

Horringer Court Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124806
Local Authority	SUFFOLK LA
Inspection number	315068
Inspection dates	16–17 April 2008
Reporting inspector	David Jones 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	Community
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	383
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Nicola Rawcliffe
Headteacher	Mrs Tania Johnson
Date of previous school inspection	4 May 2004
School address	Glastonbury Road Bury St. Edmunds Suffolk IP33 2EX
Telephone number	01284755626
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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

This average sized middle school is part of the three-phase system that serves Bury St Edmunds. Pupils enter the school in Year 5 and leave at the end of Year 8. Numbers in each year group and the ratio of girls and boys vary annually. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups and of those who are learning English as an additional language is low, although the number of children from Eastern Europe is rising. The area displays a normal range of social and economic characteristics. Attainment on entry is just above average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average; however, the percentage with a statement of special educational needs varies between year groups but is average overall. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The school has been awarded: Training School status by the Department for Children, Schools and Families; is a Football Association Partnership and Charter School; holds the Sportsmark and Activemark Gold; and has secured Artsmark status. The local authority's proposals for the re-organisation of middle school education in Suffolk will not affect this school for some years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The quality of education is satisfactory with some good features. The leadership and management team has been reorganised, and their shared view of what constitutes good learning is an important strength. The school's capacity to improve is satisfactory.

Self-evaluation is generally more positive than the judgements given in this report; however, senior managers have recently taken a number of positive steps to enhance key areas in need of development. Senior staff were invited to observe teaching with inspectors; the views they expressed on this occasion, concurred with the judgements given by inspectors, although the school's monitoring of teaching often records more positive comment.

Overall, teaching is satisfactory. However, in a significant number of lessons, pupils were not provided with sufficient challenge or time was not managed well enough. Monitoring and support are not yet used effectively to develop the quality of learning. The use of assessment information to enhance learning and achievement remains inconsistent. For example, marking in pupils' books does not always help pupils review or improve their work.

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. The validated results of the 2007 Key Stage 2 national tests were close to the national average. However, achievement varies by year group, between boys and girls, among those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and between the core subjects. Evidence from the school's sound assessment database, the scrutiny of the pupils' work and lesson observations confirm that achievement is satisfactory overall. Those pupils from an Eastern European background who are at an early stage of learning English are not receiving sufficient support to access the educational provision available.

The pupils' personal development is satisfactory overall. However, the behaviour of a minority of pupils with social and emotional problems, learning difficulties and/or disabilities is inconsistently managed and this is often to the detriment of the quality of learning. In general, when the majority of pupils are challenged and engaged by the task provided, they display positive attitudes to learning. Care and pastoral support are satisfactory although academic guidance is variable; overall, the quality of care, welfare and guidance is satisfactory.

Efforts to secure the pupils' future economic well-being are enhanced by their generally mature social skills; the range of extra-curricular sporting opportunities provided is outstanding. The pupils are guided towards healthy lifestyles by very effective physical education provision and access to good quality school meals. The school has achieved Healthy Schools status and a range of sporting accolades. Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements. The majority of parents and guardians took the time to respond to the inspection questionnaire. Many were pleased with the efforts of the new headteacher, the commitment of staff, and quality of the physical education opportunities provided. However, 40% of those who responded expressed concerns regarding behaviour and bullying. As a result of inconsistencies in behaviour management and of the inappropriate behaviour of a small but significant minority, inspectors judged behaviour to be inadequate.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the achievement of pupils, particularly in Key Stage 2 and of those who are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language.
- Improve the quality of learning by providing lessons that consistently challenge and engage; and eliminate the inconsistencies in the quality of marking.

- Provide clear and easy access to assessment information for staff and governors.
- Address the inappropriate behaviour of a small but significant minority of pupils through more consistent approaches to behaviour management.

A small proportion of the schools whose 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

The proportion of pupils achieving the expected level in the Year 6 national tests in English, mathematics and science has been at or close to national levels for some years. However, when their previous attainment is considered, pupil progress in Years 5 and 6 has been significantly below average since 2005. The school's self-evaluation notes that Key Stage 2 achievement was 'unsatisfactory' in 2007.

The school has a secure range of assessment data which is used adequately to track pupil progress in Years 7 and 8. However, this does not inform teaching and learning well enough or aid easy evaluation by senior managers and governors because it is not coordinated into a single coherent format. In Key Stage 3, achievement and standards are satisfactory. However, this varies between the core subjects; it is strongest in mathematics, where most pupils make good progress, and weakest in English where significant numbers underachieve.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

