

# Lincroft Middle School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	109708
<b>Local Authority</b>	Bedford Borough
<b>Inspection number</b>	325014
<b>Inspection dates</b>	18–19 March 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Mark Sims HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Middle deemed secondary
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	9–13
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	760
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr M Carr
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr M Lavelle
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	5 July 2006
<b>School address</b>	Station Road Oakley Bedford Bedfordshire MK43 7RE
<b>Telephone number</b>	01234 822147
<b>Fax number</b>	01234 825923

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<b>Age group</b>	9–13
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three 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. Three of the four Trust members, Lincroft Middle School, Harrold Priory Middle School and Sharnbrook Upper 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

Lincroft is smaller than the average-sized secondary school and is set in rural North Bedfordshire. It has had specialist status in the performing arts since 2008. The percentage of students entitled to free school meals is well below the national average. The proportions of minority ethnic students and students for whom English is an additional language are also very small. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average, but the percentage of those with a statement of educational needs is high. The school has a specialist unit for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD).

The school has received many awards including Artsmark Gold, Investors in People, Sportsmark and Healthy Schools status. The school has specialist status in performing arts, which it shares with the upper school in the trust. At the time of the inspection, the headteacher was on secondment and the deputy headteacher was the acting headteacher.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

Lincroft is an outstanding school which has made significant improvements since its last inspection. Under the inspirational leadership of the headteacher and acting headteacher, the school has gone from strength to strength. Its excellent capacity to improve further has been demonstrated by the senior leaders who have assumed additional leadership responsibilities during the headteacher's secondment and continued the success of the school.

Pupils get off to a flying start when they join Lincroft at the beginning of Year 5. The proportion of students achieving the higher levels in writing, mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 2 is very high. The school builds upon these high standards so that by the time pupils leave at the end of Year 8, they have reached a level that is well above the national average. Their exceptional rate of progress is such that in the most recent test results, pupils attained levels at the end of Year 8 in English, mathematics and science that are exceptionally high when compared to pupils in Year 9 nationally. No group of pupils is left behind. The ASD unit in the school demonstrates the school's strong commitment to inclusion. The pupils in this unit also make exceptional progress.

The outstanding outcomes in the school are achieved by a combination of factors, not least the senior leaders' relentless focus on achievement and their detailed tracking and monitoring of the performance of every pupil. This information is regularly communicated to pupils so that they know exactly how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further. Pupils receive exceptionally high levels of care, guidance and support during their time at Lincroft. They are able to learn in an environment largely free of any bullying or harassment. If anything does happen they have such good relationships with the staff, and with each other, that they always feel confident that they have someone to whom they can turn.

The quality of teaching and learning is consistently effective. Highly skilled teachers are often called upon to teach more than one subject, which they do successfully. There are occasional gaps in their subject knowledge, however. Teachers have very high expectations of pupils in lessons and at the same time bring in a strong element of fun and enjoyment in lessons that make pupils want to come to school. It is no wonder that more than one parent commented on how much their children enjoy school. As one said, 'My child always wants to go to school. She has got a ready smile when going to school'. Another parent summed up the feelings of many parents and their children by saying, 'My son has never been happier at school than at Lincroft and is making excellent progress'. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes in school are of a very high standard and they thrive on the opportunities they are given to take responsibility, make choices and help others. The school's specialism in performing arts enables pupils to make a significant contribution to the local community through performances. Overall their personal development and well-being are outstanding.

Pupils benefit from an excellent curriculum that ensures they have a wide range of lessons, with some subjects that they can choose as options. There are also many extra curricular activities before and after school, particularly in performing arts and sport and also Latin. This ensures that pupils from all backgrounds and abilities are catered for.

Leaders and managers at all levels are fully engaged in monitoring and challenging pupils to do as well as they can but the school recognises that there is room for enhancing the role of subject leaders. Governors are particularly well informed and bring considerable experience and expertise to support and challenge the work of the school.

## What the school should do to improve further

- Develop further the role of subject leaders in monitoring the quality of teaching.
- Ensure all staff are deployed as efficiently as possible to make best use of their subject specialist experience.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 1

Pupils' attainment on entry at the start of Year 5 is above the national average. Through working closely with the lower schools to assess pupils' standards at the end of Year 4, Lincroft has a secure knowledge of individual pupils' starting points. Their progress is closely monitored throughout the school. By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils have made good progress. Attainment at the end of Year 6 is above the national averages in English, mathematics and science. In the most recent Key Stage 2 tests the proportion of students achieving the highest possible level in writing, mathematics and science significantly increased and is well above the level found in most schools. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected level for their age in English dipped slightly as a result of some staffing disruption, but is still above the national average.

In their most recent Key Stage 3 tests, pupils were entered one year early at the end of Year 8. Their attainment in the core subjects was significantly above average when compared to the national performance of Year 9 pupils. This represents outstanding progress. By the time pupils leave Lincroft their standards are very high and their overall level of achievement is excellent. There are no significant variations in the progress of different groups of pupils. Pupils in the ASD unit make outstanding progress.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 1

Pupils say they enjoy school so much because their teachers make learning interesting and because they feel extremely well cared for. Pupils say that the staff deal very quickly with rare incidents of bullying. Little time is wasted in lessons as pupils are so keen to learn, settle quickly to tasks and work exceptionally well, either independently or in groups. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to lead a healthy life and the numbers who take up after school sports and healthy meals confirm that they put this knowledge into practice. They are very well behaved, thoughtful, polite, confident and articulate. They treat all in the school community as equals. Their attendance is very good.

Pupils are also involved in a range of community projects through close links with the parish council. They have lobbied their Member of Parliament on issues close to their heart, giving them an insight into how democracy works. Within school, pupils have abundant opportunities to take responsibility through the wide range of roles, including school and ECO councils, as house captains and peer counsellors. They also have the opportunity to work with younger pupils in the neighbouring lower schools. The school places a strong focus on knowing each individual and giving them time to reflect on their own feelings and emotions. This results in exceptional spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and high levels of self esteem among pupils. They are very well placed to move on to the next phase of their education.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 1

Almost all the teaching within the school is at least good and much of it outstanding. As a result pupils' learning is excellent. This reflects the efforts of the highly skilled and knowledgeable staff and the very good support pupils receive, especially those who find learning difficult. In the best lessons pace and challenge combine with varied and often creative activities to ensure that pupils' needs are well met. Teachers build very well upon pupils' willingness to learn and very good progress is made in lessons, often through animated but well focused group work. Pupils are encouraged to assess their own and others' work, which helps build their confidence and extends their learning.

In one outstanding lesson, pupils worked very well together to solve a complex mathematical problem and then explained in detail how they had reached their conclusions to the rest of the class. High quality problem solving, team work and presentation skills were demonstrated throughout and pupils clearly enjoyed the demands made of them. There is a very small proportion of satisfactory teaching where the pace of challenge is slower and occasional gaps in subject knowledge reduces the rate of pupils' progress, but the school is aware of this and has already put additional support in place.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 1

The curriculum ensures continuity with the Upper School in the Trust. It is extremely effective in personalising learning to meet the needs of pupils. The early morning 'Lesson A' and a wide range of extra curricular activities encourage all pupils and those with particular talents to excel. The impact of the specialist school status on the curriculum is very positive. The school offers enriching opportunities, such as visiting speakers and theatre groups as well as a wider choice of performing arts subjects taught by specialists and supported from sixth form students from the Upper School.

Option choices in Years 7 and 8 allow pupils to specialise in languages and performing arts whilst offering extra English and mathematics to those who need it. Pupils have a wide range of opportunities to use information and communication technology in their learning. Theme weeks supplement the curriculum and these are supported by a good range of other activities, productions and trips. Pupils with ASD have their needs particularly well met by an appropriate curriculum and are given excellent support when introduced to mainstream lessons.

### Care, guidance and support

#### Grade: 1

There is a very high level of commitment in caring for all students. Health and safety is rigorously promoted and safeguarding procedures are robust. There are appropriate strategies to follow up the very small levels of pupil absence. The school communicates effectively with parents and there are excellent links with other agencies. The level of guidance and support is excellent. Vulnerable students including those with personal and bereavement issues are particularly well supported by a dedicated and experienced school counsellor. Peer mentors also offer support to younger pupils.

Pupils are encouraged to succeed. Nearly all of them know their challenging targets and what they need to do to improve and their performance is tracked carefully. Students with learning difficulties and those with ASD benefit from excellent support tailored to their needs and, consequently, make excellent progress. Close partnerships between all the schools in the Trust ensure that transition arrangements run smoothly for pupils.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 1**

The headteacher has a dynamic vision for the future of the school and an entrepreneurial flair that has helped the school move further forward since the last inspection. He is supported by highly talented staff and a very effective acting headteacher who has, like others, taken on additional responsibilities during his secondment. Extensive self evaluation structures are in place, which involve pupils in commenting upon the quality of school life. The school knows how well it is performing at any time and what it needs to do to make further progress or respond to any needs as they arise. Robust tracking of pupil progress informs detailed planning for improvement at subject and whole school level, although the role of subject leaders in monitoring the quality of learning in lessons is less well developed.

Community cohesion is outstanding. Pupils take great pride in supporting the school community and links with local, national and international partners are very strong. The impact of this upon pupils' personal development is significant, with pupils involved in national and overseas sporting and creative projects. Teachers also benefit from professional links with schools in several countries. The governors have a very good understanding of the strengths and areas for development within the school and hold it to account rigorously.

The governors have also taken the very positive step, along with governors from all the local schools, of establishing the North Bedfordshire Schools Trust, encompassing 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 English and across the Trust in the performing arts, through the school's recently acquired specialist status, in mathematics and modern foreign languages.

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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?	1
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	1

**Achievement and standards**

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

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<sup>1</sup>Grade 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

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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	1
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	1

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	1
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?	1

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	1
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	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
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	1
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 Lincroft Middle School, Oakley, MK43 7RE

You will know that we recently came to inspect your school. Thank you very much to those of you who took time to speak to us to tell us what you think about Lincroft.

We agree with you that you go to a fantastic school. That is why we have judged its overall effectiveness as outstanding. Your headteacher, supported very well by all the leaders in the school, is making sure you all do as well as you can so that by the time you leave at the end of Year 8 your test results in English, mathematics and science are very high. You are kept very well informed about how well you are doing and how you could improve further in your work and you are very good at assessing your own and others' work. Those of you with additional needs are also doing very well. Your teachers make sure that nearly all the lessons are of a very high quality but are also fun and enjoyable.

You have told us how you feel safe and secure in school and well looked after. You get on with each other and with all the adults in the school and your behaviour is very good. The curriculum provides you with a wide range of opportunities, particularly in sports and the performing arts, which you take up enthusiastically. You also do much to contribute to the local community through performances and fund raising activities. You should be very proud of your contribution to the school.

There are just a couple of things we have suggested which we think will help the school go on to get even better. Firstly, to develop further opportunities for the subject leaders to monitor teaching in lessons and, secondly, to make sure the school always makes the best use of teachers' subject skills when timetabling lessons.

Can I take this opportunity to thank you for your warm welcome and wish you every success in your future.

Mark Sims

Her Majesty's Inspector