

Margaret Beaufort Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109657
Local Authority	Bedfordshire
Inspection number	324998
Inspection dates	18–19 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Rashida Sharif 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 (total)	370
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr G Westgate
Headteacher	Mr P Allman
Date of previous school inspection	21 March 2006
School address	High Street Bedford Bedfordshire MK44 1DR
Telephone number	01234 708213
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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.

It was carried out as part of a coordinated inspection of the Middle and Upper School partnership in the North Bedfordshire Schools Trust. Three of the four Trust members, Sharnbrook Upper School, Lincroft Middle School and Harrold Priory Middle School are in the process of consulting parents about the formation of a 'hard federation', which will provide a single governing body.

Description of the school

Margaret Beaufort is a small, oversubscribed, middle school. The proportion of pupils who are entitled to free school meals is well below the national average. The proportion of pupils identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average; however the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is above the national average. Almost all pupils are White British.

Pupils' attainment on entry varies from year to year but is generally above average. The school has specialist status in performing arts, which it shares with the upper school in the trust. It is part of the North Bedfordshire Schools Sports Partnership and has the Sportsmark award. The school achieved its financial management standard in schools in 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Margaret Beaufort Middle school is a satisfactory and rapidly improving school with some good features. The school is led by a committed headteacher and a developing senior leadership team. Leaders have created a safe, cohesive community where the climate for learning is positive and where pupils are extremely well behaved, polite, highly motivated and are treated equally. The school has acted on all the key issues for improvement raised at its last inspection, although these actions have not yet fully impacted on pupils' achievement. Standards by the end of Year 8 are generally above average with a growing number of pupils leaving with standards that are well above average, particularly in English and science. While the school judged its teaching and learning to be good, inspectors judged it to be satisfactory with a number of strengths. Though inconsistencies remain, particularly in Years 5 and 6, there is evidence of good and occasionally outstanding teaching. The best lessons are carefully structured to enable pupils to learn for themselves, in groups, and through a range of activities. However, in some lessons the planned activities are still not sufficiently exciting, interesting or challenging, placing a constraint on pupil progress.

The overall curriculum provision is good. Pupils enjoy their education because of the innovative personalised approach to broaden the curriculum. This is through, for example, performing arts and the wealth of enrichment activities offered before school and during lunch times. These activities, developed through the good partnership with its partner schools, extend learning further by developing pupils' creative skills through for example, music, art, dance and drama. Pupils were keen to tell the inspectors that they would like more time for these clubs.

The quality of care, guidance and support is good overall. All pupils, including those who find learning difficult, are well-supported. However, the headteacher is aware that not all staff plan tasks sufficiently closely to meet the pupils' different learning needs, nor provide specific guidance when marking the pupils' books to guide further improvement. The pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding because of the whole school commitment to creating an ethos, which is inclusive and develops the whole child. Pupils clearly enjoy school and are very proud to say they come to Margaret Beaufort Middle; attendance is good. Some parents expressed a concern about the behaviour of a small minority of pupils, but inspectors found behaviour to be exemplary. Pupils are very polite and well-mannered in lessons and around the school. They are given many opportunities to develop their independence, entrepreneurial and social skills particularly as they move up the school, for example, acting as mentors for the younger pupils and fund-raising for local and national charities.

The headteacher has successfully pulled the school community together in his determination to raise standards. The senior and middle leadership team are becoming much more focused on whole school improvements, giving them a good capacity to act on the issues raised by this inspection. There have been some recent improvements in Years 7 and 8 as demonstrated by pupils' attainment by the end of Year 8. The school recognises that this level of provision needs to be mirrored in Years 5 and 6. The school recognises the importance of building further the capacity of some middle leaders to enable them to evaluate teaching effectively so that they are able to measure its impact on learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching and learning by consistently providing good learning opportunities to enhance pupil progress, particularly in Years 5 and 6.

- Make sure that staff match work closely to the needs of pupils of differing abilities and provide specific information to tell them how they can make further progress.
- Ensure that managers evaluate the impact of the quality of teaching and learning on pupils' achievement and progress to help raise standards.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory, but which have some areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' attainment on entry to the school varies but is generally above average. In the 2008 Key Stage 2 tests, standards were above average in English and science, with pupils doing less well in mathematics. By the end of Year 8, standards continue to be above national averages. Pupils perform less well in mathematics, due in part to some non-specialist teaching.

During the four years they spend at the school, pupils make satisfactory progress overall with a growing number making good progress. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar progress. However, those with a statement of special educational needs make good progress because of the additional and focused support they receive. Since the last inspection, improved subject leadership and the regular and systematic monitoring of the performance of pupils has meant that by the time they leave school, pupils make good progress in English and science. The school recognises that the teaching of mathematics remains an area for further development.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development and well-being and pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. Pupils' responses in assemblies and elsewhere show them to be reflective and thoughtful, particularly when supporting each other. Social relationships are very good. Older pupils particularly are very enthusiastic when asked to help the younger pupils through mentoring.

Pupils enjoy school very much and as a consequence attendance is good. They particularly enjoy the wide range of arts and sports activities which they say keep them healthy and fit. Pupils have good knowledge and understanding of healthy eating and are proud to have played a key role in ensuring that school dinners are healthy. Secure relationships make them feel safe, with an adult to talk to about any problems they may have. Behaviour in class and around school is exemplary. However, the school was disappointed that pupils, during the lesson observations undertaken jointly with inspectors, were a little subdued and the headteacher noted that his pupils are 'normally enthusiastic and engage in lively debates'. A few parents report bullying; however, the pupils disagreed and expressed confidence that if it was to occur it would be dealt with swiftly. Pupils feel fully engaged with the school and contribute to its many developments. For example, they take responsibility as sports leaders, mentors or as school council representatives. Pupils also contribute to the local community, particularly through their links with feeder schools and actively support fundraising, sometimes raising substantial amounts for a charity of their choice. Opportunities to work in teams in lessons, combined with pupils' ability to work well independently, prepare them well for future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Although some teaching is good or outstanding, overall it is satisfactory because of inconsistencies in practice. Good lessons are carefully structured, provide a variety of activities and have a brisk pace. They include opportunities for pupils to learn in different ways which offer suitable challenge. In such lessons, teachers use skilful questioning techniques to encourage pupils to give lively extended responses. Teachers do not always capitalise on pupils' outstanding behaviour by arranging for them to work in groups or to explore topics independently. Where opportunities are given, there is a warm, productive relationship with adults and between pupils. This facilitates independent learning and good collaboration between pupils.

The senior leaders who joined the inspectors in lesson observations were disappointed that teachers did not use the range of strategies that the school has been working on to improve teaching, which it has judged to be consistently good. This included support staff who were not always used effectively. Where teachers do work closely with support staff, pupils of all abilities benefit significantly.

The school has rightly prioritised the effective use of assessment information by teachers to inform their planning to meet the needs of individual pupils. Some staff provide clear feedback which tells pupils exactly what they need to do to improve, but most marking and oral comments do not, leaving many pupils unclear. Questioning does not always engage both boys and girls, so girls remain too passive in some lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad and balanced and develops pupils' interests because of the school's personalised approach. Provision for literacy and numeracy across the curriculum is satisfactory, but is improving. This is partly because these subjects have been hardest to teach for non-specialist staff. The school is rightly working intensively to improve this and there is some evidence of improvements, particularly in English and science where standards are high. Pupils benefit from the school's good emphasis on developing their information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Pupils use these skills effectively throughout the curriculum.

The school's emphasis on personal and social development, including pupil's social moral, spiritual and cultural development is enhanced by the impressive range of extra-curricular activities attended by over 90% of the pupils. These and other activities, for example, music, dance and drama generate self-confidence and good interdependence as well as contributing to pupils' already impressive behaviour and attitudes.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school promotes good care, guidance and support through its inclusive environment. The pastoral care is very effective because staff know their pupils well and there are good welfare systems in place to ensure that pupils are supported appropriately. The school has good links with outside agencies, which they use effectively to ensure that their pupils get the best service that is available.

Safeguarding procedures are robust and are reinforced by a well run system of risk assessments. Pupils say they feel safe. Parents have confidence in the school's systems and trust staff to deal properly and effectively with any problems. Health and safety procedures are fully adhered to.

The tracking of pupils' progress is regular. Pupils are provided with targets for improving their work, which are beginning to have an impact, particularly in Years 5 and 6. However, there are still too many lessons where teachers do not use the assessment information provided to plan their lessons to meet the needs of different groups.

The close links forged with feeder schools mean that pupils are well prepared for entry to school and settle quickly. Similar links with the upper school ensure that pupils are well prepared for moving onto the next stage of their education.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher leads with purpose and has created a structure that empowers managers to take greater responsibility and play a more active role in the leadership and management of the school. Although most have responded well to these enhanced responsibilities, not everyone has yet embraced them with the same level of enthusiasm. Similarly, on occasion there is some resistance to the pace of change.

The headteacher, with his team, has prioritised actions appropriately to raise standards and improve teaching. Many new systems to support staff have been established and are beginning to have an impact on both the role they play in the life of the school and their teaching. Core subject leadership has improved. However, the school recognises that there is still some work to do to ensure that monitoring and evaluation of teaching focuses on how well pupils learn.

The school has good links with parents and other local schools. The vast majority of parents report that communication with the school is good and that the headteacher has made a big difference. As one parent wrote, 'There is a healthy buzz about the school. Parents want to send their children here'. In this and other ways, the school promotes good local community cohesion, a fact much appreciated by parents. The national and international dimensions of community cohesion are adequate but remain areas for development.

Governance is good. The chair of governors is a regular visitor to the school and holds the headteacher to account at all levels. The governors actively support the school and have ensured that financial management remains good. Governors have taken the very positive step of joining 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 ICT facilities. Curricular improvements are already evident in mathematics, modern foreign languages and the performing arts.

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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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

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?	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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
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	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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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	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

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

20 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Margaret Beaufort Middle School, Bedford, MK44 1DR

Thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave me and the other inspectors when we visited your school recently. We thoroughly enjoyed speaking with you, looking at your work and watching you learn. You told us that you enjoyed coming to school and that you particularly enjoyed the impressive range of extra curricular activities which most of you regularly attend. We would particularly like to thank the school council for giving up their lunchtime to speak with us. We were impressed with the contribution you make to the school.

We found your behaviour and attitudes to be exemplary and your attendance to be good. Staff really care for you and make sure that you are safe. You get a lot of leadership opportunities, which you told us you enjoy and to which you respond with enthusiasm, particularly as mentors. This helps develop your confidence and self-esteem. We were, however, disappointed that you were not very talkative in your lessons. We were looking forward to hearing and seeing you debate with teachers and other pupils in your class. Please thank your parents for the time they gave to our parent questionnaire.

In order to make your school even better, your headteacher and senior staff have been asked to:

- improve teaching and learning so that they are at least consistently good and enable the pace of pupils' progress, particularly in Years 5 and 6 to be faster
- make sure that staff match work closely to the needs of pupils of differing abilities and provide specific information to tell you how you can make further progress
- ensure that managers evaluate the impact of the quality of teaching and learning on pupils' achievement and progress to help raise standards.

Yours faithfully

Rashida Sharif

Her Majesty's Inspector