

Alameda Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109680
Local Authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	325006
Inspection date	9 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Champak Chauhan 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)	554
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Chris Gill
Headteacher	Mrs Susan Lourensz
Date of previous school inspection	5 July 2006
School address	Station Road Ampthill Bedford Bedfordshire MK45 2QR
Telephone number	01525 750900
Fax number	01525-750901

Age group	9–13
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- why pupils' progress in Years 5 and 6 declined in 2008 and why a few pupils with special educational needs made inadequate progress
- what actions senior leaders are taking to improve provision and outcomes in English
- how the relatively new senior leadership team is working as a cohesive unit and how it is moving the school forward.

The inspector gathered evidence from the school's self-evaluation, achievement and attainment information, observed the school's work, including undertaking a 'learning walk', scrutinised documentation provided by the school, held discussions with senior leaders, a representative group of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and analysed parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Alameda is a relatively large and expanding middle school. Pupils transfer to the school at age nine from three main feeder schools and leave at age 13 to go largely to one upper school. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average. The vast majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds and very few speak English as an additional language. Numbers of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with statements of special educational needs, are well below average. Pupils' attainment on entry is above average. The school achieved the Healthy Schools Award in July 2007 and gained the Sportsmark in October 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Alameda Middle School continues to be a good school. In recent years, pupils have made good progress at Key Stage 2 and attained standards in the national tests that were significantly above average. In 2008, however, pupils' progress dipped and their attainment in English was average. In mathematics and science their attainment at the higher Level 5+ was significantly above average. Current school data indicate that pupils are making at least good progress at Key Stage 2 and they are achieving good standards. This is consistent with the school's provisional national test results for 2009 in which standards, not yet confirmed, in all three subjects have recovered and are significantly above the national averages for 2008. Standards in science at both the expected Level 4 and also at the higher Level 5 are especially good. In Key Stage 3, internal school data indicate that pupils make good progress and that standards in Year 8 in all three subjects are relatively high.

Pupils are achieving well because of the good quality of teaching and learning that they experience. Some of it is outstanding. Lessons are conscientiously planned and the needs of pupils of various abilities are taken into account. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use this well in whole-class questioning to extend the pupils' understanding. Teaching and learning activities are meticulously organised, allowing intensive and productive work in pairs and small groups. Relationships are excellent and there is a good learning environment. Teachers' efficient use of time and their selection of challenging activities lead to a brisk pace in the learning. There is perceptive evaluation of the learning that has occurred, both of the whole class and of small groups. The good quality of teaching takes place within a broad and balanced curriculum, which is enriched by an extensive range of extra-curricular activities, including sports, music, art and drama. A large proportion of pupils regularly participate in these activities.

Pupils enjoy their lessons and value what the teachers do for them. One pupil remarked, 'This is a good school with good facilities and good, welcoming teachers.' They recognise that they are taught well and that the provision that the school makes for them is good. As a result, their attendance rate is high and their punctuality is good. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent. Their participation in an extensive range of extra-curricular sporting activities encourages them to adopt healthier lifestyles. This is complemented by the promotion of healthier eating by the school kitchen and the pupils' awareness of adopting healthier lifestyles. Pupils know of the need to adopt safe practices and they learn about these well, especially in science and personal, social, health and careers education lessons. Pupils feel safe and most say they have not experienced any bullying. In the isolated cases where this has occurred, they say they know which adult or peer mentor to turn to for help and know that appropriate action will be taken. Pupils contribute well to the school community and beyond. They act as prefects and library monitors, organise summer fetes, participate in the school council and raise money for various charities, for example the local Leonard Cheshire homes. Pupils have well-developed skills in literacy, numeracy and in the use of information and communication technology. Their financial capabilities are developed in personal, social, health and careers education. As a result, they are prepared well for their future economic well-being.

The school is a calm, orderly and harmonious community, permeated by a welcoming ethos. Pupils are well cared for. There is good support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and for those who are gifted and talented. All pupils are set challenging targets and their progress is regularly monitored. Appropriate strategies are in place to identify

underachievers and for further action to be taken to help them. Pupils said they found the teachers' marking constructive and it enabled them to improve their work.

The driving force behind the good outcomes for pupils is the rigorous quality of leadership and management. The relatively new headteacher provides strong and dynamic leadership of the school. She is ably supported by the other two senior leaders who are also relatively new to their posts. They work well together and have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The senior leaders are driving forward positive changes to make the school even better. Good systems are in place to ensure that middle leaders are made more accountable for their areas of responsibility. Appropriate action continues to be taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and the tracking of pupils' progress. As a result of these actions, standards are rising even further. Plans are also well under way to enhance the quality of the curriculum. The school promotes pupils' appreciation and understanding of local, national and global communities effectively. Governors have a broad range of knowledge and expertise which is of considerable benefit to the school. The governing body has very good knowledge and understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses through the presentation of written reports by senior leaders, and direct links with different subjects and other aspects of the school. The governing body and senior leaders are forging ahead with many positive changes for the school. As a result, the school has a good capacity to improve even further. At the time of the inspection, safeguarding requirements were being met.

A relatively high number of parents and/or carers responded to the inspection through parents' questionnaires and a large majority overwhelmingly support what the school does for their children. A typical comment was, 'My child has flourished at Alameda and is making good progress'. One parent stated, 'To date, we have had positive experiences with the school and feel they have my son's well-being at heart', while another said that there was an 'excellent level of pastoral care from the form tutor right through to the headteacher.' A few parents, however, expressed concerns about the school not seeking their views or of their children, while others had some concerns about behaviour and/or their child not making good progress. Senior leaders and governors are aware of these concerns and are addressing them.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' progress and standards in English, especially for the more able

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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?	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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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	2

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?	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	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	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**

10 July 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Alameda Middle School, Ampthill, MK45 2QR

Thank you for welcoming me to Alameda during its recent inspection; I enjoyed speaking with many of you. I would like to summarise below what I thought about your school.

As some of you told me, Alameda is a good school and I agree with you.

Your recent standards in the Year 6 national tests in English, mathematics and science have been much higher than those achieved in the past by other pupils in the country. However, results in English fell last year. The results for this year seem much better in all three subjects. Those of you in Years 7 and 8 make good progress and you are achieving really good standards.

Your behaviour is outstanding. You are polite and have excellent attitudes to your work. The school is calm and orderly, and you are welcoming. Your teachers teach you well and this helps you to make good progress. You are offered a good range of subjects and learning experiences. Many of you participate in after-school clubs and other extra-curricular activities.

Your headteacher and others senior leaders manage the school well. They and the governors are constantly looking at ways of improving your learning experiences, and ensuring that you make even better progress and achieve even higher standards.

Most of your parents and/or carers are very supportive of the school and value what the school does for you. Governors are aware of the concerns a few expressed and are tackling them.

Since English is such an important subject, I have asked the school to ensure that your progress and standards in the subject, especially in Key Stage 2, continue to improve.

I wish you all the best for your future.

Champak Chauhan

Her Majesty's Inspector