

Holmemead Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109646
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	310054
Inspection dates	12–13 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Elaine Taylor HMI

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	510
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Gary Waghorn
Headteacher	Mrs Caroline McGuckian
Date of previous school inspection	8 March 2004
School address	Mead End Biggleswade Bedfordshire SG18 8JU
Telephone number	01767 318123
Fax number	01767 318123

Age group	9–13
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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 situated on the outskirts of Biggleswade. It is larger than average and oversubscribed. Fewer pupils than average are eligible for free school meals and fewer are from minority ethnic groups than found nationally. The proportion with English as an additional language is low but rising. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is slightly above average. The school has achieved the National Healthy Schools, Artsmark silver and Investors in People awards. Pupils from a nearby school for children with language and communication difficulties join many activities in the school. The school is currently being led by the acting headteacher. A new headteacher has been appointed and will take up the post in September.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory and improving school with some good features. Its strengths lie in the way the school enables pupils to make good progress in their personal development and the good quality of care it provides. Parents are very positive about the school. Their views are reflected in these words from one of the questionnaires: 'We congratulate Holmemead on the quality of education provided, giving our children a firm base on which to build their futures'.

Achievement is satisfactory. When pupils enter the school midway through Key Stage 2, their standards are below average. They make slow progress to the end of the key stage, but then progress improves in Years 7 and 8 so that, by the end of their time in the school, they have made satisfactory progress overall and standards are in line with expectations. This satisfactory achievement is the outcome of teaching and learning that are sound overall, but weaker for the younger pupils. Some teaching is good and, when this is the case, pupils are enthusiastic learners. However, some is inadequate and, when this is the case, pupils make unsatisfactory progress. In many of these lessons, the unsatisfactory behaviour of some pupils disrupts the learning of others and is not effectively managed by the teacher. This disruption occurs mainly when pupils lose interest because the work provided is either too hard or too easy.

The curriculum meets statutory requirements and has undergone significant review in the last year, particularly with a view to forging better links between subjects in Years 5 and 6. There is a good range of well-supported after-school clubs, especially in sport and the arts. These contribute well to pupils' personal development and the pride they have in their school. Pupils receive good quality pastoral care from committed staff, who provide effective support for their individual needs. Pupils feel safe in school because they trust the adults and are confident of their prompt help when problems occur. Any instances of bullying and racism are dealt with well. Arrangements to support pupils transferring into the school are a strength. These help pupils to settle quickly and are recognised by parents as beneficial. For example, one parent wrote: 'My son had a tough start from nursery onwards, but Holmemead has made him a great, confident young boy.'

Pupils have a clear understanding of how to adopt a healthy lifestyle through their involvement in the National Healthy Schools programme, and they are keen to participate in sports. Pupils are proud that their suggestions, through the work of the school council, have brought about improvements in the school. They are developing self-confidence and a range of additional skills, such as those seen in information and communication technology (ICT) and design technology (DT), to provide them with a good preparation for secondary education and the world of work beyond.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The acting headteacher and the deputy headteacher have steered the school through a period of considerable uncertainty and created a positive atmosphere. There are better systems for monitoring its work. These systems are still developing, but self-evaluation is now accurate. The middle leaders in the school are taking an increasing amount of responsibility for monitoring the work of their teams and appropriate training is being provided to support those with less experience. Improvements made since the last inspection, especially in tackling underperformance in mathematics, indicate that the school has good capacity to continue to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all teachers provide activities in lessons that create suitable challenge for all pupils.
- Support middle leaders in developing the skills necessary to monitor and evaluate the work of their teams.
- Ensure that all staff use a consistent approach in lessons to managing behaviour that is disruptive to learning.

A small proportion of 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

In national tests at the end of Year 6 in 2007, standards were broadly average in English and science but below average in mathematics. Successful strategies developed to raise achievement in science are now being used in other subject areas and particularly in mathematics, where attainment has been particularly weak. School information indicates that these measures are already having a positive impact, with pupils on track to meet the targets set for them. There is no significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls. Pupils who need additional help with their work make satisfactory and improving progress. Those pupils identified as gifted or talented benefit from more opportunities to extend their learning outside lessons, but are not always challenged enough in lessons. Increasingly thorough analysis of the information collected by the school on the progress pupils are making enables interventions to be focussed where they are needed most. Standards of work in personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE), physical education, art and DT are above national expectations. They are broadly average in the rest, including ICT.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development is good. The school is a calm environment where pupils feel safe. Relationships are good and teachers and support assistants help pupils to grow in self-esteem and confidence. Pupils speak enthusiastically about the school and say they feel valued as members of the community. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Spiritual development is strongly supported by daily acts of collective worship and trips abroad help pupils to develop their appreciation of other cultures. Pupils behave well when moving around the school; however, overall behaviour is only satisfactory because of the unruly behaviour in some classes. Most pupils enjoy school, as shown by their above average attendance. Pupils make a good contribution to the smooth running of the school by, for instance, acting as assistants in the ICT department and through the 'Big Buddy' programme. They help with the appointment process for new staff and work hard to help those less fortunate through fund-raising in the local community.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory and this is reflected in the sound progress made by pupils across the school. However, whilst some teaching is good, there is also some that is inadequate. In the best lessons, good planning ensures that varied activities engage and interest pupils. Teachers' marking celebrates progress made and signposts future improvement. Teaching assistants support learners who require additional help well and higher attaining learners have suitable activities provided for them. Pupils say they enjoy such lessons and relationships and behaviour are positive, reflecting the good personal development. In too many lessons however, expectations are lower, teacher talk dominates and planning is not detailed enough. Work is not matched well to the different needs of individuals, with a lack of challenge for the more able. Questioning does not stretch pupils' understanding and hence learning is less secure. In these lessons, pupils lose interest and their behaviour deteriorates.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum in Years 5 and 6 increasingly links subjects together and places an increasing emphasis upon the key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT. Classes are taught predominately by the form tutor, which aids transition from partner lower schools, with specialist input increasing as they move up the school. The classroom use of ICT has improved since the last inspection. There is not enough variety of content, resources or activities in much of the curriculum, especially at Key Stage 2. However, the school is beginning to improve this situation. This will enable the needs of all pupils, especially the higher attaining learners, to be met more fully. Education for health and safety is satisfactory and the school makes good use of visits and visitors to enrich the curriculum. In Key Stage 3, the programme for PSHCE covers aspects of careers education. Working in collaboration with the Connexions service and through the school library, pupils are helped to think about their future career options.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school follows good and well-monitored procedures to ensure pupils' safety. Teachers and outside agencies work well together to support pupils with additional learning needs. Family learning events and an improved reporting system help parents to support their children. Good and rigorous procedures for child protection, risk assessments and for medical and emergency aid are understood by all staff. Pupils' are well supported and guided academically because arrangements for tracking and assessing progress are good. A new system for setting and reviewing targets is already providing pupils with a clearer understanding of how to improve their work. Analysis of attendance and behaviour is thorough and a system to promote good attitudes through a merit system has been introduced.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school uses a range of techniques to monitor its work, which include regular lesson observations by senior leaders, scrutiny of pupils' work and pupil shadowing. Subject leaders contribute satisfactorily to this process by producing their own departmental self-evaluation reports. There is some variability in the quality of middle leadership, but appropriate training and mentoring for these staff is in place. Staffing difficulties have limited their opportunities to observe teachers in their areas, but clear plans are in place to address this next year. The governors support and challenge the school well and bring a wealth of useful expertise to their work. They give of their time generously to assist in a range of ways and link with subject departments to learn about their work at first hand. Good financial management means the school is well placed to continue with its planned improvements. Hence, the new headteacher will have a sound base from which to build when he takes up his post in September.

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

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
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	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	3
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?	3
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.

Annex A

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 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	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

14 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Holmemead Middle School, Biggleswade SG18 8JU

What a pleasure it was to meet you all and see how happy you are at school. I want to thank you for your help in the inspection, for welcoming us into your school and talking to us so sensibly about the things you like and what you would like to see improved.

You told us how proud you are of the many improvements that have come about through the work of the school council. We were impressed by the respect everyone shows for each other and how much you enjoy being part of everything Holmemead has to offer you. We could see why you attend so regularly.

We found that the school is satisfactory but with several good features. You make satisfactory progress in your learning, helped by your good attitudes, and we were pleased to see that the school now monitors your progress to make sure you all succeed. You told us how safe you feel at school, knowing there are many adults you can turn to for help. There is a range of sporting and other activities for you to take part in and opportunities to travel abroad. Your teachers often make lessons interesting and you learn well. Sometimes we saw that the work they set was either too hard or too easy and then some of you lost interest and started to misbehave.

We believe that the leaders of your school will be able to improve things even more in the future, especially when your new headteacher arrives in September.

We have asked the school to do several things.

- Make sure your teachers set work for you, which is at the right level of difficulty.
- Stop any pupils making it difficult for others to learn. You can all help by behaving well in lessons at all times.
- Help all the teachers who are in charge of subjects to check that the work of the teachers in their teams is the best it can be.

We all wish you every success in the future

Elaine Taylor HMI