

Woodland Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109687
Local Authority	Bedfordshire
Inspection number	325007
Inspection dates	21–22 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Clive Kempton 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)	641
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Mandy Wilsmore
Headteacher	Mr Jeff Conquest
Date of previous school inspection	10 December 2007
School address	Malham Close Flitwick Bedfordshire MK45 1NP
Telephone number	01525 750400
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Introduction

When the school was inspected in December 2007 it was judged to require significant improvement. It was asked to:

- improve pupils' achievement in English, particularly in writing
- improve the quality of teaching and learning, ensuring that lesson planning is more effective in promoting key subject skills, and that these are underpinned by specific opportunities for assessment through activities designed to meet the needs of pupils of all levels of ability
- improve the monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum in order to judge its impact on pupils' achievement and to ensure that statutory requirements are met fully.

A monitoring visit was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors six months after the inspection, when it was judged to be making satisfactory progress in addressing these issues. Now, after 13 months, this reinspection of the school was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Woodland is a large middle school that serves a relatively small rural town. Pupils come mainly from three lower schools in the town and the percentage from socially and economically advantaged homes is above the national average. Pupils enter the school with standards that are broadly average. Very few are from minority ethnic backgrounds and the percentage with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. There are two pupils at an early stage of learning to speak English as an additional language. The school is a member of the Redborne Upper School pyramid and holds both the Healthy Schools' award and the Sportsmark awards. The headteacher took up his post in September 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Woodland Middle is a satisfactory and rapidly improving school with many good features. The outcome of the last inspection was to spur the staff on to a determination to improve inadequate provision. They have been successful. Ably led by a good headteacher and senior staff, the school has acted on all the key issues for improvement. It has raised standards in writing; improved the quality and consistency of teaching; monitored and improved the curriculum so that it now meets statutory requirements; and ensured that there are more opportunities for assessment. In accordance with section 13(5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Pupils enter the school with standards that are broadly average, make satisfactory progress as they move through the school, and by the time they leave, attain standards in line with expectations, an improvement since the last inspection. This is why achievement and standards are now judged to be satisfactory. The impressive pupil data collected by the school, and national test results, indicate that standards are improving. In mathematics and science, pupils are already attaining above average standards.

Improved achievement and standards are due to the relentless focus the school has had on improving teaching and learning, which are now judged to be satisfactory. There is now evidence of higher quality teaching in the school. Whilst inconsistencies remain, there is evidence of outstanding as well as good and satisfactory teaching. Teachers have developed good skills in lesson planning and providing a range of activities in lessons. However, the learning in some of these planned activities is still not sufficiently exciting, interesting or challenging, which is why achievement and standards are not yet as good as they potentially could be. A lot of work by the senior team has ensured that the curriculum is now satisfactory.

The personal development and well-being of pupils and the care, guidance and support they receive have also improved and both are now good. The Values Programme is contributing to the strong ethos in the school, and fostering pupils' spiritual and moral awareness. Staff care for the pupils and want them to succeed. Gifted, talented and vulnerable pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are well-supported. Pupils obviously enjoy school and are very proud to say they come to Woodland Middle, which is why their attendance is good. Some parents were concerned about the behaviour of a minority of pupils, but inspectors found the pupils to be very polite and well-mannered in lessons and around the school. Behaviour is good. This was confirmed by discussions with pupils and parents. Pupils are given many leadership opportunities as they move up the school and the head girl and boy spoke enthusiastically about the way the school had changed over the last year. There are some good opportunities for pupils to give something back to the community, such as their impressive fund-raising for charity. They learn to empathise with others less fortunate than themselves. For example, a link with the local church resulted in one thousand T-shirts being sent to Addis Ababa. The pupils were thrilled to receive photographs and a video back of their shirts being worn.

None of this could happen without good leadership. The headteacher has successfully pulled the school community together in his determination to raise standards. The senior team and middle managers are much more focused on improvement. Leadership and management are now good. Managers at all levels have a good capacity to act on the issues raised by this inspection. Needless to say, there remain things to do. For example, development plans to raise

standards do not have enough measurable criteria to help managers, parents and governors gauge the speed of improvement; and the headteacher's strategy of deploying primary specialists in Year 5 and Year 6 is at the early stages of development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that learning activities in all lessons are more exciting, practical and challenging.
- Ensure that development planning has clear and measurable success criteria and milestones.
- Ensure the strategy of using primary specialists in Year 5 and Year 6 is effectively developed.

