



Woodhouse Middle School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 124432
Local Authority Staffordshire
Inspection number 292995
Inspection dates 17–18 January 2007
Reporting inspector Ceri Morgan HMI

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary	School address	Woodhouse Lane
School category	Community		Biddulph
Age range of pupils	8–13		Stoke-on-Trent ST8 7DR
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01782 297875
Number on roll (school)	406	Fax number	01782 297885
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	David Allen
		Headteacher	Brian Mirza
Date of previous school inspection	1 September 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
8–13	17–18 January 2007	292995

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Woodhouse Middle School serves a semi-rural area of north Staffordshire and the town of Biddulph. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is below average. The proportion of pupils who are entitled to free school meals is small and very few pupils are in the early stages of learning English.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The inspection took place at a time when the school is making many significant changes to staffing, school organisation and long-established practices. These changes are highly appropriate and have been broadly welcomed by the school community. The outcomes of these changes are not yet fully evident and the school acknowledges that there remains much to be done to complete them. As a result the overall effectiveness is currently satisfactory but improving and the school has some considerable strengths. Woodhouse Middle is a satisfactorily effective school striving to ensure that the good care and support it gives pupils are matched by increased attention to educational achievement. Recent initiatives are breathing renewed vigour into day to day practices and establishing a more forward looking ethos. There is a welcoming and friendly atmosphere and an experienced and hard working staff offer much to their pupils. The achievement of pupils is at least satisfactory and good in some subjects. However, teachers do not all have and make use of accurate data that keeps track of pupils' progress. This prevents some pupils from achieving their full potential, especially in lessons, and is one key reason why achievement is satisfactory overall. The newly established assessment arrangements, including the pupil planners, are helping to monitor progress but not enough use is made of the information these provide, especially in planning lessons. In some subjects, standards are high and pupils make good progress. This is especially evident in mathematics but not yet reflected in all subjects. In English, for example, progress is more often satisfactory. Many of the recent changes, however welcome, have only recently started to improve outcomes for all pupils and there is a lack of urgency in implementing some necessary change. For example, the school is aware that the tracking and monitoring of pupils in Years 7 and 8 require improvement but not all staff yet show a full commitment to the new process. The timings of the school day lead to too much unproductive time: in some cases, pupils are in school for over an hour before they receive any direct teaching. The school has recently reorganised the leadership within school to focus more closely on pupils' learning rather than organisational matters. For example, year heads have taken on the role and title of learning leaders. This change has started to influence the way in which strategic decisions are made but, again, it is new and has yet to have a demonstrable impact. Although staff are diligent in their work there remains a gentle informality about much of the decision making process that leads to delays in evaluating the impact of the changes in practices. Communication both within the school and with families is improving. Although some is good, teachers' planning varies too much in quality. As a result, work is often not matched closely enough to pupils' abilities. This means that many pupils find the work either too easy or too hard and consequently the achievement of more able pupils and pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is satisfactory rather than good. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, although there are some examples of good and outstanding practice. Pupils make better progress when they take an active part in lessons and where the teacher uses planned opportunities to assess their learning. Their achievement is only satisfactory when they are required to listen for too long and when lesson plans do not take account of their different abilities. Some sessions are dominated by teacher talk at the expense

of allowing pupil discussion. This also has the effect of limiting opportunities for extended writing – a problem identified by the school, although measures to improve standards of writing are still developing. Leadership at all levels is increasingly effective but does not evaluate the impact of its work in enough detail to inform future planning. The routine monitoring of standards in subjects and the quality of teaching is not fully established although much has been done recently to improve this. Although lesson observations take place, they lack focus and do not directly relate to the school's priorities.

What the school should do to improve further

- Revise the timings of the school day to ensure a greater proportion is given to direct teaching.
- Improve the monitoring of pupils' progress and the use of assessment information in teachers' planning.
- Monitor the whole range of the school's work with increased rigour and implement changes with greater urgency.
- Engage pupils more actively in their learning and promote greater independence.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are above average although they vary between subjects. Achievement varies more widely and is satisfactory overall although in some subjects it too is good. In mathematics, for example, almost half of the pupils in Year 6 achieve a level above that which is expected for their age. Standards in English and science are also good although standards in writing dip slightly below those for reading. Progress made is more often satisfactory in these subjects and is the main reason why achievement overall is judged as satisfactory. A lack of rigorous monitoring makes some analysis difficult, especially for pupils in Years 7 and 8, but the results of annual tests confirm the overall picture of high standards of attainment with more variable patterns of achievement for some pupils in some subjects. This was also evident in lesson observations and pupils' workbooks. The overall progress made by pupils in Year 6 has been close to average each year since 2003. More able pupils make satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school and their attendance is good. They show good attitudes to learning and behave well. They feel safe in school and are confident that there are adults who will help them with problems. A minority of parents express concern about poor behaviour but behaviour seen during the inspection was good and sometimes exemplary. The school succeeds in building the self-esteem of pupils especially those with learning difficulties although some are still excluded from classes for misdemeanours, a practice which does not sit comfortably with the inclusive nature of the school's ethos. Pupils

are confident and proud of their achievements and rewards and this is evident in the way they celebrate each other's successes in lessons and assemblies. One good example of this was when pupils burst into spontaneous applause when one pupil made an exceptional effort in gymnastics during a challenging task. The spiritual, moral, cultural and social development of pupils is good and aspects of this are particularly strong. Pupils are given responsibilities in school as buddies to younger pupils, as prefects, helping out with office duties and caring for the site. They respond well to these but could sometimes be expected to take on more responsibility for their own learning. Pupils express their views clearly and the school acts on their suggestions through the school council. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe and healthy and they understand the importance of a healthy diet and regular exercise, making sensible choices at lunchtimes. Most pupils take some part in the impressive range of extra activities – especially in sport and music. The school has a growing and good range of links with the community. A series of events, competitions and performances, including a carol concert at a local church, is well received. Pupils' understanding of citizenship and skills that contribute to their future economic well-being is satisfactory but the school has already identified plans to improve this.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. However, some very good teaching was seen. Where teaching is good, pupils engage in interesting lessons with added sparkle provided by imaginative use of interactive whiteboards, as in one example based on the purpose of a prologue in Shakespeare's writing. In these sessions, the pace of learning is brisk and well judged. Crucially the level of challenge and engagement is high. Behaviour was often exemplary during these good lessons. Pupils respond well to opportunities to work in pairs and groups, although opportunities to do this are too limited. Pupils are increasingly aware of the level at which they are working and what they need to do improve. In an English lesson, pupils responded enthusiastically to opportunities to act out feelings and to assess each other. Pupils and teachers have good relationships although behaviour management is sometimes overly confrontational. In less effective lessons, teachers talk for too long thereby restricting the opportunity for pupils to write during the main part of the lesson. The pace of lessons is too slow and tasks lack genuine challenge or purpose. Pupils do not progress as fast as they could and behaviour is generally worse. Sometimes the same task is set for all pupils regardless of ability and some pupils who could be attaining higher standards are held back. Teachers are very patient in helping individuals but meanwhile other pupils are ready and waiting to move on. Although some teachers make very good use of assessment, the school does not yet have a consistent approach to setting targets for pupils and monitoring their progress. Marking does not always show pupils how to improve. Lesson observations do take place but they are not yet frequent or rigorous enough to deliver sustained improvement. The school has the

capacity to share good practice and to make the necessary improvements in teaching and learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good, building effectively on pupils' previous learning. Regular meetings with other schools make the curriculum more consistent across Years 6 to 8. Collaboration with the specialist high school has also increased the range and quality of the physical education curriculum. Curriculum details are on the school's very good website so that parents can help their children with assignments. There is good provision for literacy and numeracy although some aspects of the timings of lessons impair learning. Information and communication technology (ICT) provision has expanded significantly in the last year and has begun to increase the quality and range of learning experiences provided. Support staff are deployed well. Recent initiatives for more able pupils, like the Keele University Mathematics Master Class, help them to benefit from enrichment activities, but there is not enough in lessons to challenge them. Health and safety education is excellent so pupils understand a wide range of dangers, from fireworks to chat rooms. Curriculum activities like the Young Enterprise Fair Trade Project, the stationery shop and Christmas fayre stalls teach pupils to work together developing enterprise and work-related skills. Pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is enhanced with a sustained emphasis on rights and responsibilities. Many pupils enjoy the excellent range of sports and clubs. Attendance at the ICT club is especially impressive and more than 80% of pupils participate in sports activities. All Year 6 pupils and many in Years 7 and 8 have the opportunity for residential visits to an outdoor education centre.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care and support for pupils are good and some aspects are outstanding. Guidance towards learning targets is inadequate. All staff are trained in child protection. Posters in all cloakrooms explain procedures to pupils who are strongly encouraged to report and discuss concerns. This is a strength of the school. Risk assessments are well organised and arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils are good. Good procedures ensure that attendance is above average and unauthorised absence is very low. Pupils say that they like their school and feel safe here. The school works very effectively with other agencies in all aspects of pupils' welfare. Pupils at risk or with learning difficulties are identified early and good arrangements support them well so that they make good progress. Individual education plans are revised frequently and shared with parents who are invited to discuss their children's needs with the school. Systems are being developed to analyse data, but information about pupils' attainment is not yet adequately used to track their progress and to guide their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The very good work of the headteacher has started to instil a thoughtful and sensitive determination to improve the progress pupils make. He has improved communication both within school and with the wider community and initiated some positive changes over the last year. He has a clear vision and an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. His style of management is going a considerable way to securing more effective contributions of the wider management team. This approach is a key contributory factor to the recent improvements. He is well supported by governors. They have appropriate plans to increase the level of accountability and involvement at subject level but contribute well to the financial security of the school and all other aspects of school life. They have rightly identified that reporting on standards and pupils' achievement will have an increased priority in the future. However, there are some aspects of improvement that are being made too slowly. For example, the school is aware that the tracking of pupils' progress and the monitoring of teaching quality are not rigorous enough. There is an opportunity for the school to show greater ambition and aspiration, especially in their target setting. The role of the subject leaders is growing but there are considerable variations in the depth and quality of their monitoring. Not all know enough about standards in their subjects. However, as a result of the progress currently being made, the school has demonstrated a good capacity to make further improvement. Parents are very supportive of the school and value the supporting ethos and the confidence it instils in the pupils.

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
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?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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?	2
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	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
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?	2
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.

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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	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

- would like to thank you for your welcome when we recently came to inspect your school. We greatly enjoyed meeting you. What struck us most were the positive views of staff, governors, parents and pupils on how much the school is improving. I am also writing to let you know our findings. The school is satisfactory but it has many good features. The care and support the staff offer all of you are very good as is the range of activities and these contribute to helping many of you achieve good standards in your work. There are some findings that we have asked the school to consider for the future. These are:
- Consider changing the timing of some sessions to increase the amount of time spent learning.
- Improve the way the school checks on your progress and use this information to plan even more appropriate lessons that actively involve all pupils.
- Keep checking on how well the changes being made help improve the school and do this rigorously.
- Make sure you all have more opportunity to learn for yourselves. We know that you are rightly proud to attend Woodhouse Middle School and that you like the school. Your attendance is good and the school works hard to listen to your suggestions. I encourage you to support the school and play your part in continuing the current improvements. I would also like to wish you well in the future.