

Harrold Priory Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109649
Local Authority	Bedfordshire
Inspection number	324995
Inspection dates	18–19 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Philip Mann 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	Foundation
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	424
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Christine Herridge
Headteacher	Mrs Janine Waring
Date of previous school inspection	24 May 2006
School address	The Green Harrold Bedfordshire MK43 7DE
Telephone number	01234720346
Fax number	01234721036

Age group	9–13
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. The inspection was carried out as part of a coordinated inspection of the Middle and Upper School partners in the North Bedfordshire Schools Trust (NBST). Three of the four Trust members; Sharnbrook Upper, Lincroft Middle School and Harrold Priory Middle School are consulting parents on the formation of a 'hard federation', which will provide a single governing body.

Description of the school

Harrold Priory Middle school takes pupils from the villages of North Bedfordshire as well as some pupils from Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire. The school has been oversubscribed for a number of years. The vast majority of pupils are of White British background. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The number of pupils identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The attainment of pupils when they start school in Year 5 is above that expected nationally. The school has recently been granted specialist status as an Arts College which it shares with the upper school in the trust. It holds awards for healthy living and sport and plays an active role in the local learning community.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Harrold Priory Middle School is a good school, which has particular strengths. However, the school is going through a period of change and there are some aspects of its work that need to be improved. These areas of improvement have been accurately identified by the school through self-evaluation and inspectors recognise that much is already being done to address them. Strong leadership by the headteacher and governors is moving the school forwards at a fast rate. The results of this work can be seen in the good progress of pupils and the achievement of some very high standards overall by pupils in English, mathematics and science.

The quality of education is good overall. A positive climate exists where the efforts of all are valued greatly. The curriculum provision is outstanding. Pupils respond well to the extensive range of experiences made available to them and their personal development is good overall. The vast majority display excellent attitudes towards living a healthy and safe lifestyle. Teaching is good overall but ranges between barely satisfactory to excellent. These inconsistencies lead to variations in pupils' progress. This is because in the weakest lessons some pupils become disengaged from their learning, restless and sometimes disruptive. This limits the ability of pupils to reach their full potential. A number of parents expressed their concern and frustration about these inconsistencies. However, inspectors judge that many lessons are well taught with some excellent practice evident around the school. In these lessons, pupils respond very well, make rapid progress and demonstrate a level of maturity in their learning. As a result of these opportunities, pupils produce some stunning work, for example, in science, information and communication technology (ICT) and art.

The care, guidance and support of pupils are good overall. Staff provide excellent levels of pastoral support to individual pupils whose personal needs are monitored well. Progress tracking systems have been implemented but the data is not being used effectively in all subjects to monitor progress and set challenging targets for pupils to achieve. The school is responding to the concerns of a number of parents that teachers provide insufficient information to them in reports home about their child's progress. Safeguarding procedures and procedures for health and safety are satisfactory.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has instilled a greater sense of accountability amongst the staff in order to accelerate improvement across the school. Capacity to improve is satisfactory. Although self-evaluation is accurate, not all subject leaders have fully embraced the process. This is limiting the school's ability to really advance change and raise standards in all subjects. In contrast, the governors provide outstanding levels of support for the school. They possess a comprehensive understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Membership of the North Bedfordshire Schools Trust provides good potential for further improvement in the overall quality of provision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is consistently good or better in all lessons.
- Improve the quality, gathering and use of assessment data to track pupils' progress effectively in all subjects and set challenging targets.
- Ensure that all subject leaders play an effective role in monitoring, self-evaluation and school improvement.
- Improve the quality of communication with parents overall, especially about the progress their child is making.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good. Results from the 2008 national tests at the end of Key Stage 2 and teacher assessments at the end of Year 8 confirm that pupils make good progress overall to attain standards that are well above national expectations in mathematics and science. Standards in English have been similar at the end of Key Stage 2. Standards in English in Year 8 are above the expected levels for this age group with inspection data confirming that progress is now good. This is because greater focus is being placed in the development of pupils' writing skills across the school. Predicted results for the current academic year indicate a continuing trend of improvement. Better teaching in English and greater use of resources that engage the attention of boys are reducing the gap in achievement between that of girls successfully. More able pupils and those who are gifted and talented are being challenged effectively in most lessons. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress because support is carefully targeted to meet their needs.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are highly motivated and enthusiastic learners who thoroughly enjoy the time they spend at school. Overall attendance has been consistently above average for several years and pupils arrive promptly at school and lessons, displaying very positive attitudes to their work.

Pupils develop into confident and sociable individuals because of an outstanding curriculum and pastoral care. Most pupils display great consideration and respect towards others and are polite towards visitors. Pupils gain a good understanding of their part in the wider community and their responsibility towards others. However, opportunities are often missed in assemblies and form sessions for pupils to reflect on important issues that affect their daily lives and their place within the wider world. In contrast, pupils adopt exceptionally safe and healthy lifestyles. They speak highly of the many activities outside lessons and a very high proportion regularly take part in the wide range of sporting and other opportunities. This helps pupils to develop their ability to collaborate with others, contributing to exceptionally positive working relationships. Pupils behave sensibly and very safely, making an outstanding contribution to the school and wider community. One pupil commented, 'Everyone gets a say in the school, not just the teachers.' For example, as part of the school's Trust, pupils attended a pupil voice conference, delivering a presentation on how they thought their school could develop in the future. Fundraising for both local and national charities is considerable. Pupils contribute to the development of the school through the work of the school council and the house system. Pupils' impressive personal skills, readiness to work as part of a team, coupled with their very good basic skills, prepare them exceptionally well for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The school has developed a consistent approach to planning lessons and this, together with the effective use of electronic whiteboards, is having a positive impact on pupils' learning. Many teachers make good use of questions to make connections with previous learning and encourage pupils to think. In these lessons there is a high level of challenge and teachers use