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

In the 2008 Key Stage 2 tests, standards were broadly average in English, mathematics and science. This constitutes an improvement since the previous inspection and represents satisfactory achievement for these pupils. The percentage of pupils reaching the higher Level 5 improved in all three subjects, although it was just below the national average in English, due to weaknesses in writing. Pupils are on track to reach similar standards and make satisfactory progress in 2009 but with significant increases in the percentage of pupils reaching the higher Level 5. While writing remains the relatively weaker area, pupils are benefiting from a higher proportion of good teaching. Consequently, recently improved achievement is set to continue.

In Key Stage 3, standards in English are similar to national expectations and progress is satisfactory. By the end of Year 8, attainment is above national expectations in mathematics and science and therefore progress is good in these subjects. Slower progress in English is because the scheme of work has only recently been introduced, and planning is not as established as in mathematics and science. Pupils produce good practical work in art and design technology. The school's current data indicates that pupils are on track to reach higher standards in English in 2009. Attainment in science is set to improve too, and previous strengths in mathematics maintained. Improvements in writing are already having a positive impact in other subjects, such as history.

During their four years at the school, pupils make satisfactory progress overall. Pupils who find learning difficult make similar progress to their peers, with examples of individual pupils making good progress. Since the last inspection, improved subject leadership, a much improved scheme of work for English, and greater use of information generated by impressive systems that track each pupil's progress, have all begun to have a positive impact on standards.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are well prepared for their future, have well developed social and other skills, have good attitudes to their work, and make a good contribution to the community through their ready acceptance of responsibility. Pupils are courteous and polite, and they really enjoy school. One pupil commented, 'this school is fantastic, because it has got lots of things to do'.

Behaviour is good, both during lessons and outside during lunch and play breaks. Pupils confirmed that behaviour has 'definitely improved', citing the Values Programme, the

anti-bullying measures, the prefect and buddies systems among others. They feel safe and secure in school. The Values Programme has been successful in developing a spiritual aspect of education too, where pupils learn, for example, how hope can lead to high aspirations and improved confidence to achieve.

Pupils are proud of their school, feel that it is improving, and enjoy being there, as seen particularly in their good attendance, which is above the national average. Pupils have a good understanding of how to live healthy lives, and they benefit from the good facilities for sport and exercise. All of these strengths are exemplified in pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

There has been a marked improvement in the quality of teaching and learning and they are now satisfactory overall. Lessons observed during the inspection ranged from satisfactory to outstanding. Teachers are beginning to share good practice and this has had a positive impact on the quality of teaching. Better teaching is beginning to raise standards. Subject leaders regularly monitor the quality of lesson planning and there is a level of collaboration which ensures a more uniform and thorough approach. Where lessons are good, there is secure classroom management, well-established relationships between teachers and pupils and a positive atmosphere. Teachers display good subject knowledge and there are good examples of active learning. However, some lessons are lacking in challenge, interest or excitement and as a result, some pupils lose focus. Appropriate assessment strategies are used consistently that encourage pupils to become independent learners. The majority of pupils know how well they are progressing and what they need to do to improve. However, learning objectives are not always suitably challenging and not always expressed in pupil friendly language.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory, with a number of good elements. It is now well suited to the needs of most pupils. The headteacher recognises the value of deploying primary specialists to ensure that the Key Stage 2 curriculum is delivered effectively, with greater links between subjects. However, this initiative is at an early stage of development to have had a significant impact. Adjustments to the humanities curriculum has allowed more time to be given to both art and drama to offer a well-balanced provision in all years. A dedicated space has been allotted to drama, and music facilities are in the process of being refurbished to further enhance the learning experience. Provision across all subjects is closely monitored by subject leaders. Careful mapping has ensured that National Curriculum requirements are met. The new provision for literacy is beginning to have an impact on learning. Citizenship is firmly embedded and this has added to the provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There is a dedicated teacher to support the development of gifted and talented pupils and a rolling programme of activities and events to support and develop their interests. A wide range of extra-curricular activities, including numerous sports and musical events, are well attended. There are specific clubs to support student needs, including a games session to help identified pupils make friends and develop social skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support provided for pupils promote a good inclusive environment. These are having a noticeable impact on improvements in pupils' personal development and achievement. The pastoral care of pupils is good. Staff know the pupils well and are committed to their welfare. Good systems are in place to ensure that all pupils in need of additional support are catered for appropriately.

Safeguarding procedures are robust, and are reinforced by a well run system of risk assessment. Pupils say they feel safe. They trust the staff to deal properly and effectively with problems, and they have confidence in academic and pastoral support systems. Health and safety procedures are adhered to.

Pupils are well supported in their learning. They are provided with challenging targets for improving their work in literacy and numeracy, and pupils say that they are helped to understand how to improve their work.

The close links forged with feeder schools mean that pupils are well prepared for entry to school and settle quickly. The tracking of their progress is regular and thorough, and additional strategies are in place to support those who are underachieving. Pupils willingly ask for help, because they know that staff respect their views and ideas.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management have improved since the last inspection and are now judged to be good. Leaders and managers at all levels have worked very hard and responded to the headteacher's challenges over the last year to raise standards.

New teaching staff and key management appointments have added to the renewed energy and excitement of managers. All are now much more accountable for standards. There is now more subject and whole school self-evaluation. Appropriate development priorities result from self-evaluation, although currently there are insufficient measurable success criteria in planning documents or quantifiable milestones for managers to measure the success of their actions.

The headteacher leads with vision and purpose and has empowered other leaders. All feel they have a part to play. He has prioritised actions appropriately to raise standards in writing and improve teaching. Outside agencies such as the local authority, have been used well to support developments. Many new systems to support teachers have been established, such as the PROWL activity, where pairs of teachers have the opportunity to observe other teachers to learn from their good practice. Community cohesion is currently satisfactory. There is a strong sense of identity within the school and its local community, but there is still work to do to develop pupils' understanding of the wider UK community.

Governance is good. The chair of governors is a regular visitor in school and holds the headteacher to account for standards attained. The strong governing body actively supports the school. Outside agencies appreciate the commitment of the staff and the courtesy of pupils. The vast majority of parents are very supportive of the school. They report that communication with the school is good and that the new headteacher has made a big difference. They feel

they can come into school when they have a concern. One said of the school, 'There is a healthy buzz about the school now. Parents want to send their children here'.

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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	3
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?	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	2
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?	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?	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?	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	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**

23 January 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Woodland Middle School, Flitwick MK45 1NP

Thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave me and the other inspectors when we visited your school earlier this term. We enjoyed talking to you, looking at your work and watching you learn. I thought you would like to know the outcome of the inspection, and what the school could do to get even better.

I think that your school has improved a lot since the last time the inspectors visited. It is now satisfactory with lots of good bits. Inspectors will not have to visit as frequently any more to check if everything is OK. Your writing work has improved and your test results are getting better every year. All of this has happened because you have a good headteacher who has managed to get everyone working together to help you.

Your behaviour is good and your attendance is good too. The teachers work really hard for you and have tried to make lessons more interesting, but I still think they could be even more exciting, stimulating and challenging. Staff really care for you and make sure that any of you who need extra help get good support. You get lots of leadership opportunities as you move up the school to be prefects, buddies and monitors. This helps develop your confidence and self-esteem. I think your monthly focus on values is really good and your parents think so too.

You are raising lots of money for less fortunate children in other countries. I thought your T-shirt appeal was very successful in providing one thousand shirts for villagers in Addis Ababa.

In order to make your school even better, I have suggested to your headteacher and senior staff that they do the following things.

- Make activities in lessons more exciting, practical and challenging.
- Make sure that school planning for the future has clear and measurable success criteria.
- Make sure that Year 5 and Year 6 have the opportunity to spend more time with one teacher who teaches them lots of different subjects.

Yours faithfully

Clive Kempton

Her Majesty's Inspector