The great majority of pupils enjoy school; attendance is consistently above average. Pupils say they feel safe and enjoy good relationships with their peers and adults in the school. There is some bullying or harassment, about which a number of parents have concerns, although pupils express confidence that such incidents are acted on promptly by staff. While the great majority of pupils behave well in lessons and around the school, a small and persistent minority show challenging behaviour that is sometimes not managed well enough. This disrupts the learning of others. Most pupils put into practice their good understanding of how to live healthy, safe and fit lives by, for example, taking full advantage of the excellent range of sports activities and clubs provided and eating healthily. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are satisfactory. There are strengths in pupils' cultural understanding, gained from the school's strong creative and performing arts provision. Pupils show care and concern for others, acting as buddies to younger pupils and raising very considerable funds for a range of charities. They acquire sound basic skills and most learn to work collaboratively and independently when given the opportunity.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Almost all staff were observed teaching. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Of the lessons observed, approximately, one in every five were good, nearly three-quarters were satisfactory and two were inadequate. Lessons are generally planned appropriately but the use of assessment information is inconsistent. In some lessons, the match of task to the

pupils' learning needs is inappropriate; as a result, some pupils are not always sufficiently challenged. In almost half of those lessons judged satisfactory the time available was not used effectively, limiting pupils' progress. Inspectors invited senior managers to review a random selection of pupils' books; the style, quality and consistency of marking varied considerably. Too often teachers' comments failed to identify what pupils need to do next to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Overall, the curriculum is satisfactory and pupils have access to a very good range of extra-curricular sporting activities. The teaching time available is above the minimum recommended and this has enabled the school to include 'thinking skills' and philosophy lessons for all pupils. French is taught throughout the school. The school is taking the opportunity to link learning in different subjects; for example, by the use of extended writing across a range of subjects to enhance literacy skills. However, it is too early to see the impact of these initiatives on standards. The curriculum support for the small but increasing number of pupils who are at an early stage of learning English as a foreign language is ineffective. The monitoring and review of subjects is becoming more rigorous, notably in the core subjects; weaknesses have been identified and are beginning to be addressed. A good range of additional activities is organised to challenge gifted and talented pupils. Personal, social and health education ensures pupils are aware of health and safety issues. Effective links with the partner schools ensure a smooth transition.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Staff provide a positive and caring environment for learning; appropriate arrangements for protecting pupils' welfare, safety and security are in place. The school's behaviour policy sets out systematic and stepped approaches to promoting good behaviour that are well understood by staff and pupils, to which most pupils respond well. These are not implemented consistently by all staff in relation to a small but persistent core of pupils who misbehave. In addition, records of bullying and actions taken are not kept centrally, making it difficult for the school to monitor the impact of its efforts in this matter. The appointment of a pupil support manager and introduction of a dedicated support centre, which aims to address pupils' social and behavioural difficulties, is a positive but recent move forward for the school. While provision for pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is satisfactory overall, the new leader for this area is working to improve methods of communicating to all relevant staff the plans and guidance to support such pupils; these are currently not sufficiently robust. As a result, some pupils, including those with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, do not consistently receive the support and guidance that is planned for them.

Pupils' academic progress is monitored and reviewed regularly in relation to their targets by senior staff, who have begun to identify and act on potential underachievement. The school's assessment management systems have been unnecessarily complex and are currently being simplified into one coherent central record to better promote good access and use by all staff. Pupils know their targets and how well they are doing. The guidance that they receive through marking and their involvement in reviewing their work is inconsistent; however, there are strengths on which to build, for example, in mathematics.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and her senior leadership team have begun to address a number of areas requiring improvement, however, some of these developments are relatively recent. Senior staff have succeeded in providing a supportive environment for all learners that promotes pupil care, a feature noted by parents in their responses to the inspection questionnaire. The new senior management team has a number of strengths and recognises what needs to be done, although their initial self-evaluation was too generous, and the monitoring of teaching too positive. The school sets challenging targets for pupils in Year 8 but this does not extend to those in Year 6. When senior staff have completed the reorganisation of the school's extensive assessment database into the more manageable format chosen, the information provided will permit more effective monitoring and evaluation of provision and achievement.

Equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled; however, the inconsistencies in care, guidance and support for non-English speakers as well as for pupils with learning and behavioural difficulties noted previously remain a concern. Resources are deployed effectively and efficiently and the school provides satisfactory value for money. Governance is satisfactory and the transparency of information sought by the headteacher enables governors to play their role as the 'critical friend' more consistently.

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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?	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	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
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	4
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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	4
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

18 April 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Horringer Court Middle School, Bury St Edmunds, IP33 2EX

You may remember that inspectors visited the school just after Easter this year and I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your contribution to the inspection; it was a pleasure to meet so many of you.

I was impressed by the artwork on display around the school and the quality of the music I heard in assembly. Your successes on the sports field are impressive and your parents were keen to praise the sports staff for their efforts. Nearly 80% of your parents took the time to respond to the inspection questionnaire, please give them my thanks. They were impressed by the positive changes made since Mrs Johnson became headteacher, but they also expressed concerns about the way a minority of you behave in some lessons. Some parents were concerned about bullying but you were confident that when it occurs staff take appropriate action.

I have asked Mrs Johnson and the governors to help you to make greater progress by providing lessons that consistently challenge and engage you. Staff have been asked to try and provide more consistent guidance on how to improve your work when they mark your books. A small number of pupils do not behave as well as they could and the school needs to be more consistent in how it deals with this; however, I was pleased to see some of you encourage others to concentrate more in lessons, well done.

It was a pleasure to visit your school and I look forward to hearing about your future success.

David Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector