

Ryecroft C.E. (C) Middle School

Inspection report

| | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 124450 |
| Local Authority | Staffordshire |
| Inspection number | 314933 |
| Inspection dates | 9–10 July 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Judith Matharu HMI |

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

| | |
|---|--|
| Type of school | Middle deemed primary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 9–13 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 250 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Pat Curtis |
| Headteacher | Julia Turner |
| Date of previous school inspection | 7 February 2005 |
| School address | Denstone Road Rocester Uttoxeter ST14 5JR |
| Telephone number | 01889 590394 |
| Fax number | 01889 591483 |

| | |
|--------------------------|----------------|
| Age group | 9–13 |
| Inspection dates | 9–10 July 2008 |
| Inspection number | 314933 |

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This church controlled middle school is smaller than the average secondary school of its type. The number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average. Pupils' attainment on entry in Year 5 varies from year to year, ranging from average to above average. The number with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. The vast majority of students are White British. The acting headteacher is a National Leader in Education and is the headteacher of a school holding National Support School status. She has been in post at Ryecroft as acting headteacher since January 2008.

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 rapidly improving school. Standards at Key Stages 2 and 3 have been around national averages in recent years, but given pupils' average to above average attainment on entry, pupils' progress has been just satisfactory. Recently, under new, purposeful leadership from an experienced acting headteacher, the school has become appropriately focused on achieving improvements in standards and progress. Following the recent drive to improve progress, some impact is evident, with the school's current results indicating that the Key Stage 2 results for most pupils have improved in 2008. However, more able pupils are capable of achieving more highly, given their starting points, and this is an ongoing issue for the school to address. Similarly, there is still some underachievement evident from pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities due to the nature of the support organised for them.

Pupils say they enjoy school life and this is demonstrated in excellent attendance and positive attitudes to learning. The personal and social development of pupils is good. They behave well and are enthusiastic learners, contributing much to the positive atmosphere evident in school.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, but inconsistent. The strengths evident are not widely shared at present. There is insufficient focus on learning and the progress made by pupils. The curriculum is satisfactory, with a number of important improvements in place for next year. These should provide better balance and ensure statutory requirements are fully met. Whilst pastoral care is effective, academic guidance is less successful. The tracking of pupils' progress is not sharp enough and clouds some judgements about this. Opportunities to involve pupils in assessing their own work, or inform them of the next steps to improve their learning, are not taken regularly enough. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The acting headteacher is vigorous and dynamic, accurate in her assessment of the school's performance, and fully committed to ongoing improvement. She has made a substantial difference in a short time, but is realistic in her recognition that there is more to do. She is improving the capacity of the middle leadership team through appropriate training and has successfully gained their support and commitment to the improvement agenda. However, this team is not yet effective in driving forward whole school improvement, partly due to the lack of time available to fulfil their monitoring responsibilities and because of the uncertainties remaining in the current staffing structure. Parents are largely supportive of the school and both staff and parents are supportive of the new leadership, recognising the good progress made in recent months. However, some anxiety remains about the future of the school's leadership, given the continuing temporary nature of this at present. Recent improvement indicates that, overall, the school has satisfactory capacity to move forward now.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement, particularly of more able pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Establish a staffing structure that fully meets the needs of the school.
- Improve the quality of teaching to the highest level by focusing sharply on the quality of learning in lessons and the progress being made by all pupils.
- Establish a whole school system for accurately tracking and monitoring pupils' progress and give pupils clear guidance on how to improve their performance.
- Improve the capacity of middle leaders in the school to fulfil their leadership roles, particularly in relation to the monitoring and evaluation of work in their subjects.

A small proportion of the schools where 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 recent years, standards at Key Stage 2 have remained broadly around the national average. The results have been variable, with fluctuations in the core subjects. The accurate judgement of the acting headteacher is that standards overall at Key Stage 2 have not been high enough, given pupils' starting points. Vigorous action has been taken in recent months to improve standards and boost progress. Considerable effort has been directed into improving English and mathematics, particularly at Level 4 plus. Unvalidated data held in school for the 2008 end of Key Stage 2 results indicate significant improvements in the percentage gaining Level 4 in each of the core subjects, in line with national expectations. However, the reduced number of higher Level 5 results achieved by the school's more able pupils remains an issue for the school to address.

