

Alvechurch CofE Middle School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 116983 |
| Local Authority | Worcestershire |
| Inspection number | 312469 |
| Inspection dates | 9–10 July 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Brian Cartwright 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 | Voluntary controlled |
| Age range of pupils | 9–13 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 358 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Bryan Maybee |
| Headteacher | Karen Jordan |
| Date of previous school inspection | 13 January 2004 |
| School address | Redditch Road Alvechurch Birmingham B48 7TA |
| Telephone number | 0121 4451033 |
| Fax number | 0121 4477792 |

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|--------------------------|----------------|
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Introduction

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors carried out the inspection.

Description of the school

This small middle school has recently moved to new buildings and grounds, which it shares with one of its feeder first schools. Socio-economic information shows that most pupils come from favourable backgrounds, and very few pupils are eligible for free school meals. Almost all pupils are from a White British heritage. There are an above average proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need. About one in every five pupils register with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, this is slightly above the national proportion. Almost all pupils remain at the school throughout their middle school education.

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: 2

Alvechurch CofE Middle School is a good school, with several outstanding features. This is because the school leaders have created a culture that permits all staff to develop innovative and creative approaches to the curriculum. The richness of this curriculum includes timetabled weeks exploring the arts, skills-based sessions throughout the year to teach thinking skills, and an extensive and well-used range of clubs, trips and visits. As a result, pupils thoroughly enjoy school life and throw themselves into its diverse range of opportunities with enthusiasm. They achieve well, making better than expected progress between entering the school in Year 5 and leaving in Year 8. Standards at Year 8 are above average, with some pupils gaining well above average results. Science is a particular strength in Key Stage 2.

Thanks to good leadership and strong management, the move to the new site has gone smoothly. Teaching throughout the school is good, with excellent relationships between staff and pupils, and excellent teamwork between staff. Teachers have good access to information on the ability of each pupil, although some lesson plans do not explicitly use this in planning tasks that match to their ability. Most, but not all, day-to-day marking is extremely thorough, peppered with encouraging comments, and containing good advice on what pupils should do next. However, pupils are not consistently responding to that advice when they could, for example by repeating a problem, correcting a diagram, or redrawing a graph. This in part, is because subject coordinators have little time to maintain regular checks on the consistency of lesson planning and marking.

Pupils say they feel safe from bullying, and confirm that the school deals effectively with, any incidents. Attendance is very good and the school canteen offers healthy meals that pupils really enjoy. As a result of recent improvements in information and communication technology (ICT), alongside the high standards in English and mathematics, pupils are well prepared for their future lives. Their personal development is outstanding. The support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding because the school insists on including all its learners within classes, and provides teachers with the expertise and classroom support necessary to do so. This approach ensures every teacher takes responsibility for the needs of these learners, as well as other children in the class. This ensures that those who find learning difficult make much better than expected progress in both academic and social development. Teachers regularly monitor the progress of pupils in their subjects, and use this information to check against the expected progress for each pupil. This information used by class teachers ensures no one is falling behind. However, actions are piecemeal because overall coordination to get a better whole-child picture is at an early stage of development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure lesson plans consistently take full account of the abilities and prior knowledge of pupils, irrespective of their sets or classes.
- Ensure pupils are given sufficient time, day-to-day, to respond to the advice from marking.
- Ensure the provision of sufficient time for managers to monitor the quality of lesson planning and marking.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good and standards are above average. This school receives pupils in Year 5, who gained above average standards in the Year 2 national tests. The evidence from school assessments and information from first schools suggest pupils are still working at above average levels on arrival in Year 5. In national Year 6 Key Stage 2 tests, pupils continue to attain above average standards. These are particularly strong in science. There are no significant differences in the satisfactory, and often good, progress made by both girls and boys. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make significantly better than expected progress in Key Stage 2. By the end of Year 8, standards have climbed further still compared to the average, as shown by both the school's own end-of-year assessments and the results in mathematics in the Key Stage 3 national tests, which these pupils take one year early. Achievement throughout the school is therefore good for all pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Pupils enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in their well above average attendance. They take a pride in their school and the new school buildings and value the very wide range of exciting opportunities on offer to enrich their learning. Their outstanding spiritual, cultural, moral and social development is exemplified in the quality of teamwork and creativity displayed in response to the variety of multicultural activities they experience during arts week. Pupils work very well together in mixed-age groups, taking responsibility for their own learning and supporting each other. They contribute to the local community, for example through strong links with the local ex-servicemen association and extensive fund raising on behalf of local and international charities.

The school council takes an active part in the running of the school and influences many of the decisions for the new school buildings. It contributes to the development of a healthy menu and in producing an anti-bullying leaflet. Large numbers of pupils take up the opportunities offered to develop personal fitness and pupils of all levels of ability are able to take part. Pupils feel safe and know that there is always someone to help should a problem arise. Bullying is minimal and swiftly dealt with where necessary. Pupils feel that their teachers know them and will listen to and support them. Behaviour is good and often outstanding. As one pupil said, 'Why would anyone want to misbehave in a school as good as this?' Pupils greatly value the relationships they develop with their teachers and support staff. They appreciate that staff are always willing to give up time to help them and there is a strong ethos of mutual respect.

Pupils are confident, articulate and mature in their discussions with adults. These qualities, together with strong basic skills including ICT, ensure that they are well prepared for future working roles.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good, characterised by excellent working relationships between teachers and pupils that establish a safe and energetic working environment where it is 'OK' to try hard, make mistakes and try again. Inspectors' observations coincided with 'Arts Week',

with mixed-age classes instructed by outside experts as well as in-house staff often operating outside their own area of subject expertise. Their planning and preparation for these creative sessions were good, and ensured active participation and good progress for all the pupils. Evidence from subject planning documents shows there are good middle and long-term schemes of work, although lesson-by-lesson plans vary in quality. At their best, even where classes are in ability sets, plans define different approaches for different groups of pupils and set out explicit tasks for teacher assistants. The plan is used less successfully for different ability groups or classes. It has too little detail available on pupils' learning needs for teaching assistants, other than 'to support' particular pupils. The day-to-day marking of work shows a similar range of practice, varying from detailed and explicit advice on how to improve the work to simple ticks and the occasional exhortations for more effort. In both examples, it was unusual to see pupils responding positively to the advice, as there is no planned lesson time for them to do so.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The outstanding curriculum is innovative and creative and strives to meet the needs of all individuals. The provision for Years 5 and 6 is balanced and broad with the pupils benefiting from specialist teachers. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 fulfill the requirements of the National Curriculum, and the provision is enriched by lessons in dance and drama, enabling the exploration of personal issues and giving further opportunities for pupils to develop their creativity and improve their self-confidence.

An outstanding variety of activities and trips are on offer to stimulate learning and pupils greatly value these. Arts week included the creation of a professional wood sculpture produced in response to pupils' designs to be a lasting work of art for future pupils, together with a wide variety of creative activities. Safety week enables pupils to develop strategies for coping with relationships and raising awareness of fire and road safety and safe practice in the use of the Internet.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school is rightly proud of the good care, guidance and support it provides. Adults lead by example in the way they relate to pupils and, as a result, relationships are based on warmth and respect. Procedures for safeguarding children are robust and the support of vulnerable children extends beyond school in effective partnerships with other agencies. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or difficulties is outstanding and enables them to achieve well above expectations. Teaching assistants provide very good support for these students both in and out of the classroom.

The transition from first school is managed well and pupils are fully prepared as they move to their next school. Older pupils are involved in caring for younger ones as they arrive at the school. Although the tracking of pupils' progress is thorough, the coordination of early intervention and support for pupils who require it is less effective. Pupils know their academic targets, but their progress towards them in all subjects is not reviewed or recorded regularly or consistently in pupils' planners.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

A special quality of the school is the permission, drive and enthusiasm from leaders to encourage a creative and innovative curriculum. This provides unique experiences for pupils, and maximises the advantage of a middle school setting that is not distracted by the turbulence of transition between Key Stages 2 and 3. Furthermore, the headteacher has steered a very successful move from the old school to the new site, without any noticeable detriment to pupils' learning. The whole staff are very committed to going 'the extra mile' to make teaching and learning interesting, and many staff spoke enthusiastically about their particular projects. They confirmed this strong sense of exploration and development of new ideas and practices, boosted by the very good facilities of the new school site. However, there are elements of inconsistency in the implementation of the marking policy and the variable quality of lesson planning. This is partly because time allocated to subject coordinators for monitoring is limited and because, in recent months, staff focus has been on the move to new premises.

Governors played an important and effective role in guiding the school through the move to new buildings. This has required a great deal of their own time but highly valued by the school. This event and its financial ramifications have taken much of the business of governance up. Governors have basic information about pupil performance, but lack sufficiently rigorous evaluation of what that data shows about pupil achievements, from either subject leaders, or external professional partners.

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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? | 2 |
| 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

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| How well do learners achieve? | 2 |
| The standards ¹ 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 | 1 |

Personal development and well-being

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|---|---|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 1 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 1 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 1 |
| The attendance of learners | 1 |
| The behaviour of learners | 2 |
| 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 | 2 |

The quality of provision

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|--|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs? | 2 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 1 |
| 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

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| 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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 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 | 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

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Alvechurch CofE Middle School, Alvechurch, B48 7TA

Thank you for all your comments in our discussions during our inspection visit. We are impressed by how positive and enthusiastic you are about your school, and it is no real surprise, because it is a good school! Some of the best features are in the range of opportunities in lessons, and in extra clubs, to learn about many different subjects and skills. We were very pleased to see part of your Arts Week, and we were very impressed by the high quality displays of your work around the new school. Although we did not see 'normal' classes, what we could tell from your working attitudes was the good natured and high quality of discussion you enjoy with your teachers, and their professionalism in planning sessions that are not necessarily their 'first choice' of subject.

It is obvious from the high standards of your academic work throughout the school that you are taught well and make good progress. Thanks to the commitment of staff to out-of-hours activities and trips, the varied and interesting range of subjects, and the good care and guidance of your teachers, your personal development is exceptionally good. This shows in your excellent school attendance, healthy lifestyles, thanks to great food from the new canteen and lots of sporting activities, and the close attention to your spiritual development, for example in assemblies. You have helped in decisions about the new school through the school council.

Some things could make the school even better. Teachers should provide you with tasks in lessons, which challenge you appropriately. Teachers' marking usually tells you to do something to improve your learning, but often you are not able to carry out that advice, for example by correcting a faulty diagram, or re-writing a sentence correctly. You should have more time to respond to the comments in marking so you are better able to improve your work. Staff with responsibilities for managing subjects should have enough time to make checks on the quality of planning and marking in their subject.

Best wishes for your future, which we are confident, will be successful for you all.

Yours sincerely

Brian Cartwright Her Majesty's Inspector