

Hugh Sexey Church of England Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123897
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	314758
Inspection date	27 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Nick Green 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	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	675
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Julie Walter
Headteacher	David Cameron
Date of previous school inspection	15 September 2003
School address	Blackford Wedmore BS28 4ND
Telephone number	01934 712211
Fax number	01934 712998

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: students' achievement and standards, their personal development and well-being, and the effectiveness of leadership and management, gathering evidence from assessment data, discussions with students and staff and observation of lessons. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The school is a larger than average middle school and serves a wide rural area. It works in close association with the other schools in the Cheddar Valley. Most students are of White British heritage; around 3% are from other minority ethnic backgrounds. Most students come from generally advantaged socio-economic areas. The percentage of students entitled to free school meals is well below average. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with a formal statement of special educational need is around half the national average. Students' attainment on entry to the school is broadly average. The school has received numerous awards including the School Achievement Award, the Basic Skills Quality Mark, the Sports Mark, the Healthy Schools Award and Education Business Partnership Awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

When asked to sum up the school in a word or short sentence students said to the inspector, 'brilliant', 'a happy school', 'great for learning', 'friendly and safe', 'cool', but the most frequent comment was that the school was 'one big family'. These accolades only begin to describe what makes Hugh Sexey the outstanding inclusive school that it is, where students' achievement and their personal development and well-being are outstanding. Parents justifiably have great confidence in the school; one rightly described it as being a place where 'children are treated as individuals and are encouraged to do the best they can'. Underpinning the school's success is outstanding leadership and management, driven by the clear vision and direction of the headteacher and leadership team. This is focused firmly on raising achievement by improving the curriculum and teaching, and enabling students to thrive in a stimulating, safe and caring environment.

Students' standards at the end of Year 6 have been above average for several years. In relation to their level of attainment on entry, students make significant progress and at the end of their first two years in the school, their achievement is good. No groups of students underperform, although standards attained this year in mathematics were lower than in English and science, particularly for middle ability girls. Students continue to make rapid progress and standards attained in the Year 8 optional national tests this year were consistently well above average in most subjects and exceptionally high in mathematics. Students' current standards are of a similar level. Based on students' starting points when they enter the school, most groups of students' progress and achievement are outstanding by the time they leave. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the most gifted and talented are given well matched support and challenge to enable them to reach their potential. As one student said to the inspector, 'I like the school because it challenges you and makes you improve.'

A great strength of the school is the way it effectively promotes students' personal development and well-being. This is firmly underpinned by the school's emphasis on Christian values which are reflected in the students' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students make an outstanding contribution to the school community by taking advantage of the extensive opportunities that are available for them to take responsibility. Through the school council, students have initiated improvements in school meals to provide healthier food. Most take advantage of the excellent choices they are offered in the school's Taste Bud Cafe. A high proportion of students engage enthusiastically in physical exercise and sport and they are proud of the many sporting trophies the school holds. Students' roles as form representatives, peer mediators, buddies to Year 5 students, library monitors, school gardeners, stage crews and school newspaper producers build self-confidence and a sense of initiative in students that is palpable. They participate in 'The Children's Parliament' national competition where they speak on global issues, world poverty and ecology. Every week, different students lead acts of Collective Worship on these and other topics. The recent introduction of the 'Learning to Lead' programme is giving students an even more active role in the running of the school.

Students' contributions to the wider community are also extensive; students decide the recipients of the school's charity fund raising and have established links with schools in Bristol and Coventry. They perform music and drama in local villages and are involved in church and community events. They exhibit strong financial, enterprise and workplace skills as a result of the many business and enterprise activities they are involved in. Students are emphatic about how safe they feel in school, and have great confidence in staff and the Year 8 peer mediators

to help them resolve any issues when they occur. Bullying and racist incidents are extremely rare. Attitudes to learning are very positive and behaviour in classrooms and around school is exemplary. Students' trust and respect for each other is demonstrated by their security in leaving their belongings in desks and in cloakrooms. Few incidents of interference or theft exemplify the strong sense of social cohesion in the school. Students of all ages enjoy school immensely and are proud to belong to the school's 'family' community. As a result, their attendance is significantly better than that of most schools and the number of students excluded from school is very low. This effective development of personal qualities and the acquisition of excellent basic skills prepare students to be successful, responsible and caring young citizens.

The good and often outstanding teaching and learning provided by the school staff play a major role in ensuring students enjoy and achieve so much. As one student said, 'They make learning interesting and fun.' Teachers plan thoroughly and share the well-considered learning objectives of lessons fully with students. A variety of interesting tasks keeps students working at a lively pace. Teachers provide articulate explanations and use skilful questioning to check and develop students' knowledge and understanding. In most lessons, students are active and in the best they are encouraged to work independently for significant periods of time. Teaching assistants are deployed well and provide effective support. The use of assessment to inform learning is evident in most lessons and students are regularly told how well they are doing and given clear guidance on how to improve their work. The highly effective features of the best lessons are developing rapidly across all subjects but have yet to be embedded consistently in all lessons. However, the school's rigorous monitoring and assessment system ensures any underperformance is identified early and suitable intervention is provided to help students meet the challenging targets they are set.

Students are well served by the school's outstanding curriculum, which is carefully planned to complement the curriculum in the first schools from which the students come and the upper school to which they subsequently go. It is broad, well planned, and very successful in meeting the needs and interests of all students, as well as national requirements. Attainment data are used very well to inform the curriculum structure and student groupings. For example, students whose literacy and numeracy skills are below average are given additional support in smaller classes. Constant review and expansion of the curriculum ensure it reflects contemporary developments and good practice. Beneficial partnerships have been established with local schools to enhance the curriculum in English and mathematics in Years 5 and 6. The comprehensive programme of work-related learning activities and contributions from outside speakers prepare students very well for future employment. They are very positive about the extensive enrichment and extended learning activities that the school offers them. The exceptionally wide-ranging choice of lunchtime and after-school activities caters for all needs: a steel drum band, a computer club, textile workshops, basket ball practice, Spanish club, a peace poster competition; the list is extensive. As one student said, 'There are so many things to enjoy.'

All staff show high levels of commitment to students' care, guidance and support. The needs of individual students are responded to effectively through a range of provision. Vulnerable students are supported very well through personalised programmes. Those at risk of disengaging with school are identified early and effective measures taken to ensure their commitment and progress. The recent establishment of the Focus Centre to nurture small groups of students with social and emotional needs is enhancing this support. The school's pastoral systems provide a supportive family environment that all students recognise and value. As one student said of the school staff, 'They are very caring and listen to students' problems.' Academic progress is

monitored very well and students' targets are regularly reviewed and discussed with them. Child protection requirements and procedures are fully in place and the safeguarding of students is robust. Strong links have been established with parents and outside agencies to support the school's work and promote students' well-being. The students' adoption of healthy lifestyles, their excellent behaviour, the high level of participation in activities and their achievement are testament to the outstanding care, guidance and support they receive.

The headteacher and leadership team are not complacent about the outstanding quality of education provided by the school and are continually striving to improve its performance. Self-evaluation is highly effective and accurate. Systematic and rigorous monitoring and evaluation are undertaken and used to help the school meet the challenging targets it sets itself. Thorough, regular observation of lessons provides an accurate evaluation of all teachers' performance. Assessment data are analysed extremely well and used very effectively to identify strengths and target areas of underachievement. This leads to clear identification of priorities for development. Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection. Enhanced monitoring and evaluation, the support given to raise the practice of middle managers and improvements in academic guidance have had a significant beneficial impact. Middle managers' effectiveness has grown but is not yet consistently outstanding across the school. The governors are well informed and execute their responsibilities very competently. They provide highly effective support and challenge. Improvements this year in students' standards and achievement, in the quality of teaching and learning and in academic guidance show that the school has outstanding capacity for further growth and improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement to ensure that all groups of students make the same progress as the best.
- Improve teaching and learning by challenging students even more rigorously and increasing opportunities for them to work independently.

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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	1
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	2

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	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	1
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?	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?	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	1
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

29 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Hugh Sexey Church of England Middle School, Wedmore, BS28 4ND

Thank you for the help you gave me when I visited your school. I enjoyed meeting so many of you and I learned a great deal from your comments.

You think the school is brilliant and I do too! It provides you with an outstanding quality of education and I think it still has the capacity to get even better. This year, the standard of work in tests in Year 6 was above average and in Year 8 it was exceptionally high. From the time Year 8 students entered the school until they left their progress and achievement were outstanding. Your current progress indicates that you are poised to achieve similar results next summer. Some groups of students could raise their performance in Year 6 and the school is using well devised methods to help it do this. The quality of teaching and learning is good and sometimes outstanding. Your teachers plan well and use effective strategies to help you learn.

The school's strong Christian values and the way it makes you feel like you are part of one big family have a very positive impact on your personal development and well-being, which are outstanding. You clearly enjoy school very much, have a sense of belonging and feel especially safe. Through your numerous roles and responsibilities in the school and through the contributions you make to the wider community your personal qualities are developed very well. The quality of the care, guidance and support you receive is outstanding. Your teachers are highly committed to your welfare and ensuring that you all succeed. The curriculum and the wide range of other activities you participate in are outstanding and meet your needs and interests very well.

The headteacher and senior teachers' very clear vision, strong direction and ability to bring about improvement underpin the school's success. To raise achievement and standards even further I have suggested that all groups of students should be helped make the same progress as the best and that teaching and learning should challenge you more and give you more opportunities to work independently. You can also help by striving to do your very best in this year's tests.

Best wishes with your studies.

Nick Green

Her Majesty's Inspector



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