Progress from pupils' starting point in Year 5 to Year 6 is broadly satisfactory. Progress improves slightly in Years 7 and 8, particularly in mathematics where for many pupils progress is good. However, in view of the issue around the performance of higher attainers and because the progress of a small number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below expectations, progress is satisfactory overall.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy being at school and behave very well in lessons and around the school. Attendance and punctuality are excellent. Pupils have good relationships with each other and have a rapport with the vast majority of their teachers. Bullying is rare and dealt with through good pastoral support. Pupils are aware of how to develop a healthy lifestyle and there is a strong focus on the benefits of healthy eating and physical activity, with a range of sporting activities taking place over the year including a swimming gala in the summer.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and, although pupils are predominantly White British, they have excellent opportunities to learn about other cultures. When asked what she had learned during the recent multicultural week, one pupil said she had not realised the extent of world poverty and another said that he was concerned that 'a child dies every fifteen seconds' from avoidable causes in developing countries. Pupils make a good contribution to the school's development and the wider community by taking responsibility through school council activities and participation in money raising activities for a range of appeals and charities. They are well prepared as responsible young citizens. However, because academic achievement is only satisfactory, pupils' preparation for their future economic well-being is also only satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching is improving and, although not yet sufficiently consistent to ensure that all pupils make enough progress in all subjects, it is satisfactory overall. The acting headteacher is leading a very strong focus on raising the quality of teaching and learning in the school and, as a result, teachers are gaining better understanding of the essential components of effective teaching, although there remain significant areas for further professional development. The majority of pupils now make satisfactory progress in their lessons. In the most successful lessons, pupils are well motivated and appropriately challenged by teachers who employ a variety of teaching methods and gauge their teaching to meet pupils' individual needs. In less effective lessons, expectations are too low, the work lacks challenge and pupils are not motivated to succeed. In these lessons, work is sometimes repetitive and fails to stretch some pupils, particularly the more able. In the better lessons, teachers' infectious enthusiasm for their subject and commitment to pupils achieving good progress promote very positive attitudes to learning. In one outstanding Year 7 mathematics lesson seen, pupils were fully engaged in a carefully pitched mathematical investigation which promoted a real enjoyment of learning. Marking is variable in quality. Too often, opportunities are missed to provide pupils with helpful advice on how to improve their performance. In some lessons, teachers are not always aware of the levels that their pupils are working at. As a result, they do not accelerate the learning, which would help pupils to progress more quickly. The teaching of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is too inconsistent. Pupils are often supported suitably when withdrawn for individual help, but their work is not always followed up appropriately in mainstream classes. In mainstream class lessons there is not enough account taken of these pupils' needs.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum has recently been restructured by the acting headteacher and now meets statutory requirements. The balance between the various subjects of the curriculum is now more appropriate and individual subject planning has been improved through the support of local authority consultants. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and there is some excellent provision for promoting pupils' awareness of other cultures.

The curriculum does not, however, consistently match the needs of all learners, particularly gifted and talented pupils or those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Initiatives to support the most able pupils are still at a very early stage of development. There are not yet enough opportunities for developing pupils' extended writing skills across the curriculum. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities on offer, including the opportunity to take part in school productions. Pupils enjoy a very wide range of visits, including residential trips in Years 7 and 8.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall, with pastoral care being good. Statutory requirements for child protection are met. Risk assessment procedures in relation to school

visits and activities are satisfactory. The school is aware of the need to review aspects of the school's health and safety policy and this is currently underway.

Good relationships are evident between staff and pupils. Pupils feel safe and well cared for and feel that they can approach staff with issues or concerns. However, the tracking of pupils' academic progress is weak. A sharp and accurate whole school system for tracking progress from Year 5 to Year 8 has not been established. There are pockets of good practice emerging, for example in mathematics where the department's tracking demonstrates good progress for many pupils. However, this is not yet completed across the school in a systematic manner. Hence, some teachers' views of the progress their pupils make is not always correct. Pupils do not receive enough guidance regarding the levels they are working at and how to improve their performance. Again, some good examples are evident where pupils refer to levels and are able to assess their own work, for instance in art, but this is generally inconsistent across the curriculum.

The support for some pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities within lessons is sometimes ineffective. There is insufficient liaison between class teachers and support assistants to provide work suitably matched to individual pupils' needs. Further, some staff are insufficiently well trained in matters relating to inclusion and their resulting responsibilities within this.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The acting headteacher is providing clear vision and direction for the work of the school. She is energetic, passionate about the school, and totally committed to providing the best for its pupils. In a short time, she has quickly identified the areas for improvement and begun a vigorous drive for improvement. Her evaluation is accurate in terms of what needs to be tackled. In particular, she is very clear about the priority to raise standards and achievement and improve the overall quality of teaching and learning. Her energy and enthusiasm have already made considerable impact on the morale of the staff team. Staff have galvanised their efforts and put renewed energy into improving the outcomes for pupils.

Although the acting headteacher's leadership is excellent and moving the school forward, there is a significant amount still to do. The capacity for shared leadership across the school is weak at present and this is a barrier to moving things on quickly. The school's staffing structure is unclear and does not fully address the priorities identified. There is lack of clarity regarding the line management of team leaders. Insufficient attention has been paid to developing the team leader role and this has disempowered staff and limited their influence. The role of subject leaders also remains insufficiently developed and their accountability for standards and progress in their subjects has not been established until recently. There is enthusiasm and commitment evident from several subject leaders to drive forward improvements, but they recognise that there is some way to go in order to have the required impact.

There is not yet shared understanding and agreement by all staff across the school about the constituents of high quality learning in lessons, which is a barrier to improvement. Monitoring and evaluation of the school's work has been limited in the past and has glossed over weaknesses. A more vigorous programme of monitoring is now in place. The acting headteacher has an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses here.

The governing body has been supportive of the school but governors have not held the school sufficiently to account. Overall, until very recently, there has been unsatisfactory improvement since the last inspection. However, the capacity to improve from this point is satisfactory, given the clear understanding of the issues now emerging and the continued involvement of the current acting headteacher in supporting the school.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

| | |
|--|-----------------------|
| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | School Overall |
|--|-----------------------|

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 | No |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 3 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 3 |

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 | 4 |

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 | 1 |
| 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 | 3 |

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 |

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 | 2 |
| 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 Ryecroft C of E Middle School, Rocester ST14 5JR

Thank you for your warm welcome at your school's recent inspection. We enjoyed meeting you and talking with many of you about your school. You clearly enjoy being at Ryecroft and are happy overall with your school. We found that you get a satisfactory standard of education and that the school is rapidly improving. We were impressed with your good behaviour and the maturity you show in lessons and around school. You get on well with your teachers and showed us that you often work really well. The curriculum is improving, with better sharing of time between subjects planned for next year.

Your headteacher and her staff team are working hard to find ways to help you to achieve more highly. A number of important changes have been made recently to improve the progress you are making and this is now making a real difference. Your teachers clearly want you to succeed and everyone at the school is putting considerable efforts into improving your learning. Teaching is satisfactory and some of it is better than this.

We have asked your headteacher and her staff to do the following.

- Make sure that all of you make the progress of which you are capable.
- Improve teaching to the best levels we saw during the inspection.
- Organise the school and its staffing so that it helps you to achieve your best.
- Help teachers who are subject leaders to check on the learning in lessons and see if you are making sufficient progress.
- Make sure that the school has a good system to record and check the progress you are making from Year 5 to Year 8 and to guide you on how to improve your work.

You can help with this by making sure you continue to try hard try and give your best in everything you do. We feel that your school has potential to continue to improve and we look forward to hearing about this in the future.

Best wishes

Yours sincerely

Judith Matharu Her Majesty's Inspector

11 July 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ryecroft C of E Middle School, Rocester ST14 5JR

Thank you for your warm welcome at your school's recent inspection. We enjoyed meeting you and talking with many of you about your school. You clearly enjoy being at Ryecroft and are happy overall with your school. We found that you get a satisfactory standard of education and that the school is rapidly improving. We were impressed with your good behaviour and the maturity you show in lessons and around school. You get on well with your teachers and showed us that you often work really well. The curriculum is improving, with better sharing of time between subjects planned for next year.

Your headteacher and her staff team are working hard to find ways to help you to achieve more highly. A number of important changes have been made recently to improve the progress you are making and this is now making a real difference. Your teachers clearly want you to succeed and everyone at the school is putting considerable efforts into improving your learning. Teaching is satisfactory and some of it is better than this.

We have asked your headteacher and her staff to do the following.

- Make sure that all of you make the progress of which you are capable.
- Improve teaching to the best levels we saw during the inspection.
- Organise the school and its staffing so that it helps you to achieve your best.
- Help teachers who are subject leaders to check on the learning in lessons and see if you are making sufficient progress.
- Make sure that the school has a good system to record and check the progress you are making from Year 5 to Year 8 and to guide you on how to improve your work.

You can help with this by making sure you continue to try hard try and give your best in everything you do. We feel that your school has potential to continue to improve and we look forward to hearing about this in the future.

Best wishes

Yours sincerely

Judith Matharu
Her Majesty's Inspector