

Etonbury Middle School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 109644 |
| Local Authority | Bedfordshire |
| Inspection number | 310052 |
| Inspection dates | 17–18 June 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins HMI |

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

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| Type of school | Middle deemed secondary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 9–13 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 470 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr Roy Arden |
| Headteacher | Mr Ian Mitchell |
| Date of previous school inspection | 26 April 2004 |
| School address | Stotfold Road Arlesey Bedfordshire SG15 6XS |
| Telephone number | 01462730391 |
| Fax number | 01462730626 |

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|--------------------------|-----------------|
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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 majority of pupils are White British with pupils of minority ethnic heritage making up around 6% of the school population. A much lower than average proportion of pupils is eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. Most of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties. The school renewed its Sportsmark status in November 2007. Several key teaching staff left the school in 2005/06, which left a significant gap in the school's permanent workforce in 2006/07.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Etonbury Middle School provides a satisfactory quality of education for its pupils. The significant staffing issues faced by the school throughout 2005/06, which adversely affected pupils' achievement in 2006 and 2007, have been mostly resolved and there is now a gradual upward trend in pupils' performance. Pupils enter the school with higher than average levels of attainment and make satisfactory progress through Years 5 to 8. This year, pupils have made better progress in mathematics, due to an increased range of initiatives and improvements in teaching the subject.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. They develop good levels of self-confidence and cultural awareness through personal, health and citizenship education and a wide variety of curriculum enrichment activities. The development of skills to support pupils' future well-being is good. They have very good attitudes to health and fitness, which are promoted exceptionally well by the school. Pupils have appropriate opportunities to take on positions of responsibility. Most enjoy their education, demonstrated by their very good attendance. Their conduct around the school is generally good, although behaviour by small groups of pupils in a minority of lessons disrupts learning and teachers do not always manage this well. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Not all lessons sufficiently challenge and inspire pupils to do their best and sometimes pupils take a passive role in their learning. The curriculum overall is satisfactory and developing. Pupils receive satisfactory care, guidance and support. Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements. Whilst many parents feel their children are generally doing well at school, a significant proportion who responded to the inspection questionnaire felt strongly that communication between the school and parents was unproductive. Many felt the school did not listen to or respond effectively to their views and concerns. Several parents raised concerns about the negative behaviour of pupils in some lessons.

The school's leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has successfully fostered very good partnerships with the local upper school and lower feeder schools to further support pupils' transition arrangements. The school applies a range of systems to monitor and improve the quality of its provision but these vary in rigour. For example, the tracking of pupils' progress is thorough but systems to check on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are not sufficiently robust. This results in inconsistent practice by teachers. The process of checking the school's effectiveness is well established, extending to all departments. The school's self-evaluation report, although accurate in most of its judgements about provision, does not identify all key areas for improvement clearly enough. The self-evaluation of teaching and learning does not identify clearly the inconsistencies in teachers' planning for different ability groups. Consequently, areas for improvement are not targeted effectively. Progress to improve the quality of provision since the last inspection has met with mixed success. Nevertheless, the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure all lessons are planned effectively to engage and challenge pupils of all abilities.
- Check the quality of provision more rigorously to ensure greater consistency of practice across the school.
- Improve the effectiveness of communication with parents so that they know that their views are considered in the planning for school improvement.

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

Pupils make satisfactory progress during Years 5 and 6. By Year 6 standards are close to the national average in mathematics and marginally above average in English and science. This is an improvement on standards attained in the previous two years when pupils' achievement was adversely affected by staffing difficulties, particularly in mathematics and science. Pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 7 and 8. By Year 8 standards are above national expectations. Progress in mathematics has been particularly good and has enabled some pupils to attain standards that are considerably higher than those normally expected of Year 8 pupils. By the time that they leave the school, there is no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls. Pupils who need extra help with their learning make good progress in relation to the difficulties that they face.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being are good. The majority of pupils enjoy coming to school and feel safe. Attendance is consistently above the national average and good systems are in place to encourage this. Behaviour overall is satisfactory. Most pupils are friendly and polite. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. There is evidence that pupils have opportunities to learn about a wide range of cultural traditions and practices other than their own. Most display consideration towards each other and have a clear sense of right and wrong. Pupils say that bullying is uncommon and they are confident that there is a number of adults from whom they can seek help if needed. They know the importance of healthy eating and are keen to explore further healthy options through the strong sports programme and the school council. The school council is established and has begun to contribute to decision making. Pupils work enthusiastically to improve their fitness in games lessons and many take up the extra opportunities offered to develop personal well-being in after school activities. They have appropriate opportunities to take on positions of responsibility, although there are few chances for them to contribute to the wider community.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory because the quality of teaching and learning is inconsistent across the school. In the most effective lessons, teachers know their subjects well, teaching is lively and there are constructive relationships between pupils and staff that motivates pupils and makes learning fun. However, in too many lessons, planning is not thorough enough and activities fail to engage all pupils or ensure they are challenged sufficiently. For example, in some lessons there is too much time spent 'copying out' and pupils often work at the same activity regardless of their abilities. In these lessons, they often get restless and their concentration lapses because activities do not fully meet their learning needs and interests. A

range of strategies and staff development has led to improvements in the teaching of mathematics and subsequently standards in this subject are rising.

