

Droitwich, Witton Middle School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 116779 |
| Local Authority | Worcestershire |
| Inspection number | 326445 |
| Inspection dates | 1–2 July 2009 |
| Reporting inspector | Marion Thompson |

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 primary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 9–12 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 535 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Judith Holloway |
| Headteacher | David Coll |
| Date of previous school inspection | 4 May 2006 |
| School address | Old Coach Road Droitwich Spa WR9 8BD |
| Telephone number | 01905 773362 |
| Fax number | 01905 795474 |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large school where the majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. Very few pupils are at the early stages of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. The school has been awarded the Artsmark (Silver) and Activemark and has Healthy Schools and Eco-Schools status. The school has suffered from staffing difficulties during in the last year which have now been mainly resolved for the next academic year.

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: 3

This is a satisfactory school. It is improving slowly but steadily over the last academic year. The curriculum, pupils' personal development and pastoral care are good. A large number of parents responded to the Ofsted questionnaire and the vast majority are highly supportive of all aspects of the school's work. Parents particularly appreciate the sensitive care provided by staff, which enables their children to enjoy school and behave well. It has also resulted in a sharp decrease in persistent absenteeism so that attendance is now broadly average. Typical comments include, 'My son leaves, always looking forward to the day ahead', and 'We are impressed with the care and professionalism in this supportive and nurturing environment.' Because the school values their contributions, pupils act responsibly and safely. They take seriously their wide range of responsibilities, such as organising activities for other pupils in the playground. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

By the end of Year 7, pupils reach broadly average standards. Reading is an area of particular strength and by the time they leave, most pupils read fluently and with good expression. Achievement is satisfactory overall. However, the rate of progress pupils make is uneven and is considerably faster in Years 6 and 7 than in Year 5. Achievement in writing and mathematics, especially for girls, is improving rapidly in Years 6 and 7, because the school has identified and tackled weaker areas well. For example, there has been a successful emphasis on improving punctuation and sentence structure in writing. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress, because support is available when it is needed. Pupils at an early stage of learning English as an additional language make good progress. Teaching is satisfactory overall. An increasing proportion is good and occasionally outstanding. The best lessons present pupils of all abilities with a high level of challenge. However, too frequently, particularly in some lessons in Year 5, the range of needs is not fully met, which limits the progress pupils make. Academic guidance is satisfactory. Pupils usually know what their targets are, but at times are not reminded to focus on them when working. Marking and feedback in class do not consistently provide pupils with specific guidance on how to improve their work and reach their targets.

Pupils benefit from a good, recently introduced curriculum which has a strong focus on the development of skills, for example in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) through theme or topic work. There has not yet been enough time for the full impact to be felt. Accurate assessment and careful monitoring of pupils' progress in writing and mathematics enable the school to make well directed interventions with groups of pupils. Personal development is also promoted well and helps pupils to develop a good understanding of how to stay healthy. There is good uptake of the numerous opportunities for inter-school sports events. Many parents comment on the 'extensive additional activities' and say that the 'sports side is very good'.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher and senior team have continued to keep the school on a steady course during a very difficult year when there have been extremely severe staffing problems. Self-evaluation and planning are sound and have resulted in improvements in key areas, such as the significant reduction in persistent absenteeism and improved achievement in writing and mathematics. This demonstrates that the school has satisfactory capacity to continue to improve. Nevertheless, staffing difficulties have slowed developments in some key areas, such as improving the quality of teaching and the coordination of work in Year 5.

The school makes sound provision for the needs of the school and local community, although pupils' direct experience of the diverse cultures within Britain remains limited. Links with schools abroad are stronger and promote a good understanding of ecological issues. Sound basic skills and good experience of working in a range of groupings prepare pupils satisfactorily for the future.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the rate of pupils' progress, especially in Year 5, by ensuring that teaching is consistently good and meets the range of pupils' needs within the class.
- Ensure that pupils are encouraged to think about their targets when learning and that marking and feedback in class provide specific guidance on how to improve their work.

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

Attainment on entry is broadly average in Year 5 but lower in writing. By the time they leave in Year 7, standards are broadly average. Pupils make good progress in Years 6 and 7, because of effective teaching. Achievement in mathematics and writing, previously areas identified by the school as in need of improvement, is now much more rapid because of the effective strategies the school has put in place. Problem solving has been improved in some imaginative ways, for example linking it to working out personal financial problems. This also prepares pupils well for their futures. However, progress is much slower in Year 5 in English, mathematics and science, because the quality of teaching is uneven. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress overall, again making much quicker and sustained progress in Years 6 and 7 than in Year 5. The achievement of girls is improving, because of the range of strategies adopted by the school, for example ensuring subject matter engages their interest. Pupils do well in physical education and music partly because of the specialist support from external partnerships.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils display a good awareness of the issues related to personal health. In school, they eat sensibly, exercise regularly and take reasonable precautions to avoid excessive exposure to the sun. They feel safe in school, because bullying is rare and incidents are dealt with swiftly and effectively when they occur. Pupils attend regularly and behaviour and attitudes to learning are good. Pupils enjoy school and particularly appreciate recently introduced project work - as one pupil commented, 'We do learn a lot- definitely!' They make a good contribution to the school and local community, for example older pupils act as mentors to younger children. They show initiative and entrepreneurial skills, through activities such as using 'seed money' to raise substantial sums at the summer fair. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall, with strengths in social and moral development, especially the way in which pupils collaborate and show respect for each other in group activities in class. Pupils' satisfactory skills in literacy and numeracy prepare them soundly for the next stage in their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning, while satisfactory overall, is inconsistent across the school. It is frequently good and occasionally better in lessons in Years 6 and 7, but is more variable in Year 5. Typically, lessons are characterised by good relationships which motivate pupils to learn, and tasks which engage pupils' interests. Management of behaviour is good, which establishes a good atmosphere for learning and enables pupils to enjoy their work. Good opportunities are provided for collaborative work and questions are effectively targeted to ensure all pupils are involved. However, in a number of lessons, activities are not well enough matched to the range of pupils' needs, which limits the progress they make. Marking and feedback in class value pupils' efforts, but too often do not provide pupils with clear guidance on what they need to do to improve their work and reach their targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets pupils' personal development needs well. It is enhanced by good partnership arrangements, for example links with a local specialist sports college improve provision in physical education. Improvements in the planning of the curriculum are leading to better progress for many pupils, though these have yet to make a full impact. The school is moving away from a subject-based curriculum to one based on the development of skills and this is coming along well. Some innovative strategies are beginning to have a positive impact on improving achievement, for example separate provision for girls and boys in some mathematics classes is resulting in better achievement for girls. Educational visits and visitors to the school provide a good stimulus for pupils' skills and knowledge and the extensive and varied range of extra-curricular activities have a high take up. Planning for pupils to experience the diversity of cultures in contemporary Britain is rather limited.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Effective strategies are in place to ensure that pupils are kept safe and to promote their well-being. All pupils, including those who are vulnerable, are supported well within a safe environment, with good support from a range of external agencies. Good arrangements are in place for transition to high school. Parents, in particular, appreciate the good quality of pastoral care provided by the school. 'We have had so much support. I cannot praise Witton enough,' as one very grateful parent, typical of many, wrote. Robust procedures have reduced the level of persistent absenteeism significantly over the past year. Support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is satisfactory. Academic guidance is satisfactory, but teachers do not always encourage pupils to use their targets to help them improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher, supported effectively by the senior team, is providing a clear sense of direction for the school during a period of turbulence. Realistic targets are set for pupils and in the main

they are achieved. Planning is sound and identifies sensible areas for improvement. The school works hard, and in the main successfully, to promote equality of opportunity, for example by improving the achievement of girls in mathematics. The school has correctly identified a need to expand pupils' experience of the diverse cultures in contemporary Britain. During the current year, the school has been constrained in its effort to drive improvement rapidly, for example in Year 5, by a lack of management capacity, especially at middle management level. Governors provide good support and challenge for the school and use their individual expertise well, for example in supporting innovations in financial management.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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? | 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 | 3 |

Achievement and standards

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| 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

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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 | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 2 |
| The extent to which learners enjoy their education | 2 |
| The attendance of learners | 3 |
| 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 | 3 |

The quality of provision

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|--|---|
| 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? | 3 |

Leadership and management

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 3 |
| 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 | 3 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated | 3 |
| 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**

3 July 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Droitwich, Witton Middle School, Droitwich Spa, WR9 8BD

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. Many of your parents replied to our questionnaire and the vast majority of them are pleased with the education the school provides for you. We know that you are proud of your school, so we are pleased to tell you that the school provides you with a satisfactory education and that some aspects of the school's work, like care, the curriculum and personal development, are good.

You make satisfactory progress in mathematics, English and science, reaching broadly average standards. In writing and mathematics, standards are improving, because the school is making sure you concentrate on the areas you find the most difficult. Teaching and the curriculum are improving. The headteacher and staff are working hard to make sure things carry on improving, even though this has been quite hard this year with so many staffing problems.

The staff take good care of you, so you feel safe and enjoy school, especially project work and the wide range of out of school activities. Because you feel valued, you make a good contribution to the school and local community, for example by raising money at the school fair, acting as mentors to younger pupils and organising games in the playground. We were impressed by the recent rise in attendance, so keep it up! You know a lot about how to stay healthy and active and most of you eat sensibly while in school and protect yourselves from too much sun.

In order to improve things further, we have asked the school to help you make faster progress, especially in Year 5, by making sure that teaching meets the needs of all the pupils in the class. We have also asked teachers to encourage you to bear your targets in mind when you are working and to give you really clear guidance on how to improve your work through discussion in class and marking.

We hope you will continue to enjoy your learning as much as you do now.

Yours faithfully

Marion Thompson Lead Inspector