

Westfield Middle School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 109666 |
| Local Authority | Bedford Borough |
| Inspection number | 325000 |
| Inspection dates | 17–18 June 2009 |
| Reporting inspector | Ian Middleton HMI |

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

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| Type of school | Middle deemed secondary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 9–14 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 329 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Cllr Gordon Colling |
| Headteacher | Miss Karen Jackson |
| Date of previous school inspection | 21 March 2006 |
| School address | Chester Road Bedford Bedfordshire MK40 4HW |
| Telephone number | 01234267353 |
| Fax number | 01234347907 |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Westfield Middle School serves the Queen's Park area of Bedford. The majority of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and a high proportion speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The school has Sportsmark, Eco Schools, Basic Skills Quality Mark and Healthy Schools awards. The school recently achieved specialist sports college status. It is part of a Full Service Extended School jointly with its main feeder and upper schools. A summer playscheme runs on the school site. It is not managed by the school and is inspected separately.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Westfield Middle School provides a good quality of education for pupils of all abilities and backgrounds. Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The school's improvement in almost all aspects of its work is due to the commitment and effective partnership work of all who contribute to the school community; teachers and support staff, pupils, parents and governors. However, the busy pace and clear focus of improvements are driven by strong and determined leadership and conscientious management by the headteacher and deputy headteacher who exemplify the qualities they expect of others. Overall, leadership, management and capacity to improve are now good, leading to some outstanding features emerging at the school.

Pupils make good progress. Whilst overall standards are below average, pupils narrow the gap between the standards they achieve whilst at Westfield and schools nationally. Achievement significantly and consistently better than schools working in similar contexts is underpinned by pupils' success in developing and applying their literacy skills, particularly the acquisition of English as an additional language. Improved tracking of pupils' progress and their wider achievements in different subjects show that many are capable of reaching high standards. Boys and girls enjoy school life, particularly the teaching that promotes participation and builds personable relationships with adults and other pupils. Whilst not all pupils initiate questions or demonstrate their ability to lead others in lessons, both boys and girls respond confidently to questions and challenges set by teachers. Strengths in their good personal development and well-being are particularly evident out of lessons through the work of the school council and break-time activities involving different years that contribute to their view that the school is a safe and supportive community.

Teaching and learning are good. In individual subjects teachers monitor pupils' performance regularly and the most effective subject leaders use assessment information well to design different activities and deploy individual support. The school is at an earlier stage in setting targets to overcome barriers across subjects. Information and communication technology is used confidently and, at its best, selectively, to stimulate pupils or deepen their understanding. Some areas of variability remain. Pupils are particularly enthusiastic about learning when the teaching takes account of their interests and makes the purpose clear. However, the relevance of lessons to other subjects or pupils' future lives, including economic well-being, is not always explicit. Curriculum planning supports pupils' progression well, including that between lower and upper schools. Sustained links with the local and global communities contribute to evidence that the school's promotion of community cohesion, including the positive contribution made by the pupils, is exemplary.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards further by identifying strengths and addressing common weaknesses in pupils' overall performance across different subjects.
- Increase the proportion of teaching that makes the purpose clear and actively involves pupils in applying their personal development to their learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those at the early stages of language acquisition, make good progress from low starting points. Whilst test results in

Year 6 and Year 8 remain below national averages, the gap is narrower than that when the pupils were tested in their previous schools, in Year 2. Between 2006 and 2008, boys and girls made significantly better progress than pupils in other schools with similar contexts, consistently in mathematics and in all subjects in the last two years. The school's current assessment data shows that different groups of pupils continue to make good progress in achieving suitably challenging targets across their subjects, including English, mathematics and science. However, in subjects that involve physical or practical skills some pupils show that they are capable of achieving above average standards early on. For example, some pupils flourish in aspects of physical education (PE), the arts and history. Underpinning the overall success of many pupils is their good progress in developing and applying their literacy skills, particularly the acquisition of English as an additional language.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils contribute positively to the views of others that school is safe and supportive. Whilst many are competitive, they celebrate the achievements of others warmly. Boys and girls cooperate well and develop good relationships with other pupils, teachers and support staff. A small minority of parents expressed the view that the behaviour of some individuals limits the progress of others but in the lessons observed by inspectors all pupils behaved well and displayed positive attitudes to learning. Their attitudes and attendance are good overall, but are even better as pupils progress through the school and when the small but significant number of persistent absentees attend school. Many pupils make the most of extra-curricular activities and understand that participating in initiatives such as 'Eco club' contributes to their enjoyment and achievement. High levels of involvement in physical activities in between lessons and their choice of meals indicate that pupils apply their awareness of healthy lifestyles.

Pupils mirror the particularly enthusiastic and characterful teaching. Girls express their confidence more openly in lessons where boys and girls are taught separately. However, different groups of pupils contribute equally well to the school council, which is particularly proud of its involvement in the school's improvement through staff appointments. Not all pupils make the most of opportunities in lessons to develop or apply their personal skills, for example by leading the learning of other pupils. Links between their learning in lessons and future economic well-being are not always understood. Nevertheless, in the best lessons pupils show initiative and balance their independence with enquiry. Whilst improving pupils' literacy and numeracy skills remain an important priority, their cooperation, collaboration and involvement in assessment and target setting, show that pupils develop other skills also valued in the workplace.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good, contributing to pupils' good progress in lessons and across their time at the school. Monitoring and evaluating pupils' progress is now a consistent feature of teaching, an improvement since the last inspection. Information is used well to group pupils and target support. Teaching assistants make a significant impact on pupils who find learning difficult. Teachers explain technical language well, but a more variable aspect overall is teachers' consolidation of pupils' understanding, for example by questioning quieter pupils or engaging them in presenting parts of the lesson. Less effective lessons are dominated by the teacher

and are less practical. Pupils' organisation of group activities at lunchtimes shows what many are capable of.

Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and know the pupils well. Excellent relationships are built by teachers who are enthusiastic about making the most of pupils' personalities and interests. For example, in an English lesson pupils were stimulated by computer imagery that took them on an imaginary journey to a fantasy world. Close observation of pupils' reactions by the teacher led to well-timed pauses and probing questions aimed at maximising the learning of all. Teachers observed were good at managing group work and paired discussion, and the most confident improvised well when teaching the whole class. Objectives for lessons are generally clear, but the most effective teachers also explain the purpose of the lesson in relation to pupils' everyday lives. For example, in a mathematics lesson, the use of local bus timetables helped pupils understand the relevance of calculation.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The quality of the curriculum is good. The school provides a breadth of opportunities for all learners, including the gifted and talented and those with learning difficulties, to progress and perform well. The enrichment centre provides particular pupils with additional challenge appropriate to their needs. Visits and visitors add enrichment to the experiences of all pupils. Continuity of the curriculum is promoted effectively through collaborative work with lower and upper schools, for example a recent mathematics challenge involving Year 8 and Year 4 pupils. The recent achievement of specialist sports college status with the upper school is building on strong links in the PE curriculum and the wide range of sporting extra-curricular activities, for which there is a high take up, and very good promotion of healthy lifestyles. However, whilst Years 5 and 6 benefit from some specialist teaching and resources, there is scope to improve the coherence of the curriculum by strengthening links between subjects in all years. An area of strength to build on is literacy across the curriculum which is explicitly developed in many subjects. For example, content that relates to pupils' interests or promotes their curiosity, such as in global issues through 'Eco' club, stimulates their personal and academic growth.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Outstanding care, guidance and support contributes to the acceleration in pupils' progress and personal development and well-being, which are now both good. The pastoral care of the pupils is particularly strong. All requirements for child protection are in place and suitable risk assessments are undertaken. There are robust systems for identifying and supporting vulnerable pupils. Very few incidents of bullying or racism are reported and pupils know that any issues are dealt with quickly and fairly. Liaison with parents has strengthened and partnerships now reinforce the work of the school and help promote the progress and personal development of the pupils. The support given to pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, pupils with English as an additional language and gifted and talented pupils, ensures that whilst different groups have varying starting points, their progress is consistently good. Lesson plans contain specific information about pupils requiring additional support or challenge. Tracking pupils' progress was a weakness at the last inspection. Whilst some variability in the analysis and use of data remain, regular evaluation of progress now has proven impact on pupils' improvements in subjects. Summaries identifying strengths and weaknesses in each subject are exemplary and provide a good model for development at individual pupil level.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

A strong and focused partnership between the headteacher and deputy headteacher has quickened the pace and impact of improvement. Whilst senior staff demonstrate different but complementary skills, they share high expectations of pupils and the school's role in the community. Their commitment to equality and diversity, working hard but enjoying it too is an example to all. Supported by effective middle managers, senior staff are committed to raising pupils' achievement and personal development, determined to help overcome significant challenges faced by some pupils in and out of school. Effective partnerships with parents and external agencies have strengthened care, guidance and support and its impact on pupils' performance and well-being. Whilst staff are not equally confident about teaching creatively, the school's monitoring and evaluation indicate that good and better teaching has increased and is now common. Inspection evidence supports this view.

Issues raised at the last inspection, including those related to leadership and management, have been addressed through strategies tailored well to the school's context and day-to-day priorities. The school's accurate self-evaluation is clearly focused on outcomes for pupils, is well informed by internal observation, scrutiny and tracking, is challenged by governors and influenced by the views of pupils and parents. However, the school community is also energised by the outward-looking perspective of the headteacher, which, through links with local and international schools, sets no limits on what might be possible at Westfield. Not all aspirations have yet been realised. The personal development of pupils could play an even bigger part in raising standards, which are below the national average. Nevertheless, the good progress across different pupil groups compares well with schools in similar contexts and shows good capacity to build on improvement.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

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| 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 | 2 |

Achievement and standards

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|--|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 2 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 3 |
| 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

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|---|---|
| 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 | 2 |
| 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 | 3 |

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? | 2 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 1 |

Leadership and management

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| 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 | 1 |
| How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 2 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated | 1 |
| How well does the school contribute to community cohesion? | 1 |
| 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 | 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**

19 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Westfield Middle School, Bedford, MK40 4HW

Thank you for welcoming inspectors into your school when we visited recently. We appreciated the opportunity to discuss your school with those of you we met in lessons and at break times. Your views, and those of parents, helped us evaluate the information provided and confirm the view of staff that yours is a good school.

Particular strengths of your school are:

- your headteacher and deputy headteacher have high hopes for you and work hard with teachers, support staff and governors to bring about improvements
- you make good progress in lessons, including pupils who find learning difficult and those who are at the early stages of learning English
- your teachers and support staff are caring, providing excellent guidance and support, including regular information about your progress
- you enjoy opportunities that get you actively involved in lessons, in organising and participating in extra-curricular events and contributing to the school council
- your courses and extra-curricular opportunities offer a good range of experiences and are particularly good at helping you adjust when you move classes or schools
- you and your parents contribute to making the school and locality work well as a community and your links with the worldwide community is a strong feature.

What we have asked the school to do next:

- help you look at areas of particular success or concern across your subjects that could help you raise standards further
- develop more teaching that makes the purpose of learning to your future lives clear, and gets you actively involved by applying your personal skills in lessons.

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your school, I wish you continued enjoyment and success at Westfield Middle School and in your future education and lives.

Yours faithfully

Ian Middleton

Her Majesty's Inspector