Pupils' punctuality to lessons is good. Behaviour is good in some lessons with pupils actively participating in their learning and enjoying activities. However, in a few lessons, particularly in Years 7 and 8, the management of pupils' behaviour is ineffective. This can lead to a noisy environment that distracts the teacher and disrupts learning. Most teachers mark pupils' work frequently. The school is seeking to involve learners more in assessing and evaluating their own learning, although this is in the early stages of development and is not yet fully embedded across the school. There is inconsistent setting and marking of homework across subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory and developing curriculum. It meets National Curriculum requirements and promotes good personal development and sound academic achievement for the majority of pupils. The curriculum fosters healthy lifestyles effectively. Staff modify the curriculum using ability groups, mixed ability classes and support groups satisfactorily, to cater for pupils with differing needs and abilities. Recent developments in provision for pupils who may be gifted or talented are beginning to have a positive impact. There is a satisfactory emphasis on developing the skills of literacy and numeracy, and facilities for information and communication technology in the curriculum have strengthened since the last inspection. The school enriches the basic curriculum with a good range of educational visits, visitors and special events, which add to the quality of pupils' learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Effective and well-planned links with primary schools ensure that pupils settle quickly into their new school. Well-established transition activities allow them to move smoothly onto their next stage of education. Procedures for ensuring the welfare of vulnerable children and safeguarding all pupils are satisfactory. Pastoral care and guidance are effective in securing good levels of personal development for most pupils. Good links with external agencies help make sure that pupils who have specific needs are well supported and this is reflected in their achievements. The quality of academic guidance is satisfactory and marking is usually helpful and linked to improvement strategies. The setting of individual targets for pupils is developing well and most are aware of their targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher, along with the senior managers and governors, sets a clear strategic direction for the school. There are strong and developing links with local feeder schools. Strategies and initiatives to improve pupils' achievement in science and mathematics, a key focus for the school, are beginning to prove successful.

There is progressively more robust tracking of pupils' progress across the school and the use of data to inform target setting is improving. Subject leaders are increasingly held accountable for pupils' performance and use data more effectively to inform their reviews. However, the rigour of analysis and monitoring in other areas of the school's provision is uneven and

inconsistent practice remains, for example in the setting of homework and the quality of teaching and assessment. There is extensive monitoring of teaching and learning by the school, including recently introduced peer observations within some subjects. There is a limited amount of joint checking of standards to ensure consistency. Observations of teaching are undertaken but these are not formally evaluated to determine the overriding strengths and areas for improvement. As a result, the school's evaluation of teaching and learning does not identify clearly the inconsistencies in the quality of lesson planning for pupils with differing abilities.

Governors are well informed of the school's academic progress and are highly supportive of the school's work. Links with aspects of the school's curriculum are developing. There is scope to improve communication with parents. Accommodation and resources are adequate overall and there is a rolling programme of refurbishment planned to update and improve the building and internal decor. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

| | |
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| 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? | 2 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 3 |

Achievement and standards

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|--|---|
| 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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 3 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 3 |
| The attendance of learners | 2 |
| The behaviour of learners | 3 |
| 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 | 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? | 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

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| 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

19 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Etonbury Middle School, Arlesey, SG15 6XS

Thank you for welcoming us during our recent inspection of your school. We appreciated the time we were able to spend talking to you about your work and general life at the school. This letter aims to summarise for you our main findings.

Your school provides you with a satisfactory education that is gradually improving. Over the last two years some of you have had a lot of different teachers, particularly in maths and science. This sometimes meant your lessons didn't build upon your knowledge of the subjects as well as they could. Your headteacher has appointed some permanent teachers in science and mathematics and your standards of work and the progress you make in these subjects is improving. We agree with you that some lessons are better than others and that teaching is good in some subjects. Overall, the progress you make in lessons varies, as does the quality of the written feedback and homework you receive. Your attendance is very good and you generally conduct yourselves well around school and are polite and friendly to others. Your parents feel that communication between them and the school could be much better. We agree. We also agree with parents views that the behaviour of a few pupils in a small number of lessons is not always good.

Our inspection identified three areas to help the school improve further.

- Ensure all lessons are planned to be interesting, involve you more and challenge you to do your best.
- Make sure that all teachers are working to a consistently high standard, for example in planning your lessons, marking your work and setting your homework.
- Improve the way the school communicates with your parents so that they know that their views and concerns are taken seriously.

You have an important part to play in helping your school to continue to improve by behaving well in all lessons, working as hard as you can and by sharing your views through your school council. We wish you every success in the future.

Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins HMI