



Alnwick the Dukes Middle School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 122353
Local Authority Northumberland
Inspection number 292380
Inspection dates 28–29 September 2006
Reporting inspector John Paddick

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary	School address	Hope House Lane
School category	Community		Alnwick, Northumberland
Age range of pupils	9–13		NE66 1UN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01665 602037
Number on roll (school)	206	Fax number	01665 605881
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Gordon Castle
		Headteacher	Mrs Josephine McDonough
Date of previous school inspection	1 April 2001		

Age group 9–13	Inspection dates 28–29 September 2006	Inspection number 292380
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Duke's Middle School draws its pupils from a diverse catchment area encompassing the market town of Alnwick (including a ward where there is significant deprivation) as well as some surrounding villages. Attainment of pupils when they join the school at the start of Year 5 is below average, particularly in literacy. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. A local authority plan to reorganise education in Northumberland in 2009 includes the closure of the school, together with other middle schools in the locality.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Duke's is a good school. It is welcoming and successful. Excellent displays set the tone for pupils to enjoy their education in an atmosphere of calm and industry. Parents and pupils recognise the good quality of the school's work and know that they get a good deal. Pupils' personal development is outstanding and key to the success that they have in their academic studies. Pupils are happy at school, confident and well placed to make the right choices about healthy living and personal safety. They attend and behave well and their attitudes to study support the good progress that they make. The school's care, guidance and support programme is strong and effective, and is another key contributor to pupils' good progress.

The curriculum is carefully planned so that all groups of pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are gifted and talented, can make good progress and build up their skills in literacy and numeracy. An excellent provision of extra-curricular activities, visits, speakers, and successful entry to competitions, enables pupils to widen their experiences and helps them to make properly informed choices about the future in terms of study, work and leisure. Good teaching enables pupils of all abilities to make good progress in their four years at the school. Typically, it is well planned and presented in a compelling manner so that pupils learn quickly through a logical sequence of different and interesting activities. Occasionally, the pace of learning slows when teaching is of a lower but nevertheless satisfactory quality.

Pupils make good progress from the moment they start in Year 5. Where there are weaknesses in reading, writing, speaking, listening and numeracy, these are all tackled effectively. National test results have improved substantially. They were broadly average in 2005 and similar in 2006, representing good achievement. The momentum of progress is maintained until pupils leave in Year 8.

The school is led and managed well with a strong emphasis on standards, personal development, curriculum and the quality of teaching. It gives good value for money. Managers have a largely accurate view of the school's effectiveness, and direction for the future is clear. The school recognises that target setting and assessment procedures require further attention. The good improvements made since the previous inspection are evident in all aspects of the school's work. Capacity to improve further is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Set and monitor more challenging targets for individual pupils and subjects.
- Improve the satisfactory teaching to the level of the otherwise good practice in the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are average and the pupils' achievement is good. Pupils join the school in Year 5 with below average attainment, particularly in relation to reading, writing, and numerical work. Speaking and listening skills are particularly weak. In their four years at the school, boys and girls make good progress and make up for lost ground well. Speaking and listening skills improve markedly because teachers make them a priority.

After two years, pupils take the national tests in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Results in these tests have improved substantially. In 2005, they were above average in mathematics, average in English and below average in science. This represents good achievement for all groups of pupils, male and female, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are particularly gifted and talented. In 2006, results were similar overall but science results improved substantially.

Pupils continue to make good progress in Years 7 and 8 in all subjects and, by the end of Year 8, standards in English, mathematics and science rise to just above average overall with particular strengths in mathematics. The presentation of written work develops very well. However, there is still room for standards to be driven up further through the setting and achievement of higher targets for pupils and subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development and well-being of pupils are outstanding. Pupils' strong desires to learn and succeed are a real credit to all the adults who work with them.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They are strongly and effectively encouraged through assemblies and form periods to strive to do the best they can. They enjoy school and attend well. Attitudes to learning are good. Although a small minority of parents raised concerns about poor behaviour, there was no evidence of it during the inspection. Exclusions for inappropriate conduct are very low.

As a result of an extremely strong focus on healthy living and participation in sport and exercise, pupils have an excellent base for making correct personal decisions now and in the future. They speak enthusiastically about the multitude of opportunities they have to make contributions in the wider community. These are celebrated through excellent displays in the school, and some, such as the fine artistic contributions to the 'Northumberland in Bloom' calendar, are admired in towns throughout the county.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good throughout the school and strongly promotes the good progress that pupils make between Years 5 and 8. Lessons are almost always good, occasionally satisfactory, never inadequate, and sometimes outstanding, for example in art.

Pupils are interested and work hard because they enjoy their lessons. They respond well to good class management, interesting activities and a strong pace. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good and the atmosphere in lessons is conducive to learning. Teachers plan their lessons with care so that pupils either consolidate understanding well or acquire new knowledge and skills at a good rate. They present tasks in a logical, sequential and yet challenging manner that keeps the pupils fully engaged. Teachers are particularly adept at questioning pupils verbally to check on progress and to ensure that they fully understand what is expected of them and what they are learning. Occasionally, learning slows because the teachers' presentations are insufficiently compelling to capture the pupils' full attention, interest and engagement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and has some excellent features. It is carefully planned to give high priority to the promotion of good progress in basic skills in English and mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). There are secure pathways for pupils of all abilities to progress well as they move through the school. Attention given to pupils' personal development thoroughly underpins the progress they make in their academic studies. The curriculum for history, geography and ICT has improved since the last inspection; in each subject it is now good. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from good curriculum support, which enables them to progress well.

All areas of the national curriculum are covered well and in addition, pupils benefit from a very wide range of extra-curricular activities. Sporting and leisure activities are particularly strong, for example, cycling and kick-boxing. Provision for citizenship is outstanding. Pupils' classroom experiences are frequently and regularly enhanced by an impressive range of visits, speakers from many walks of life, and successful entry into competitions both local and national. Many of these activities, for example, the design of shelters for street children in Brazil, particularly enable gifted and talented pupils to make good personal and academic gains. An extremely strong emphasis on health and safety enables pupils to make very well informed personal lifestyle choices.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good overall. High levels of commitment to all aspects of pupils' welfare ensure that they make good progress in their personal development and in their academic studies. Robust procedures for child protection, health and safety and risk assessment are in place and reviewed regularly. Procedures for safeguarding pupils' welfare are fully in place. Pupils feel very safe in school and enjoy it.

Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. Effective systems track their progress and provide intervention programmes when they begin to slip or lose heart. Good liaison with parents keeps them fully involved in target setting and review. Vulnerable pupils are supported well. Those at risk are identified early and appropriate help is provided, enabling them to make the same good progress as other pupils.

There are regular reviews of the rates of progress of all pupils and underachievement is quickly identified. However, the setting and frequent monitoring of challenging targets for individual pupils still has weaknesses. Good guidance prepares pupils well for their transition to high school, where they continue to make good progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good at all levels. The strong leadership of the headteacher and senior team has focused appropriately on raising standards through the development of staff expertise. This group effectively shares a very clear vision for the future with the rest of the staff. Consequently, as vision becomes reality, standards in the school are rising quickly. The next vital step will be to improve target setting procedures to raise expectations of everyone in the school. Governors make a strong contribution to the school, providing appropriate challenge and support to the senior team. They are involved in curriculum debate and enthusiastically take part in annual reviews of subject performance.

The school has successfully tackled all the issues from the previous inspection. Monitoring and evaluation procedures are rigorous and lead directly to improvement in standards and achievement. Through its effective self-evaluation, which takes into account the views of all stakeholders, the senior management team has a good understanding of the school's large number of strengths and few weaknesses. Staff morale is good and the school is well placed to make further improvements.

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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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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.

Leadership and management

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

Alnwick the Dukes Middle School

Hope House Lane

Alnwick

Northumberland

NE66 1UN

29 September 2006

Dear Pupils

Thank you for making us so welcome when we inspected your school last week. We would especially like to thank those of you who answered our questions when we came into your classrooms, those who showed us to rooms we were looking for, and those who we interviewed as a group.

I am delighted to be able to inform you that we believe you attend a good school. The good progress that you make in the subjects you study is evident in your work and in the verbal answers that you give to your teachers. Standards rise from below average when you join in Year 5 to just above average when you leave in Year 8 so achievement is good. However, there is still room for faster progress and higher standards still. You will soon find that the school will set you higher targets and help you achieve them.

The school provides you with quite exceptional opportunities to develop personally, for example, through extra-curricular activities and visits. Your welfare and safety have high priority. Most of the teaching is good so you make good progress as you move from Year 5 to Year 8. However, in a few lessons where teaching is satisfactory rather than good, some of you become inattentive when you are not fully engaged in your work. The curriculum is good and meets all requirements well.

Your school is well led and managed by staff at all levels. It is welcoming and successful.

The improvements needed are:

- to set higher targets for pupils in all subjects and to help them achieve even higher standards
- to improve the satisfactory teaching to the level of the normal good provision in the school.

Yours sincerely

John Paddick

(Lead Inspector)