



# Bridgewater Middle School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 117541  
**Local Authority** HERTFORDSHIRE  
**Inspection number** 298901  
**Inspection dates** 12–13 December 2006  
**Reporting inspector** David Jones HMI

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Middle deemed secondary	<b>School address</b>	Bridle Way
<b>School category</b>	Community		Billet Lane, Billet Lane
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	9–13		Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire HP4 1ES
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01442 871231
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	381	<b>Fax number</b>	01442 873658
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Mr Colin Murgatroyd
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Rachel Swaffield
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	3 February 2000		

<b>Age group</b> 9–13	<b>Inspection dates</b> 12–13 December 2006	<b>Inspection number</b> 298901
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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

The school is part of a first, middle and upper school system, which serves the town of Berkhamsted and the nearby villages. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. Attainment on entry is above average. The pupils are predominately of White British heritage, with limited numbers of pupils from a minority ethnic background. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is low. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average and the number of pupils with a statement of special educational need is low. A significant number of pupils transfer out of Year 7 to join 11-18 secondary schools nearby.

## 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 a number of outstanding features that gives good value for money and has made good progress since the last inspection.

Self-evaluation is good and this report confirms the major judgements made by the school in its own analysis. Leadership and management are good. Senior managers' ambitions for the pupils and the school as a whole are impressive. Senior staff have a realistic view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have taken action to address those areas in need of development. The school's capacity to make the improvements required is good.

The curriculum is good with the breadth of provision expected for Key Stage 3 available to all year groups. However, setting arrangements for modern languages in Year 7 do not provide sufficient continuity of experience for some pupils. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching is robust and, as a result, the quality of teaching is good; however, the sharper focus on learning, provided in the relatively new learning and teaching policy needs to be developed across the school. Assessment information is used very effectively to inform management decisions, guide pupil progress and monitor the effectiveness of provision. However, the quality of some school based tests does not reflect the quality of classroom provision.

Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements.

The pupils are guided towards healthy lifestyles by effective physical education provision and high quality school meals that are very popular with pupils.

Standards are above average at age 11 and achievement in all year groups is good. The school, with the support of the local authority (LA), is working with other secondary schools in the town to assume responsibility for the national tests at Key Stage 3. A steady stream of pupils leave the middle school system in years 7 and 8 to gain a place in nearby 11-18 secondary schools. This is no reflection on the school; standards and achievement are good in both year groups.

The pupils' personal development is outstanding and attitudes to learning are excellent; attendance is significantly above average. Care, guidance and support are outstanding, helping to produce well-mannered articulate young people. As one parent commented, 'The school provides an environment in which the children can grow in a responsible, caring and independent way.'

### What the school should do to improve further

- Enhance the focus on the quality of learning developed in recent initiatives by reviewing schemes of work and the test materials used.
- Review the methodology employed in lesson observation to give primacy to the quality of learning.
- Ensure that support for lower achieving pupils does not impact on curriculum continuity.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Standards are above average and have been for three years. The provisional results of the 2006 Year 6 national tests in English, mathematics and science have regained the levels achieved previously, following a regression in 2005. The proportion of pupils attaining the higher level 5 results in the core subjects are also above the national figures. Data from non-statutory tests and confirmed by the LA, indicates that most pupils continue to make good progress in Years 7 and 8. Progress in both key stages is good.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. A high calibre middle school ethos has been created. Consequently, pupils learn in a highly supportive and inclusive environment where they feel safe and valued as individuals. One pupil commented that they are challenged, but not pressurised, to 'be the best they can be'. Attendance is well above average because pupils enjoy coming to school. Behaviour is outstanding, producing an exceptionally orderly and respectful community. During lessons pupils concentrate very well and work hard.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. They talk with enthusiasm about their sense of belonging to the school, and show a strong understanding of right and wrong. The programme for personal and social education is augmented effectively by the pupils' base teachers who see them daily. Many pupils volunteer readily for special tasks and older pupils support younger ones very effectively. As a result of the wide range of opportunities to take responsibility, pupils make a significant contribution to the life of the school and wider community. This includes strong international links with other schools; for example, with a school in Calcutta. Pupils are proud of the ways in which all are accepted and respected within their school community. They develop self-confidence and self-esteem through the excellent working relationships. Pupils of all ages feel free to express opinions, and their views are valued.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teaching and learning are good and the proportion of outstanding teaching is impressive. Teachers form good relationships with their students and give considerable individual help. In some outstanding lessons, pupils were totally involved in their learning and responded well to the pace and challenge provided. In these classes, well directed, incisive questions engage and motivate pupils. Where teaching is less demanding, the pupils' progress is only satisfactory. On these occasions the lesson