their subject expertise well to extend pupils' knowledge and understanding. In many lessons, teachers take every opportunity to ensure that pupils are actively involved and share ideas, promoting independence and encouraging pupils to take responsibility for their own learning. This was captured in a comment made by a Year 5 girl, 'I really like this lesson, it helps me to learn for myself'. Although teaching is often good and sometimes outstanding, in a small number of lessons teachers provide too much information or instruction, consequently pupils' interest and productivity wane because teaching is neither sufficiently active or challenging. Good support from teaching assistants makes a significant contribution to the progress of pupils with learning difficulties. The school is developing good procedures for tracking and assessing pupils' attainment, particularly in mathematics, however this is inconsistent across other subjects. In some lessons, verbal feedback on the quality of pupils' work is not reinforced by clear written guidance on the standard of the work and what pupils should do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding, contributing significantly to pupils' achievement. It fully meets statutory requirements whilst offering additional curriculum opportunities in modern foreign languages and media studies. A condensed curriculum in Key Stage 3 is an excellent feature that enables pupils to start GCSE courses in English, mathematics and science a year early in the Upper School. Furthermore, the school is making excellent use of opportunities within the Trust to develop innovative curriculum programmes, both between and across schools to facilitate effective continuity of learning. Specialist School Status provides further opportunities for curriculum enrichment, for example through the Art Bridging Project with the Upper School. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties is good and suitable arrangements are made to ensure their additional needs are met. The extensive range of extra-curricular clubs and booster activities is a strength of the curriculum, which effectively supports achievement and broadens pupils' experiences. The development of a virtual learning environment makes an effective contribution to provision in several subjects, whilst providing excellent lines of communication within the whole school community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Overall, this aspect is good. However, pastoral support is outstanding and this high standard of care underpins pupils' good achievement and strong personal development. Staff know individual pupils very well and pupils themselves feel very well looked after. This helps them to enjoy school and be very positive about learning. Close links with partner schools within the Trust, and a wide range of other professionals and agencies, provide all pupils with personal and specialist support as and when it is needed. Procedures for health and safety and for safeguarding pupils' welfare are satisfactory.

The monitoring of pupils academic development is satisfactory overall. Increasingly senior staff and teachers use assessment data to identify pupils who are doing particularly well, as well as those at risk of under-achieving. However, this is not the case in all subjects, such as English. Teachers usually provide pupils with very clear guidance on how they can improve their work and pupils say they find their detailed feedback exceptionally helpful. In addition, pupils play a growing role in setting their own targets for future improvement. This involvement is helping them to fully understand what they need to do next in order to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good overall. The headteacher provides clear educational direction for the school's work and sets high expectations for both pupils and staff. She is supported by a very capable deputy. Together they are instilling a sense of teamwork and accountability that is creating an inclusive school where the achievements and contributions of all are valued. Self-evaluation is satisfactory overall. The monitoring of teaching by senior staff is a growing strength leading to improvement. Some subject leaders are starting to play a more prominent role in the monitoring process. For others, it is a newly acquired skill yet to be accomplished in order to raise pupil standards in their subjects. Sufficiently challenging targets are being set to raise standards but the newly installed tracking systems are yet to provide accurate data to raise pupil achievement.

Governance is excellent. School development and a drive to improve the quality of education for all pupils are at the forefront of the governing body's work. Governors have taken the very positive step of participating in the establishment of the North Bedfordshire Schools Trust, encompassing all 19 schools linked to the local Upper School. This decision brings access to advanced skills teachers, capital projects and new ICT facilities. Curriculum improvements are already evident in mathematics and modern foreign languages. Membership of the Trust ensures that community cohesion within a local context is very good. However, the promotion of community cohesion at both a national and international level is less well developed.

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?	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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
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 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

Leadership and management

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	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

20 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Harrold Priory Middle School, Harrold, MK43 7DE

On behalf of the inspection team I would like to thank you all for making us feel so welcome during our visit. We were impressed with your behaviour. Many of you told us that the school is a good place in which to learn and we agree with you. It is very clear that many of you enjoy participating in the extensive range of learning experiences available to you.

Your headteacher leads and manages the school well. She is developing a good team of staff around her to develop the school further and ensure that you all have the opportunity to achieve your best. Much has been achieved since her appointment but there is still room for more improvement. This is because some lessons are not as interesting as others and consequently some of you find it difficult to concentrate on what you should be learning. However, teaching and learning are good overall with some excellent lessons observed. In these lessons, the teachers use resources well to make your lessons interesting and provide many opportunities for you to work together. I have asked that teaching is always, at least, consistently good.

Staff provide you with excellent levels of care and support, always taking the time and trouble to listen to your concerns. They mark your work regularly and some of you get very good advice on what you need to do next to improve. This is not the same for all of you and not all teachers make good use of assessment information to set targets for you to work at. Your parents would like to be better informed about your progress and the school has begun to do this. These are things that I have asked the teachers to improve on.

The governors provide excellent levels of support and guidance to the school. They work very closely with the headteacher to ensure that you all are provided with the best possible opportunities to succeed in your learning. Teachers who have responsibility for subject areas are going to work closely with the headteacher and governors to develop a very clear understanding of what is needed to make their subjects as successful as they can be.

I send you our best wishes for the future.

Philip Mann

Her Majesty's Inspector