



Arnold Middle School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109656
Local Authority BEDFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 299829
Inspection dates 5–6 October 2006
Reporting inspector Robert Drew

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary	School address	Hexton Road
School category	Community		Barton-le-clay, Barton-le-clay
Age range of pupils	9–13		Bedford, Bedfordshire MK45 4JZ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01582 616400
Number on roll (school)	578	Fax number	01582 616401
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Nick Day
		Headteacher	Mrs Ann Payne
Date of previous school inspection	26 January 2004		

Age group 9–13	Inspection dates 5–6 October 2006	Inspection number 299829
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school serves pupils from several villages north of Luton in Bedfordshire. It is larger than average for a middle school and numbers are rising. Pupils enter with above average attainment and, on balance, are economically and socially advantaged. The great majority are White British while very small numbers come from several minority ethnic backgrounds. A broadly average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and disabilities, while the school also makes specialist provision for pupils with autism from the county as a whole. The headteacher took up post just before the inspection of January 2004. A new chair of governors was appointed in the weeks preceding the current inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This school was judged to be underachieving in 2004 because progress was insufficient in English, mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT) and geography and because teaching and learning were unsatisfactory. Overall effectiveness is now satisfactory because of good improvement on most of these issues and sufficient upgrading elsewhere. The school demonstrates a good capacity to improve further. In each of the core subjects, standards are above average in national tests at the end of Year 6. In mathematics and science, this amounts to satisfactory progress in relation to the pupils' attainment on entry in Year 5. Gains are less in English, but recent improvements show that progress in this subject is now adequate. When pupils leave the school in Year 8, their performance in interim tests is significantly above national levels in mathematics and above average in English and science. The most recent results for Key Stage 2 show many more pupils gaining the higher levels in English than in previous years. This reflects improved strategies for challenging able pupils, including better use of assessment data. The school has been successful in promoting strong leadership and better teaching in mathematics, maintaining high standards in science and transforming geography from a weakness to a strength. It has also sustained existing success in art and design, design and technology, French, music and physical education. Pupil's personal development is good and the great majority behave well. Attendance is significantly above average and in the last two years, exclusions have been greatly reduced to modest levels. Pupils' awareness of how to act safely is high because of an effective personal and social education policy. The marked prominence of physical education in pupils' lives and a wise policy on lunch-time menus are contributing well to healthy life-styles for the great majority of pupils. The curriculum, formerly over-complex for many pupils, is now good. In some respects it is very good, but, outside English lessons, literacy is not reinforced as strongly as it should be. The school also offers a very wide range of extra-curricular activities. These include many opportunities to contribute to the school and wider community. The impact of these opportunities is evident in the large numbers of pupils who participate in charity work and community projects. Pupils have a sound grasp of the basic skills required for future economic well being and field work in the local shopping areas adds realism to their understanding. Care, guidance and support are good, with particularly effective help being given to pupils with autism and those having learning difficulties and disabilities. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, with areas of very good practice. Individual staff and some departments produce consistently good lessons. The strong pace and high levels of challenge in the best lessons seen by inspectors ensure very good progress and clear enjoyment by pupils. In English, teaching and learning are satisfactory, leading to progress which is less than in other core subjects, but is nevertheless broadly adequate. The tendency towards too much direction by teachers is more common in satisfactory lessons, where pupils have less scope to participate actively and reveal the depth or limitations of their knowledge. Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and key staff have dealt well with most of the weaknesses identified by the 2004 inspection and have made adequate gains in English provision. They show good capacity for raising standards further. Subject

leadership is generally much better and senior leaders monitor and support colleagues thoroughly, with a good impact in most cases. They have been particularly successful in encouraging relatively inexperienced staff to rise to the challenge of running a department well. While leadership and management in English are now satisfactory, the drive and rigour that promote consistently high challenge in other subjects is lacking. It is clear that governors are acquiring much better information about their school than formerly and their links with specific aspects of its work are good. They fulfil their strategic role satisfactorily and they support senior leaders well.

What the school should do to improve further

- Take decisive action to raise the quality of leadership and management in English to match that of the other core subjects and ensure good progress for pupils. - Ensure that all subjects contribute well to the development of pupils' literacy skills. - Raise the school's teaching quality so that it is consistently good, by focussing on pupils' progress during monitoring and by extending across the school the very good practice seen in several subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils reach above average standards by Year 6 and by the time they leave the school in Year 8. As standards are above average when they enter the school in Year 5, this indicates satisfactory achievement. However, pupils make better progress in mathematics and science and some of the foundation subjects, such as geography, than they do in English. This is because of the inconsistent teaching in English, where the best is vibrant and motivates pupils with practical activities and the least effective is pedestrian. Pupils refer to not liking lessons that make excessive use of text books and exercises. The school provides good support for pupils who need extra help with their learning so that they achieve well. Although it has identified the most able pupils, support arrangements for them are not as well developed.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of pupils is good. Attendance is above average. Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school's policy for behaviour is consistently applied by all the adults and pupils behave well as a result. The school council is playing an increasing part in school life. Pupils say they enjoy life in school and this is supported by parents and carers, who say it is a happy and safe environment. Pupils are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles, as seen in the menus provided for school meals. Their contribution to the community is good. For example, they undertake charity work and contribute to the local fun run. Pupils are developing the satisfactory literacy, numeracy and ICT skills needed for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, and are good in science, physical education, music and geography. Where teaching and learning are most effective, teachers plan their lessons carefully to ensure that pupils, through the whole range of ability, make good progress. In these lessons, pupils and teachers are actively engaged in working together, which ensures that lessons progress at a brisk pace. Where teaching and learning are less effective, the level of challenge is not high enough. In some lessons, pupils are not encouraged to think and work independently. This happens when there is too much reliance on text books and worksheets. In English, there is a higher level of satisfactory teaching and a lower level of good or better teaching and pupils have not made the good progress evident elsewhere.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good range of activities to help pupils to learn, both within lessons and in after-school clubs. All the required subjects are taught and learning is vitalised through a series of visits to places of interest, both in the United Kingdom and overseas, which pupils say they thoroughly enjoy. Visitors to school add interest to lessons, for example, when learning African drumming skills. The school's Values Education programme offers opportunities to reflect on values regarded as important. The accelerated Key Stage 3 curriculum adds interest and motivates pupils in addition to preparing them well for the next stage of their education. The school does not make enough use of ICT to support learning across the subjects, but has recently improved resources to enable this to happen. There are too few opportunities to develop their literacy skills through other subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. All the necessary checks to ensure pupils' safety, protection and welfare are in place. There are very good procedures for pastoral support, including older pupils acting as 'Active Listeners', and an anti-bullying council. As a result, pupils say they feel safe and free from bullying or intimidation. Those who need extra help with their learning are identified early and given good support so that they achieve well. Pupils know how well they are doing because teachers regularly set them targets and explain what they need to do to reach them. Those in the unit for autistic children are very well supported and make very good progress as a consequence. Although pupils have clear targets to help them to achieve better, the guidance they get in English has not been as secure as that in other subjects so that improvements have not matched those in mathematics and science.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is led and managed well. The Headteacher, governors and senior staff set a clear agenda for improvement and have gained good support from colleagues, parents and pupils. They have enjoyed success in raising standards and the quality of provision in several areas, especially in mathematics, while established strengths, for instance in physical education, have been maintained or enhanced. This success results from good new appointments, effective middle management training and sound monitoring and support of teaching. While much improved, monitoring of teaching does not focus sufficiently on evidence of pupils' progress in lessons. Improvement in English has been slower but enough to ensure that leadership of the subject and teaching quality help pupils to make sufficient progress. Gains have been greatest where the school has placed its focus, for instance, in driving up the performance of higher-attaining pupils. The work of leadership and management since the last inspection indicates that the school has good capacity to make the further improvement. At every level - the governing body, senior leaders and middle leadership - those in post are collectively stronger than in 2004 and have demonstrated a growing ability to change and upgrade provision. With satisfactory overall achievement by pupils, value for money is also satisfactory.

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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?	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	2

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	2

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?	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	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

7 October 2006 Dear Pupils Arnold Middle School, Hexton Road, Barton-le-Clay, Bedfordshire. MK45 4JZ Thank you for the pleasant way you received us when we visited your school this week. We enjoyed our stay because the school is doing many things well: - In several subjects you are making good progress and reaching standards which are much higher than we see nationally. - Your behaviour is good and your attitudes positive. We were impressed by how many of you join in activities at lunch time or after school. - The school gives you good support and looks after you well. - The headteacher and senior staff lead the school well and it has improved a lot since the last inspection two years ago. For the school to become even better it needs to make sure that: - The way the English department is run continues to improve so that leadership becomes as good as that in mathematics and science. - Other subjects, besides English, help you improve your literacy skills. - Teaching overall improves so it is as lively, active and demanding as it is already in many lessons. Yours sincerely Robert Drew Lead inspector