focus has been on what pupils have been asked to do rather than what they are expected to learn. A scrutiny of the pupils' books reveals that good teaching is the norm and challenge is a consistent feature of most lessons.

Assessment is often used well to guide learning, although the level of challenge in some school derived tests does not match the standard of work in the pupils' books. Marking is regular and pupils find comments helpful in working towards their targets.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The quality of the curriculum is good, fulfilling statutory requirements. In addition to traditional subjects, French is taught in Years 5 and 6, and dance has been added to physical education. Drama is taught in Years 7 and 8, and German is included in Year 8. However, a small group of pupils do not study a modern foreign language in Year 7; this omission is not acceptable.

Liaison with first and upper schools to create effective continuity is developing well. The governing body plans to extend the school day by 20 minutes to match the provision in 11–18 schools.

Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very good. Teaching assistants effectively support less able pupils, who are at certain times taught in small groups. Pupils identified as gifted or talented are often given higher challenges and extension work. The school organises a wide range of educational visits, and there are regular contributions from community and local authority organisations. Nearly half the pupils have instrumental lessons, and large numbers attend extra-curricular activities, particularly those in music and sport.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

The quality of care, guidance and support provided for all pupils is outstanding. Pupils are very appreciative of the way teachers are always there to help them when they experience difficulties. They know the school's philosophy is always 'Let's find a win-win solution.' There are effective procedures for the pupils' protection and for the monitoring of health and safety. Consequently, they feel safe and secure in school. Pupils understand the value of healthy eating, and healthy lifestyles are promoted very well. The canteen provides excellent food and imaginative menus; mealtimes are important, shared, social occasions. There are many opportunities for sport and exercise. Staff are committed to ensuring pupils have the opportunity to fulfil their potential, both personally as well as academically. This ensures individual needs are met, and effective systems enable any potential underachievement to be identified quickly. Consequently, systems for monitoring progress are very effective. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well. Pupils of all abilities are enabled to develop an important range of skills which prepare them well for their next stage in education.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The leadership and management of the school are good. Self-evaluation is good with careful analysis developed from robust evidence. Senior managers have a clear view of the improvements they are seeking. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching is robust; however, the current focus pays insufficient attention to the quality of learning.

The headteacher has chosen to support the moderation of assessment data from the feeder schools. As a result the school has a detailed and robust evidence base that allows it to demonstrate progression across both key stages. This is a good management tool, unusual in middle schools. The senior management team is effective and subject leadership is strong in a number of areas. Reports to parents are comprehensive and provide very good information.

The leadership and management of the provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are good. Senior managers direct improvement and promote the well-being of learners through outstanding care, guidance and support. The governance of the school is good. Despite some financial difficulties that are the result of pupil transfers out of Year 7, provision has been enhanced and resource management is good.

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## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	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

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2
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

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
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	1

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	1

<sup>1</sup> 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

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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**

13 December 2006

Dear Pupils

Bridgewater Middle School, Billet Lane Berkhamsted.

Thank you for contributing to this inspection. It was very good to meet many of you and see how well you respond to work that catches your attention and challenges you. The inspectors were very impressed with your behaviour and the mature way in which you conduct yourselves. Well done.

Yours is a good school with a number of outstanding features. The care, guidance and support you receive and the opportunities provided for your personal development are excellent. I have asked the school to develop further the emphasis on the quality of learning. This is about developing your thinking and investigative skills as far as possible and the headteacher will tell you how you can be involved in this process.

I look forward to hearing about your future successes.

David Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector.