

Meadowdale Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122338
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	314270
Inspection dates	7–8 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Brian Dower

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	503
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Edward Tallantyre
Headteacher	Mr Frederick Forster
Date of previous school inspection	1 September 2004
School address	Hazelmere Avenue Bedlington Northumberland NE22 6HA
Telephone number	01670 823170
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Age group	9-13
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Meadowdale is larger than most middle schools and is oversubscribed. The social and economic characteristics of the area it serves are broadly average but there are pockets of deprivation. Pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals and that of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. Very few pupils join or leave the school at times other than the start or end of an academic year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Meadowdale is an outstanding school. Pupils' progress and achievement are excellent because of stimulating teaching and a rich and diverse curriculum. The headteacher is inspirational in his leadership. Parents recognise the school's strengths and are quick to acknowledge that 'Meadowdale is an inspirational school and the opportunities open to its pupils are fantastic. 'The pride with which pupils talk about their work is music to any parent's ears.'

Standards are above average. Progress in mathematics has been good for most pupils but there have been marked improvements in the quality of their work and progress is now excellent. Standards in Year 8, for example, are higher than would be expected for pupils of this age. Standards in English have been, and are, well above average. In science the excellent progress seen in 2007, resulting in well above average standards, is being maintained. Achievement in these subjects is outstanding. It is not only in the core subjects that pupils are doing well. The quality of the work seen in French, physical education, art, music and design technology is high and pupils' knowledge and understanding of the wider world is very good.

Pupils are confident young people who are well prepared for the next stage of their education. They have the personal qualities to be successful in life. They enjoy school, feel safe and well cared for and say that rare instances of bullying are of a minor nature and soon dealt with. Behaviour is good. Pupils take full advantage of healthy choices at lunch time and exercise regularly. They undertake a range of responsibilities in school, such as mentors, buddies, or as house or sports captains. Their views are heard and they play their part in the school's development through the pupils' parliament. In the wider community, they act as ambassadors to the first schools and do much to raise money for charitable causes. They know right from wrong and are sensitive to the needs of those less fortunate than themselves. Their moral, social, spiritual and cultural development is excellent.

Pupils are self-reliant and have the ability to work independently. They are keen to learn, undertake homework and research assignments industriously and speak enthusiastically about their work. They make excellent progress because of such positive attitudes to school and because of outstanding teaching. Expectations are high, learning activities are planned to be stimulating and challenging and the curriculum is rich in its diversity. It builds on pupils' own experiences, draws out the links between subjects and extends their understanding of the world around them. Opportunities for visits away, discussions with visitors and participation in a wide range of extra-curricular activities are extensive and eagerly embraced by all pupils.

All who work in the school are committed to the well-being of every pupil and the care afforded to vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is exemplary. The headteacher's ability to delegate responsibility effectively to his senior staff has ensured strength in leadership at all levels. As a result of this, the school is excellently placed to build upon current achievements.

What the school should do to improve further

- There are no major issues additional to those already identified in the current school improvement plan.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Standards are above average. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is below average and the progress they make and their levels of achievement are excellent.

The school met its performance targets in the 2007 Year 6 national tests. Results in English that year were well above average and pupils' progress and achievement in the subject were excellent. The school's assessments and the quality of the work seen in lessons show that progress continues to be rapid and Year 8 standards are exceeding expected levels. Year 6 results in mathematics were average overall but fewer pupils attained at the higher Level 5 than seen nationally. Achievement was good for most pupils but not so for the most able. The excellent progress seen now in the subject indicates that progress has accelerated significantly and pupils are on track to exceed expected levels by the end of Year 8. The progress of the most able pupils has improved and they are now working at levels commensurate with their ability. Results in science have been average over time but in 2007 were well above average and achievement that year was excellent. Progress remains excellent and standards in Year 8 are above expected levels. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are vulnerable in any way are making excellent progress in their work and are meeting or exceeding expectations. The quality of the work seen in a range of subjects beyond the core is impressive and is testimony to the impact of the imaginative and stimulating curriculum.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are outstanding. They behave well, work hard and are keen to learn. There are a small number of pupils, mainly boys, who find difficulty in adjusting to the routines of school life but they are managed well and, consequently, make good progress in their personal development. Many pupils take on responsibilities in school as house or sports captains and the older pupils help the younger ones as mentors or buddies. Members of the school's parliament have shown maturity in managing a budget and have succeeded in securing improvements in playground facilities. Pupils' sensitivity to the needs of others is demonstrated by their involvement in charitable activities in the local community and through working with pupils in the first schools. Attendance rates are well above average and pupils enjoy coming to school. They get on well together and feel safe and secure. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay fit and well and they eat healthily and take regular exercise. They have excellent basic skills and the ability to use them flexibly across all subjects. Their self-reliance, confidence and their ability to work independently prepare them very well for the next stage of their education and for success in the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding. High quality planning lies at the heart of the reason why pupils make such excellent progress. Teachers use a wide variety of resources to engage pupils' interest, and learning activities are varied and effective in getting them to think through problems for themselves. Lessons regularly reflect life in the real world. The very best lessons

ensure that all pupils have an active part to play throughout and provide high levels of challenge on an individual basis. Year 5 pupils participated enthusiastically in a number sequencing game which demanded speed and initiative from every pupil and then the ability to work as part of a team. They learnt a great deal about decimalisation because demands were made on every boy and girl in the lesson. Such excellent teaching and learning were seen in many other classes where the emphasis was on pupils trying things out for themselves and learning through doing. Teachers deploy teaching assistants very effectively. This is to ensure that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve as well as the rest and that the most able explore their learning in greater depth. Good use is made of homework to extend pupils' understanding of the work done in class, foster independence and provide opportunities for research. Teachers are skilled at managing and encouraging the small number of pupils who are easily distracted or lack self-motivation. Teachers make good use of assessments to guide pupils on how well they are doing and what they must do to improve. However, the school is aware that there are some inconsistencies in the quality of marking and, in some books, insufficient attention is given to the standard of presentation of work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. The school has shown a rigorous determination to put in place a curriculum that will engage all pupils, promote a genuine desire for learning and enable everyone to achieve as well as they can. Whilst there is a strong commitment to English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology, subjects such as physical education, French, design technology, music and art are popular with pupils. These subjects do much to promote their well-being and cultural development and broaden their understanding of the world around them. An exemplary and innovative feature of the curriculum is the substantial commitment to flexible learning. This involves, for example, suspending the usual timetable twice a year for either one week or two weeks at a time. A thematic approach is used whereby pupils of mixed ages are taught together. Lessons are longer than normal and topics are explored in depth. Pupils acknowledge that these activities develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. Assemblies and tutor time are given high priority in school. They are the driving forces behind the excellent personal, social, health and citizenship education that pupils receive. An extensive range of enrichment activities outside of lessons is seized upon by most pupils and there are many visits away and visitors to the school to add that extra dimension to the excellent education the school provides.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

This aspect of provision is excellent. This is a school committed to the well-being of every pupil and where the most vulnerable make excellent progress in their personal and academic development because of the support they receive. Very good use is made of outside agencies to ensure that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities reach their full potential. Child protection and safeguarding arrangements are well established and risk assessments are carried out on a regular basis, particularly in the planning of visits out of school. Pupils' academic progress is assessed regularly and rigorously; the early signs of any underachievement are quickly spotted and appropriate measures taken to put it right. The school's caring and supportive ethos gives pupils the confidence to talk to teachers and teaching assistants when they have worries and know that they will get the help they need.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The inspirational leadership of the headteacher and his ability to exploit the leadership potential of his senior staff are significant factors in pupils' excellent progress and achievement, the exemplary care they receive and the richness of the curriculum. A commitment to equality of opportunity for all pupils is seen in the excellent support afforded to those who are vulnerable and the outstanding progress they make in work and personal development. There is a sense of common purpose and unity throughout the school and morale is high. Self-evaluation is accurate and appropriate priorities are in place to take the school forward. There is no complacency and staff continually seek new ways to raise the bar. They make very good use, for example, of challenging performance targets to attain and maintain high standards. Subject leadership is good but there is variation in the rigour of monitoring and not all aspects of pupils' work are being looked at on a regular basis to ensure the pace of learning remains brisk. Excellent use is made of performance targets to raise standards. Governance is good. The chair is the school's ambassador in the local community and works tirelessly on its behalf. There have been significant improvements since the last inspection, particularly in creating a stimulating learning environment in classrooms and around the school and in enriching the curriculum. The school therefore has excellent capacity to improve further.

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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?	1
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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

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	2
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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
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?	1

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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
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

9 May 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Meadowdale Middle School, Northumberland, NE22 6HA

Thank you for the warm welcome we received when we inspected your school. We enjoyed the two days we spent with you and only wished we had had more time to see all the interesting things you are doing. You spoke to us about how much you enjoy your lessons and the many after school clubs and activities. We were impressed by the way you take on responsibilities in school and in the local community and your concern for others less fortunate than yourselves. You work hard, get on well together and show care for each other. Please thank your parents for sending in the questionnaire returns. Their comments have been most helpful.

Your school is outstanding. You make excellent progress in your work and reach above average standards. This is not only the case in the core subjects. We saw work of a high standard being done right across the curriculum. You have the ability to work independently and in groups and you are conscientious with homework and research assignments. We saw lessons where you were excited by the challenges your teachers set you and where you had to think through things for yourselves. You were made to experiment and come up with your own answers and you came away having learnt a great deal.

You are very well prepared for the next stage of your education and you have the personal qualities to make the most of the opportunities that lie ahead. The quality of the education you are receiving is excellent but your teachers and the assistants are always looking at ways to make that education even better. You can play your part by paying attention to detail. It is important that written work is always completed and presented to the highest standard. You are receiving good guidance on how to improve that work and your teachers will be checking your books regularly to make that feedback even more helpful.

We will remember our time with you and we wish you and your school every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Brian Dower

Lead inspector