improved standards of behaviour, their consideration for others and their growing awareness of the importance of looking after the environment. They are friendly, courteous and polite and the vast majority are confident when interacting with adults. Pupils enjoy being with their friends at school and like their teachers, but their enjoyment of lessons is only satisfactory because not all lessons challenge and motivate them sufficiently. The attendance rate is a little below average. Punctuality is satisfactory and improving.

Pupils are making a satisfactory and increasing contribution to the community. Those with responsibilities undertake them diligently. As one parent said, 'My son is part of the school council and feels privileged and proud of the responsible role.' The school council recently played an important part in the appointment of a new deputy headteacher. Pupils are reasonably involved in the wider community and in raising funds for charities. Pupils are making satisfactory progress in gaining the skills needed for their future lives, although they do not develop the independence and initiative as learners of which they are capable.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching has improved significantly over the last year in particular and is now satisfactory. While there is little good teaching and some that is only just acceptable, there are some positive features to the practice in all classes. In most classes, relationships are good and this creates a climate supportive of learning. Activities are generally well organised and pupils are usually told the purpose of the lesson and tasks so that they know what they are aiming to achieve. Lessons usually proceed at a reasonable pace although, occasionally, teachers spend too much time talking and pupils do not have enough time to complete tasks. In many mathematics lessons, interactive whiteboards are used well to support explanations and instruction.

In lessons in which teaching is good, the teacher's input and activities are closely matched to pupils' differing needs and expectations of the standards all pupils are capable of attaining are high. These features are much less evident in satisfactory teaching and this is why pupils learn less when teaching is only satisfactory and, particularly, when it is only just adequate.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum covers all the required subjects and promotes adequate progress. There are good features in the provision for personal, social and health education and these lead to pupils' strong understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles and safe practices. They also contribute to pupils knowing that, for example, bullying and racism are not acceptable. While there is much positive promotion of personal development, there is not enough attention to developing pupils' skills in solving problems and in independent enquiry. This is a weakness in science in particular.

There is a satisfactory and expanding range of activities in addition to lessons, such as clubs. Provision for sport and physical fitness is good. A reasonable range of visits take place and the opportunities provided on a residential visit support pupils' personal and social development well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pastoral care is good. Parents are pleased with how well their children are helped to settle when they join the school in Year 5. The appointment of a behaviour mentor has done much to support pupils with behavioural difficulties and to improve behaviour generally. As the parents of one pupil commented, 'We have been very happy with the support our son has had in improving his behaviour and concentration.' Pupils with learning difficulties are given satisfactory support, as are vulnerable pupils. Good attention is given to health and safety and secure arrangements are in place to safeguard pupils. The school is working hard to improve attendance and has been successful in improving punctuality.

Academic guidance has developed this year but is not as strong as the care for pupils' personal welfare. There are variations in how well teachers use targets and marking to help pupils know what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve their performance. The school is currently working to address this and to ensure that targets are more individual and specific.

The tracking of progress is adequate and is also developing, with new systems currently being implemented.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher provides a strong drive for improvement, based on an accurate evaluation of the school's effectiveness and the action needed to take the school forward. Her clarity, commitment and enthusiasm are widely praised by staff and governors. They recognise that the school is getting better but that more has to be done before it can become as effective as they want it to be.

The headteacher does not tolerate inadequate teaching. She has given clear messages to staff whose practice has required significant improvement and ensured that support is provided. This is a major reason why teaching now is better than it was. The subject leaders have a secure understanding of the quality of provision in their subjects. They too are enthusiastic about the focus on improvement and are taking increasing responsibility for pupils' progress. The science subject leader, for example, has started action to give more emphasis to the development of pupils' skills in scientific enquiry. However, initiatives led by subject leaders are still new and many are only just being implemented. As a result, they are not yet making a full contribution to improving progress. Class teachers now recognise the extent to which they are accountable for pupils' performance.

The school has benefited a good deal from the substantial support provided by the local authority to help it to improve its provision and leadership and is continuing to work in close partnership with it. Governance has developed well this year and is continuing to get better as a result of the effective training provided. The headteacher keeps governors very well informed. Governors recognise the importance of developing their roles further, in particular to increase their involvement in the school's self-evaluation.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Westacre Middle School, Droitwich WR9 0AA

Thank you for helping us when we visited your school. We enjoyed finding out about your school and what you think of it. The groups of pupils we met with told us that you think that your school is improving. We know that this is what many of your parents think too. We agree. A lot has been put in place recently to help your school to become more effective. It is providing you with a satisfactory education.

One of the things you said has improved a lot is the behaviour. Behaviour is good now. All of you that we spoke with were friendly and polite. You have a good understanding of how to stay fit and healthy through diet and exercise. Your school gives you many opportunities for sport and physical fitness. You also know a good deal about how to stay safe in school and outside. We saw that your sensible behaviour helps to make the school a safe place.

The adults make sure that you are looked after and kept safe at school. Your parents told us that they are pleased with how well you settle in at the start of Year 5.

Your headteacher is taking a lot of important and well-thought-through action to help you get more out of being at Westacre. The other teachers and governors are giving her support to do this. The local authority is also working closely with the school to help. Everyone wants the school to become a good school. To help with this, we have asked the school to do the following things.

- Ensure that you always progress as well as you should, no matter which class you are in (or which set you are taught in for English and mathematics).
- Make sure that teaching is at the right level for each of you all of the time and that teachers always expect you to do as well as you can.
- Give you more opportunities to work together to solve problems and to become independent in your learning, particularly in science.
- Provide you with clear guidance, through targets and marking, to help you to improve your work.

You can help by always doing your best and by making sure that you are punctual and attend regularly.

Yours sincerely

Alison Grainger Lead inspector