

Maiden Beech Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123874
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	328007
Inspection date	13 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Valerie Pearson 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)	470
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Joanne Lyons
Headteacher	John Broad
Date of previous school inspection	1 June 2006
School address	Lyme Road Crewkerne TA18 8HG
Telephone number	01460 72677
Fax number	01460 74266

Age group	9–13
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: students' progress and the standards they attain across the school; the impact of the school's strategies to improve aspects of pupils' personal development, including behaviour; and the impact of leaders on improving provision and outcomes for pupils.

Evidence was gathered from the following sources: the school's self-evaluation form and other review documents; nationally published assessment data and the school's own assessment data; observation of the school at work in lessons and at break times; discussions with pupils and staff; and the parents' questionnaires.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail. The inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Maiden Beech Middle School serves communities within the town of Crewkerne and the surrounding countryside. Most pupils are White British, with very few from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is well below the national average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is in line with the national average and includes pupils with dyslexia, speech, language and communication difficulties, as well as some with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. The number of pupils with a statement of special educational need is low. The school has the Healthy Schools and Investors in People awards. It has Sportsmark and the Football Association's Charter School status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Maiden Beech Middle School is a good school. The school's successes reflect its strong commitment to doing the very best for every pupil. The creation of a nurturing and enriching learning environment ensures that pupils achieve well and that their personal development is good. One parent, encapsulating this, wrote, 'My children are very happy and self-motivated thanks to the positive ethos at Maiden Beech.' A strong feature of the school's provision is its pastoral care, characterised by excellent relationships between members of staff and pupils and a comprehensive range of support for pupils.

The clear drive to raise pupils' achievement and to promote and secure their well-being is firmly set by the headteacher, deputy headteacher and senior leaders who provide good leadership and management of the school. Strengths of their work include an accurate understanding of what the school does well and what it needs to do to improve, and the targeting of appropriate action to tackle identified issues. This is evident in their good impact on improving the quality of education the school provides.

Pupils enjoy school and demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning. Their behaviour and attendance have improved since the previous inspection. Both are now good. These improvements are the result of determined action taken by the school, channelled through the work of its effective guidance and motivation team. Most of the parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire judged behaviour good. The school places a high priority on rewarding pupils' achievements, including positive behaviour, and one parent wrote, 'We feel pupils are valued in many ways and are celebrated publicly with awards.' Pupils report that they feel safe in school, that they have adults they can turn to if they need help and that the school responds quickly and effectively to any incidents of bullying. It is clear that pupils have confidence that anyone who has a problem can always seek help from the guidance and motivation team.

Pupils have an excellent understanding of what it means to lead a healthy lifestyle and particularly value the opportunities the school provides for them to engage in physical activities. Pupils develop well their understanding and appreciation of diversity in society. They engage with commitment in a number of activities, including supporting a women's refuge in the local community, using their musical talents to entertain, and supporting charitable events. However, the enthusiasm, skills and views of pupils in all year groups are not yet making a strong contribution to the school's reflections on its life and work or its major developments. The school has rightly identified securing effective processes through which pupils' ideas and views can be heard and inform the work of the school as a priority. Early initiatives, such as consulting a small group of Year 8 pupils on developing pupils' use of the school's portal for learning, demonstrate the high quality contribution they are capable of making.

The school has rigorous and robust processes for analysing pupils' academic achievements and monitors pupils' progress closely. Pupils' attainment when they enter the school is broadly average although writing skills are weak and, more recently, there has been a decline in pupils' skills in mathematics. From these starting points pupils make good progress during their time in the school and generally attain above average standards. A strong feature in recent years has been the accelerated learning of pupils in Years 5 and 6 in English. The results in 2007 were particularly noteworthy, especially the good proportion of pupils attaining the higher National Curriculum levels. Provisional results for 2008 indicate sustained improvements in reading but a drop in writing. Pupils' progress in mathematics is good and provisional 2008 results are

broadly average. Pupils' Year 6 science results have been consistently above average for many years and confirm pupils' very good progress in the subject. Pupils' rates of progress are generally sustained during Years 7 and 8, ensuring they are well prepared to achieve well at the upper school. The school's analysis of performance, however, identifies the need to strengthen boys' achievement in these years in English. The school is constantly seeking ways to improve pupils' progress in English, particularly in writing, and is pursuing a range of appropriate strategies, including a new local authority initiative supporting work with partner schools.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities across the school make at least good progress and for some it is very good. This reflects the high level of care and support for these pupils. One parent of a child who has additional learning needs wrote, 'I was extremely impressed with the preparation and support given prior to him starting; the consideration of his needs and welfare (as well as mine as a parent) and the rapid assessment and recognition of his potential which enabled a flexible approach to his placement.' The support provided for pupils' differing needs includes the Causeway, a nurture group for those with learning difficulties, a valued mentoring scheme for those who are gifted and talented, and support for those who have challenging behaviour. The school sets appropriately challenging targets and pupils have a good knowledge of their individual targets. There is some good self-assessment by pupils, and marking sometimes provides valuable help to pupils on what to do next to improve. Not all pupils, however, are confident about how to make their work better.

The senior leaders are open and honest in their reflections on what supports pupils' good progress and what the school needs to do to get better. Good teaching and a good curriculum support pupils' achievement well. Lessons are structured and tailored to meet their differing needs. The involvement of all teachers in the school's analysis of data, a real strength of the school's processes, ensures that the information feeds into their planning and secures targeted interventions for those pupils who require additional help. Further strengths include specialist teaching, good relationships between pupils and with teachers, and the effective deployment of learning assistants. The school rightly recognises that the next step is to ensure more teaching is of the quality of the best. An example of excellent teaching and learning in a science lesson observed during the inspection illustrates well a key factor that has contributed to the department's successes. Pupils were working very effectively in groups and were absorbed in their work. They were highly motivated because they had to take increased responsibility for their learning through formulating and testing ideas and discovering for themselves the answers to questions posed. The lesson had pace and energy and the pupils took a pride in their work. Science is popular with pupils and, when asked why, they say they enjoy the fact that they have to work things out for themselves. The school knows that increasing the proportion of lessons where pupils experience opportunities to take more responsibility for their learning is a priority. Indeed, it is seizing the opportunity of recent national changes to the curriculum in Key Stage 3 to reflect on how it can be developed to encourage more opportunities for pupils to experience this type of learning. A very good range of enrichment activities, designed to enhance pupils' learning and support their personal development, complement the curriculum. Examples include participation in the Maths Challenge and Science and Technology Innovation Awards, music, drama and the homework club.

The senior leadership team has established a strong culture of accountability through its performance management and self-evaluation processes, particularly in raising pupils' achievement. The recently revised departmental self-assessment processes clearly reflect this emphasis. The team is now correctly focusing on how to extend this rigour to other aspects of

self-evaluation, including formalising some of its current practices and involving pupils and parents more fully.

The school knows itself well. It keeps striving to improve further and has a strong capacity to do so.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing, and specifically for boys in English in Key Stage 3, through implementing identified strategies and interventions.
- Extend opportunities for pupils to develop independent learning skills so that more lessons reflect the best practice such as that seen in science.
- Secure effective processes through which the ideas and views of pupils can be heard and their contributions fully inform discussions and decisions about the life and work of the school.

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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	1
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?	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

14 November 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Maiden Beech Middle School, Crewkerne, TA18 8HG

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to me during my recent visit to your school. I enjoyed meeting you and listening to your views about your work and the school.

Your school provides you with a good education. All the members of staff are committed to doing the very best for you and work hard to make sure that you receive the support and help that you need to be successful. With their help your attendance and behaviour have improved and they are now both good. My congratulations to you for your successes in these areas. You clearly enjoy school, have positive attitudes to your learning and value the very good range of extra opportunities the school provides for you. You have an excellent understanding of what you need to do to keep healthy and many of you enjoy participating in the range of physical activities provided by the school.

The school has very good systems for checking how well you are doing and uses this information well to make sure that you have work that is right for you. This, combined with good teaching, means that you are making good progress during your time at the school.

Your headteacher and senior leaders know the strengths of the school well and what to do to improve it further. A top priority for the school is to help you improve your writing and I have asked the school to continue to focus on this. In my conversations with some of you, you explained to me how you particularly enjoy learning, such as in science, when you can carry out your own investigations and research. I have asked your school to give you more opportunities to learn in this way. I have also asked the school to find ways of involving you more fully in discussions and decisions about school life. I know from talking with you that you have valuable contributions to make.

The members of staff are constantly seeking ways to improve the school and to make your time at Maiden Beech happy and successful.

I wish you all every success in the future.

Valerie Pearson Her Majesty's Inspector