

# Leighton Middle School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	109689
<b>Local Authority</b>	Bedfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	310064
<b>Inspection dates</b>	9–10 July 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	David Rzeznik HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Middle deemed secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	9–13
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	450
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Dr Fiona Dry
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Anne Thompson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	19 January 2004
<b>School address</b>	Church Square Leighton Buzzard Bedfordshire LU7 1EX
<b>Telephone number</b>	01525 374907
<b>Fax number</b>	01525 854370

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<b>Age group</b>	9–13
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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

Leighton Middle School admits pupils from a high number of lower schools. Over half of the pupils come from outside of the school's catchment area. Most students are of White British origin. A very small proportion are from minority ethnic backgrounds or are Travellers of Irish heritage. The numbers eligible for free school meals is below average. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need is average. The proportion of pupils with special needs varies from year-to-year. Attainment on entry into Year 5 is generally above average. The school has gained a Sports Mark.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

The school's leadership judges that the school is good overall. Inspectors agree that there are some good features, but overall the school is satisfactory. The two weaknesses identified at the last inspection have been effectively tackled. Opportunities for talk, discussion and drama regularly occur in English lessons and in other subjects too. The staff development programme has ensured teachers have the necessary expertise and confidence to teach citizenship and personal, social and health education effectively. The school is well placed to improve further.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher, senior staff and governors set a clear educational direction. Some of the self-evaluation procedures used are not yet robust enough. Whilst regular monitoring has pinpointed individual teacher's strengths and weaknesses, leaders have not been systematic enough in improving satisfactory teaching to make it more consistent and improve its quality. Pupils' attainment is tracked and their progress towards whole-school targets is evaluated. However, the tracking and analysis of pupils' progress is not yet rigorous enough to determine the progress made by different groups of pupils over time, to further inform intervention. The school lacks a secure baseline of attainment on entry into Year 5 from which to judge progress thereafter. Parents hold the school in high regard and are pleased with the education provided.

The curriculum is satisfactory with some good elements. There are good opportunities for pupils to take part in sport, music and the arts. A strength is the range of extra-curricular activities, and the high proportion of pupils who engage in them. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Good teaching exists but there are still a number of satisfactory lessons. Inconsistent provision leads to significant variation in pupils' progress in subjects and phases. Learning is variable because teachers are not always using assessment or tracking information effectively enough to ensure work is closely matched to pupils' capabilities. The school rightly judges standards as above average at the end of Years 6 and 8. Inspectors' agree with the school's judgement that pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall. Pupils' progress in Year 7 is good in mathematics and science but they could do better in writing. There are pockets of underachievement in reading, writing and mathematics in some year groups alongside some good progress in these subjects.

Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning, behave well and enjoy being at school. Pupils' personal development including their spiritual, moral, social development and cultural development is good overall. Pupils' understanding of their own culture is good but their awareness of other beliefs and lifestyles different from their own is satisfactory. The school recognises they could do more to develop pupils' understanding of Traveller culture. Attendance is above average and the school is robust in chasing up non-attendance. However, a few Travellers do not attend regularly enough.

The quality of care, guidance and support is satisfactory overall. Pastoral support and guidance is good and has a positive impact on pupils' personal development. Academic guidance and support is satisfactory.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate pupils' progress in reading and writing in Years 5, 6 and 8, in writing in Year 7 and in mathematics particularly in Years 5 and 8.

- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning by better use of assessment information to ensure work is consistently challenging and by following up weaknesses in provision more rigorously so teaching quality improves from satisfactory to good.
- Improve the tracking and analysis of pupils' achievement to determine the progress made by different groups of pupils over time and ensure judgements made about attainment on entry to Year 5 are secure.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged to be 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 enter Year 5 with attainment that is generally above average and leave Year 8 with above average standards. Their achievement is satisfactory but it is uneven in subjects and phases. For example, this academic year around two fifths of Year 5 pupils have made good or better progress in mathematics, whereas over the same period nearly all pupils in Year 7 have done so. Over the same period over three fifths of Year 7 pupils have made good progress in writing but in Year 8 the proportion making similar gains in learning is less at two fifths. There are years where pupils are not making the expected progress or are falling behind, particularly in English and mathematics. For example, in Year 6 around a third of pupils are marking time in reading and in Year 8 the proportion is around a quarter. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make at least satisfactory progress. Data shows that individual Travellers have made good gains in learning in some subjects and the expected progress in others.

In 2007 standards at the end of Year 6 were above average overall. Attainment in English was above average, slightly above in mathematics and average in science. In mathematics and science a higher proportion of pupils reached the higher level 5 than was seen nationally. The percentage attaining or surpassing each level in science was close to the national picture. There has been a slight rise in Year 6 standards since 2006. Current data shows that standards have risen slightly this academic year. Relevant and realistic whole school targets were set for Year 6 in 2008. Data shows pupils are on course to meet them.

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

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils have good relationships with adults and with each other and behave well. They are open, friendly and welcoming to visitors. Pupils enjoy school and are keen to learn and give of their best. They feel safe and secure and say any misbehaviour is dealt with swiftly and effectively. Pupils take full advantage of the opportunities to take responsibility in the classroom, around the school and in the wider community. For example, participating in a range of concerts and the Young Sports and Dance leader initiative. The school council take their responsibilities seriously and have made a difference. They have recommended improvements to the school uniform, and have developed, in consultation with a local supermarket, a travel plan to promote safer walking and safer parking locally, with good results. Pupils adopt safe practices and know the importance of wearing protective equipment in some practical lessons. On the first day of the inspection, the weather was terrible and pupils moved around the site at break and lunchtime in a very safe way. Pupils adopt healthy lifestyles as seen in their high uptake of sporting

activities. Good links with the local community enhance provision and contribute well to the development of the personal qualities that will eventually transfer to working life.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. There are a number of strengths. Lesson plans are detailed and learning objectives are identified and regularly shared with pupils so they know what they must learn. Teachers and their assistants form very good relations with pupils and this means learning is carried out in a very positive climate. Teachers' subject knowledge is secure and this ensures concepts are taught in a suitable way. Computer whiteboards are used effectively to introduce topics in interesting ways. This motivates and engages pupils and increases their enjoyment. A good feature is getting pupils to talk through their ideas with a partner to clarify and extend their thinking. Such activity helps to develop further pupils' linguistic skills. In the satisfactory lessons there are some common weaknesses. The ability range in classes is wide and teachers do not always plan work that is closely matched to pupils' needs and abilities. When teachers set challenging work for all groups, pupils are stretched and make good gains in their learning. At times teachers talk too much and this results in pupils being passive learners, with limited opportunity to participate, engage or extend their learning through individual or group work. Opportunities to assess pupils' understanding through focussed questioning are often missed at the start of lessons and in reviews at the end. Marking is regular, but is not always precise enough in telling pupils exactly what or how to improve in order to help them reach their targets.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 3**

The curriculum is suitably broad and balanced and enables pupils to make satisfactory progress academically and good progress in their personal development. The curriculum is moving with the times. For example, the decision to compress the Key Stage 3 (Years 7 to 9) core curriculum into two rather than three years is paying dividends. The early signs are that expectations are higher, the pace of learning has quickened and pupils' progress has accelerated, particularly in mathematics and science. Opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy skills in all subjects are evident in planning. However, such links are mainly general at present, and it is not always made sufficiently explicit how basic skills will be assessed in subjects other than English and mathematics. There is a suitable focus on work related learning in Years 7 and 8. Enterprise and careers education are being successfully promoted through personal, social and health education work.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 3**

Pupils are well cared for and parents appreciate the close attention that is given to their child's welfare. Staff are deployed effectively to ensure pupils are kept safe and secure. Good systems exist for supporting vulnerable pupils at a personal and social level, particularly those from Traveller backgrounds. Effective provision is also made for those with emotional or behavioural difficulties. Child protection procedures are robust and safeguarding arrangements meet government requirements. Induction procedures for pupils entering Year 5, and those who

arrive during the academic year, are effective. Parents of newcomers say their children have settled well and are happy. Academic support is satisfactory. It is not fully effective in ensuring pupils make consistently good progress in English and mathematics in all years. Pupils are given, or develop their own targets, but these are not always challenging enough. Pupils know what national curriculum level they are working at but many are unclear what they must do to reach the next level.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

Regular monitoring of provision has led to the headteacher and senior staff having a clear understanding of the school's main strengths and weaknesses. Measures to improve the curriculum, particularly in Years 7 and 8, are helping to raise standards. Initiatives to improve provision in Year 5 have not yet been fully effective in quickly eliminating pockets of underachievement, particularly in English and mathematics. English, mathematics and science leaders have action plans that provide a clear focus for improvement. Teaching and learning are suitably evaluated but the follow up of weaknesses is not yet systematic enough. Leaders are tracking pupils' attainment and progress towards whole school targets and staff are being held to account for the standards achieved. However, the tracking and analysis of pupils' progress over time and evaluating attainment on entry to Year 5 is not yet robust enough to pinpoint underachievement quickly and eradicate it. The management of transition arrangements into Year 5 and Year 9 are good. Governors ensure statutory requirements are met and resources are managed effectively.

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## 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	3

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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 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	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?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

<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.

## Annex A

**Leadership and management**

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

11 July 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Leighton Middle School, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire, LU7 1EX

As you know, inspectors visited your school recently, I am writing this letter to tell you what we found out. Thank you for talking to us and for making us feel so welcome. Inspectors' judge that your school is satisfactory with some good features.

We liked these things about your school:

- You have very positive attitudes to learning, behave well and enjoy coming to school.
- Your attendance is good overall although a few of you could come to school more regularly.
- You are well cared for and you feel safe and secure. Pastoral support is good and this is having a positive impact on your personal development.
- Curriculum improvements, especially in Years 7 and 8 are helping to accelerate your progress, particularly in science and in mathematics in Year 7.
- The arrangements for transferring pupils into Year 5 are good. The induction day for those transferring from lower schools went very well. The Year 4 pupils clearly enjoyed being in school and the very bad weather did not dampen their enthusiasm for learning.
- The school council are making a difference. It was good to see the travel plan was improving safety.
- You are provided with good opportunities to take part in sport, music and the arts. The proportion who engage in extra-curricular activities is high.
- The headteacher, senior staff and governors are setting a clear educational direction for the school.

The school must do three things to improve further:

- Accelerate your progress in reading, and writing in Years 5, 6 and 8, in writing in Year 7 and in mathematics, particularly in Years 5 and 8.
- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning by better use of assessment information to ensure work is matched closely to your capabilities, and ensure leaders follow up any weaknesses in teaching quality quickly and effectively.
- Improve the tracking and analysis of your progress and ensure that your attainment on entry to school is clearly established.

Best Wishes

David Rzeznik

Her Majesty's Inspector