

Redditch, Birchensale Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116967
Local Authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	326505
Inspection date	12 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Ian Hodgkinson

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)	392
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tracey Gallen
Headteacher	Hilary Dowding
Date of previous school inspection	5 July 2006
School address	Bridley Moor Road Redditch B97 6HT
Telephone number	01527 68430
Fax number	01527 584190

Age group	9–13
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one additional inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- differences in pupils' attainment and progress between English, mathematics and science
- differences in progress between groups of pupils, especially boys and girls
- strengths in pupils' personal development and well-being.

Evidence was gathered through discussion with school senior leaders, subject leaders for English, the special educational needs coordinator and learning mentor, the chair of governors, pupils, and representatives of the school council; together with visits to lessons, scrutiny of pupils' work, and analysis of school policies, records and planning documents. Parents' questionnaire responses were also analysed. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors 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

The school draws its pupils from social and private residential estates close to the centre of Redditch. A very high proportion of pupils – a little less than a third – have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, most of whom have moderate learning difficulties or behavioural, emotional and social needs. A small number of pupils have a statement of special educational needs. There is high mobility into and out of the school at other than the usual times of transfer, linked in part to new arrivals from overseas, particularly Eastern Europe. Around a fifth of the pupils speak English as an additional language, and a small minority of these are beginners in learning the language. Six pupils are in public care. Since the last inspection, the school has won many awards for its work, including Healthy Schools, Artsmark Gold, International Schools, Eco Schools Silver, and Sportsmark Gold. In addition, it has attained a Leading Aspect award for developing family links and community partnerships. A new headteacher was appointed on the retirement of a long-serving headteacher in January 2009, and a new chair of governors took office 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

This is a good school. Parents are fulsome in their praise of the features that make it special. One wrote that her child had made very good progress in the school because of its 'extremely supportive environment, in which the pupils' emotional, intellectual and social welfare is well catered for and developed'. Another finds the school 'warmly welcoming, from the head to the caretaker'. 'The teachers are fun, fair and firm,' wrote another, 'and they want to make a difference.'

The care, guidance and support pupils receive are outstanding. Excellent systems are in place to identify early those pupils who need extra support with their learning or their emotional well-being. The special educational needs coordinator, learning mentor and deputy headteacher work as a highly cohesive team to draw together the specialist support necessary to meet pupils' needs. This often involves high-quality work with a range of external agencies that are able to support both the pupils and their families or carers. As a result, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress overall and some make exceptional gains in short periods of time. Within school, support is organised very well to meet the changing needs of the pupils. For example, since the last inspection, a number of new pupils have arrived from Eastern Europe, and so the school has established a buddy system and an Eastern European club to help them settle in and acquire confidence with the language. Effective, specialist, in-class support in Polish pupils' first language is also provided. Pupils therefore integrate well and make good progress. The progress of looked after children is monitored closely and they too achieve well.

Within this secure and supportive environment, pupils' personal development is outstanding. Pupils feel extremely safe. A high profile is given to anti-bullying campaigns and pupils are confident that staff and pupils who act as anti-bullying 'playground buddies' will resolve problems that arise. The school accepts, however, that it needs to keep parents better informed about the swift and comprehensive actions it takes to resolve the few incidents that occur. Pupils of a wide variety of faiths and cultures integrate well, and are pleased to share in the celebration of each other's traditions.

The school is highly successful in promoting healthy and active lifestyles for pupils. A good curriculum and rich extra-curricular opportunities give pupils a very good understanding of how to live and eat healthily. Within school, pupils participate in many sporting activities, and the excellent rewards system offers recognition for participation in activities out of school. Cycle- and walk-to-school schemes have been highly successful. Pupils make an excellent contribution to the school and to their local community. The elected school council takes its responsibilities very seriously, and councillors talk with a maturity well beyond their years about school development issues and priorities. Innovative schemes involving the police, local charities and other agencies all encourage positive activities and engagement of pupils in their local community. Pupils are given frequent opportunities to work together in class to discuss issues and solve problems, and learn to take responsibilities for managing money through school council projects and the work of the school bank. Taken together with the good development of their basic skills, they are well prepared for the next stage of their education and later life. Pupils' good attendance is testimony to their enjoyment of school. They are well taught in lessons which are effectively planned to offer lively and varied activities. The curriculum is broad and well balanced, although it lacks a coherent careers education programme. Provision for creative arts is very strong. Very impressive displays and artefacts, created in a variety of media by pupils working with artists and craftspeople, adorn the school grounds, corridors and

buildings. In all subjects, teachers make very good use of resources, including information and communication technology, to stimulate pupils' interests and keep learning active. As a consequence, pupils remain focused on their learning and behave positively. Boys and girls in most classes show equal involvement and learn well. Pupils' progress and achievement overall are good. On entry to the school in Year 5, their standards are below average and they have particular weaknesses in literacy. By the end of Year 6, national tests results show pupils reaching average standards and attainment is broadly at levels expected for their age when pupils leave the school in Year 8.

There are, however, marked variations in attainment and progress between subjects. Standards in science and mathematics have risen very strongly over a five-year period. Year 6 national test results in science are above average and represent excellent progress, as a result of a demanding, practical approach to the subject. Expectations are also very high in mathematics where pupils' books are very well ordered and lessons move at a brisk pace. English standards are, however, below average and have been slower to improve. Pupils' progress in English is satisfactory, but writing remains a weakness which the school is addressing by improving pupils' use of grammar and sentence structure. However, the progress of higher attainers is slower than for other groups in English across Years 7 and 8, reflecting some shortcomings in pupils' extended writing skills. The marking of pupils' English work does not consistently identify how pupils need to improve to reach higher levels of attainment in all classes. The quality of marking varies similarly across the school, with some very good practice which makes clear reference to pupils' targets, but some that is too general to be helpful.

The newly appointed headteacher, supported by a restructured senior leadership team, has quickly and accurately identified where the school's performance needs to improve to build on its many strengths. Leadership and management are good, and effectively promote the strong sense of shared values, centred on providing equal opportunities for all to succeed, which permeates the school community. The school uses its strong understanding of its community and highly effective engagement with local partners to make a good contribution to community cohesion. However, performance data, including measures of pupils' progress, are not always used systematically enough to evaluate all aspects of the school's work, and particularly to address variations in attainment and progress between subjects and groups. Governance is satisfactory. Governors have deployed resources well to ensure that pupils and staff can work in a very pleasant and well-resourced environment. Governors, however, have not been systematic enough in reviewing policies or in their involvement in school self-evaluation and planning. While pupils' writing remains an area for improvement, good progress has been made overall since the last inspection, especially in raising overall standards. The clear focus provided by the school's new leadership demonstrates that the school has a good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' attainment and progress in English, particularly in writing and especially at the higher levels of attainment in Years 7 and 8.
- Improve the use of performance data by leaders and managers at all levels to monitor and close gaps in achievement between subjects.
- Ensure that the marking of pupils' work more consistently relates to pupils' targets and shows them what they need to do to improve.

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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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

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

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
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	1
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	1
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?	1

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	3
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**

13 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Redditch, Birchensale Middle School, Redditch, B97 6HT

Many thanks for the help you gave me when I visited the school for its recent inspection. I much enjoyed seeing you at work, and greatly valued the time you gave to me in discussions. I was particularly impressed by the detailed understanding your school councillors have of the issues they deal with. Like you and your parents, I think you go to a good school, for the following reasons.

- You are very well cared for and supported by the school and its staff, and this helps most of you to feel very safe and secure.
- You make an excellent contribution to the school and wider community.
- Your involvement in many physical activities in and out of school is a result of a strong awareness of how to live healthily.
- You enjoy coming to school, because your lessons and activities are lively and interesting.
- You make good progress in your work because you are well taught.
- Your attainment and progress in science and mathematics have improved rapidly in recent years because of teachers' high expectations of you.
- Your school is well led and managed, and the new leadership team has a clear idea about how to make the school even better.

I have set out three main items for the school to work on to improve still further.

- Improve the standards of your work in English, especially writing.
- Improve the way the leaders of your school use information about your progress to ensure that you do well in all subjects.
- Ensure that you are always given clear information through marking and other feedback about how to improve.

You can help by continuing to work hard at developing your writing in all of your subjects.

I wish you every success for the future.

Yours faithfully

Ian Hodgkinson

Lead inspector