

## **Arnold Middle School**

#### Inspection report

**Unique Reference Number** 109656

**Local Authority** Central Bedfordshire

Inspection number337343Inspection dates7-8 July 2010

**Reporting inspector** Charalambos Loizou HMI

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

**Type of school** Middle deemed secondary

School categoryFoundationAge range of pupils9-13Gender of pupilsMixedNumber of pupils on the school roll531

Appropriate authorityThe governing bodyChairMr Rhys Chesters-Lewis

HeadteacherMrs Ann PayneDate of previous school inspection5 October 2006School addressHexton RoadBarton Le-Clay

Bedford

 Telephone number
 01582 616400

 Fax number
 01582 616401

Email address admin@arnold.beds.sch.uk

 Age group
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#### **Introduction**

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 29 lessons and observed 28 of the 32 teachers who were teaching at the time of the inspection. They held meetings with governors, staff, groups of pupils and spoke to some parents and carers. Inspectors observed the school's work, the arrangements in place to safeguard pupils and looked at its improvement plan and self-evaluation, as well as assessment and tracking data that teachers use to monitor pupils' progress. Questionnaire returns from 257 parents and carers were analysed as well as returns from pupils and staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the extent to which the school is accelerating the progress of pupils in Years 5 and
   6, particularly in the key skills of reading and writing
- the consistency of teaching and the extent to which teachers use assessment to plan lessons and provide opportunities for pupils to assess their own learning
- the extent to which subject leaders and middle managers monitor the performance of pupils to sustain improvements to pupils' attainment and meet challenging targets.

#### Information about the school

This is a large middle school which has specialist status in mathematics and science and is part of a partnership trust called the Harlington Area Schools Trust. The large majority of pupils are White British and others come from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is similar to most schools, although a higher than average percentage has a statement of special educational needs, due largely to the school accommodating a specialist unit for up to six pupils with autism. Most of the pupils in the unit are integrated into mainstream lessons for part of the timetable. Across the school, the main areas of additional need indude pupils with moderate or specific learning or emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school has achieved the silver level Artsmark and the Sportsmark awards, as well as International Schools Status, and it has been accredited with the Valuesmark.

## **Inspection judgements**

#### Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

### The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

#### **Main findings**

The school has made considerable inroads into improving attainment and provides a good education. The effective partnerships forged with other schools and organisations in the trust and strong leadership have led to good improvements to teaching and learning since the school's last inspection. Attainment is above average in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 8 and pupils achieve well overall in relation to their starting points. Outstanding pastoral provision, good teaching and sharp assessments of pupils' progress, demonstrate that the school has good capacity to sustain improvements. The curriculum is varied and stimulating with particular strengths in music, the performing and creative arts and sport which broaden pupils' learning experiences and personal development throughout their time in school.

Although test results in English have improved, those for writing have been comparatively weaker compared with reading. Consequently, there is scope for further development, especially in ensuring that pupils are given time and opportunities to write at greater length in more subjects and topics. The school has not been complacent though, as subject coordinators and senior staff have put in place well-judged programmes of staff training. As a result, teachers are incorporating more writing tasks for pupils in their planning. Although many lessons allow time for pupils to edit and correct their independent writing, this is not consistent across dasses, resulting in variations in the accuracy, form and structure of pupils' writing.

There is good teaching across the school and in all year groups, as well as some that is outstanding so the pace of learning is good in most lessons. This improvement has led to a rise in standards, particularly in the school's mathematics and science specialisms. Some of the teaching is not as effective, however, resulting in pupils of higher ability in Years 5 and 6 falling just short of their expected targets. Assessment systems have improved so that teachers are increasingly checking pupils' progress, although this is not regular enough to ensure that all pupils reach their targets by the end of Year 6.

There is highly effective care, guidance and support for pupils. The school is a positive community where pupils feel exceptionally safe, behave well, form friendships and respect different cultures and religious beliefs. Pupils with autism do extremely well and are fully integrated and accepted by others. Expert leadership and teaching in the specialist unit continues to maintain high quality provision for autistic pupils. Across the school pupils with a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities are effectively supported and achieve well towards their individual targets. The school has worked hard to involve parents and carers, which accounts for an overall positive response from the large majority who returned questionnaires. A small but significant number of parents and carers are concerned about their children's progress and inspectors have judged

that the uplift in attainment and improvements to teaching have the capacity to allay these concerns. As a result of the very effective partnerships forged with welfare agencies and the local community, as well as the efforts of parents and families, attendance has been maintained at a high standard.

The headteacher provides dedicated and effective leadership and works dosely with governors and senior staff to continue moving the school forward. The school provides good value for money.

#### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate the progress pupils make in Years 5 and 6 to sustain improvements to standards by:
  - ensuring that the teaching in all lessons consistently meets the specific needs of more able pupils so that they all reach their targets by the end of Year 6
  - providing more tasks and activities in lessons that extends their learning towards more challenging targets
  - making even more regular checks on their progress.
- Build on improvements to attainment in English to raise standards in writing across the school by:
  - ensuring that pupils write more extensively across a broader range of subjects and topics
  - providing more opportunities for pupils to edit and correct their independent writing
  - providing dear writing targets for pupils to work towards that indude accurate spelling, punctuation and structure.

## **Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**

2

The large majority of pupils report that they enjoy school. There is a strong sense of communal responsibility and they contribute very well to their school and local community. They share ideas in lessons and cooperate when asked to engage in group tasks or assess their own learning. Older pupils mentor younger ones and effective buddy and monitor systems, together with elected school councillors, enable pupils to represent the views of, and support others. Pupils are encouraged to generate their own suggestions, knowing that these will be acted on and valued by staff and governors. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay healthy through sport and eating a balanced diet. This is enhanced by a range of activities that enable pupils, for example, to grow vegetables and fruit in the school allotment.

Pupils join the school in Year 5 with a broad range of skills and abilities that are in line with those expected for their age. They make good progress and achieve well overall by the end of Year 8, although the rate of progress varies across some dasses, reflecting inconsistencies in the demands placed on pupils. Test results show that some pupils of

higher ability, particularly in Years 5 and 6, have the potential to reach higher levels but fall just short of reaching their targets because some lessons do not incorporate sufficiently challenging extension work. Pupils behave well and are attentive when they assess each other's work. They are usually engaged in their learning through practical and stimulating tasks, particularly thriving on opportunities in mathematics and science lessons to solve problems and learn through trial and error. Careful assessments of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities have helped to accelerate their progress towards standards that are comparable nationally or exceed those of their peers.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent and is reflected very well in the respectful and courteous way they treat each other. There are outstanding opportunities for pupils to achieve high standards in the creative arts and music. They are encouraged to look out for other pupils through the effective 'see something, say something' project, which focuses on helping to alert them to different forms of bullying. This successfully addresses the concerns of a small number who are anxious or feel vulnerable. As one pupil said, 'You know that if you are worried or feel that bullying is happening, you know who to go to and it will be sorted out quickly.' Pupils reflect well on the needs of others through a wide range of fundraising initiated by pupils that contribute to the local parish or special sports projects. Pupils are thoughtful when taking responsibility for their actions, as well as empathising with others in the community, reflecting the school's achievement of the Valuesmark as a 'values-based' provider.

#### These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

| Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning Taking into account:               |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>  | 2 |  |
| The quality of pupils' learning and their progress   | 2 |  |
| The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress | 2 |  |
| The extent to which pupils feel safe   | 1 |  |
| Pupils' behaviour  |   |  |
| The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles  |   |  |
| The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community                                  |   |  |

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

| Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate |
|--|
| Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms       |

| Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>                    | 1 |
|---|---|
| The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 1 |

#### How effective is the provision?

Lessons are well planned using accurate assessments of pupils' progress. The most effective lessons offer challenge and variation so that the pace of learning is brisk, purposeful and productive. This was best illustrated in an excellent mathematics lesson when Year 7 pupils worked productively using a wide range of methods to investigate averages. Pupils enjoy sharing and generating ideas with others, which is a common feature of their learning. Good and outstanding teaching engages, challenges and supports pupils' knowledge and understanding. For example, pupils plan their writing by extending the range of vocabulary used or checking each other's work. This was the case in a very good English lesson when, after studying the persuasive language used in speeches by world leaders, Year 6 pupils constructed their own prodamations and read these aloud while other pupils assessed their writing. The large majority of the teaching reflects these strong features of learning but there are inconsistencies where the expectations set and the work undertaken by pupils is not as challenging or productive. For example, in some lessons there is too little time given for pupils to consolidate their writing or improve its structure and accuracy, which slows their progress.

The school has modified its curriculum to meet the diverse learning needs of pupils, induding those with autism and those with specific learning difficulties such as moderate language delay or emotional and behavioural difficulties. Booster groups and learning mentors are used to accelerate the progress of those who find learning difficult. Accelerated programmes for Year 8 pupils enable them to engage successfully in bridging-projects before transferring to upper schools in Year 9. Senior staff and subject leaders are broadening the scope of activities through enrichment opportunities embedded within the curriculum. For example, Black History Month extends pupils' understanding of racism and civil rights. Projects linked to sustainable development in science and technology broadens their knowledge of environmental issues facing the world today. Pupils in Year 5 were thoroughly absorbed in their current end of year project when successfully combining their English and information and communication technology skills to produce presentations and illustrated instructions for younger pupils joining the school next year. The outstanding, care, guidance and support that the school provides are carefully targeted to remove barriers for those who experience difficulties, induding those whose circumstances cause them to become vulnerable. The pastoral and learning mentor centre (Palm Centre), is particularly helpful to pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, and the skilful intervention of trained staff and mentors is indusive, supportive and very effective. This accounts for the school's extremely low exdusion rates.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

| The quality of teaching   | 2 |
|---|---|
| Taking into account:  | 2 |
| The use of assessment to support learning   | 2 |
| The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships | 2 |
| The effectiveness of care, guidance and support   | 1 |

#### How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and senior leadership team are good at listening to and acting on the views of pupils, parents, carers and staff through meetings, workshops and home visits. There is good communication and engagement with parents and carers through the use of the school's informative website, regular newsletters and bulletins. The school council plays an active role in shaping the future of the school through the opportunities provided for it to attend governors' meetings. Staff morale is high and, together with the strong partnership forged with other schools in the trust, there is a joint determination to continue improving best practice.

Accurate evaluations have established the right priorities for school improvement. These have generated well-devised programmes of training and performance management reviews that have improved the teaching since the school's last inspection. Subject leaders, middle managers and teachers engage in a range of activities to accurately assess how well pupils are doing by carrying out joint evaluations of pupils' work and reviews of teachers' planning. This reflective practice is well-established and has been encouraged through the skilful support of senior staff. Despite staff changes to leadership roles and the induction of new governors in recent years, the headteacher and governing body have successfully steered the school on an even keel towards improved standards.

The school's contribution to community cohesion is good as pupils appreciate and learn about the main world religions and different cultures as well as optimising opportunities about global awareness through its strong international links. The school is seen as a beacon for sharing effective practice in developing community cohesion in the local area. Staff are increasingly using assessment data about different ethnic groups to judge the impact of the school's work on their relative achievements. Although assessments are much improved, there are still lapses and inconsistencies in the regularity of checks made by teachers and subject leaders so that some pupils do not reach their learning targets. Most parents are pleased with the information about their children's progress, although a significant number have indicated that they need more up to date information. Inspectors agree that more frequent checks will make this aspect of communication more accessible to parents.

At the time of the inspection, all safeguarding requirements were extremely well met. There are excellent arrangements in place to ensure that only suitable adults come into

contact with pupils. Very good attention is given to ensuring that records, risk assessments and child protection policies are kept under review.

Governors are committed and supportive and have a wealth of information to make informed choices to challenge and shape the direction of the school. The intensity and impact of self-evaluation and reviews of pupils' and teachers' performance fully involve governors so that they make a significant contribution to establishing priorities and actions to sustain the continuing rise in attainment.

These are the grades for leadership and management

| The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement  | 2 |  |
|---|---|--|
| Taking into account:  The leadership and management of teaching and learning  | 2 |  |
| The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met | 2 |  |
| The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers  | 2 |  |
| The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being  | 1 |  |
| The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination   | 2 |  |
| The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures  | 1 |  |
| The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion   |   |  |
| The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money  |   |  |

### **Views of parents and carers**

Nearly half of parents and carers completed the inspection questionnaire. The large majority were positive. Parents and carers believe that their children are safe and that this is a caring and supportive school. A small but significant number are concerned about pupils' behaviour and academic progress, which to some extent are justified given that there has been relative weaknesses in the performance and progress of some pupils. However, behaviour is good, standards are rising well and pupils enjoy their time in school. Most pupils and parents expressed satisfaction with the positive and highly supportive ethos engendered by the staff.

#### Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Arnold Middle School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 257 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 531 pupils registered at the school.

| Statements Strongly Agree   |       |    | Agree |    | Disagree |    | Strongly<br>disagree |   |
|---|-------|----|-------|----|----------|----|----------------------|---|
|   | Total | %  | Total | %  | Total    | %  | Total                | % |
| My child enjoys school  | 57    | 22 | 173   | 68 | 20       | 8  | 3                    | 1 |
| The school keeps my child safe  | 109   | 43 | 134   | 53 | 10       | 4  | 0                    | 0 |
| The school informs me about my child's progress   | 59    | 23 | 158   | 62 | 29       | 11 | 6                    | 2 |
| My child is making enough progress at this school   | 57    | 22 | 160   | 63 | 30       | 12 | 8                    | 3 |
| The teaching is good at this school   | 54    | 21 | 166   | 65 | 26       | 10 | 4                    | 2 |
| The school helps me to support my child's learning  | 50    | 20 | 161   | 63 | 37       | 15 | 4                    | 2 |
| The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle   | 47    | 18 | 172   | 67 | 27       | 11 | 4                    | 2 |
| The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment) | 63    | 25 | 161   | 63 | 17       | 7  | 2                    | 1 |
| The school meets my child's particular needs  | 45    | 18 | 181   | 71 | 19       | 7  | 4                    | 2 |
| The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour  | 56    | 22 | 154   | 60 | 30       | 12 | 13                   | 5 |
| The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns   | 38    | 15 | 164   | 64 | 27       | 11 | 13                   | 5 |
| The school is led and managed effectively   | 51    | 20 | 169   | 66 | 21       | 8  | 8                    | 3 |
| Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school   | 69    | 27 | 156   | 61 | 20       | 8  | 7                    | 3 |

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## **Glossary**

#### What inspection judgements mean

| Grade   | Judgement    | Description  |
|---------|--------------|--|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding  | These features are highly effective. An oustanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.   |
| Grade 2 | Good         | These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.  |
| Grade 3 | Satisfactory | These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.  |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate   | These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. |

#### **Overall effectiveness of schools**

|                      | Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools) |      |              |            |
|----------------------|---|------|--------------|------------|
| Type of school       | Outstanding   | Good | Satisfactory | Inadequate |
| Nursery schools      | 51  | 45   | 0            | 4          |
| Primary schools      | 6   | 41   | 42           | 10         |
| Secondary schools    | 8   | 34   | 44           | 14         |
| Sixth forms          | 10  | 37   | 50           | 3          |
| Special schools      | 32  | 38   | 25           | 5          |
| Pupil referral units | 12  | 43   | 31           | 14         |
| All schools          | 9   | 40   | 40           | 10         |

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures indude those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures indude only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

## **Common terminology used by inspectors**

| Achievement:               | the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.  |
|----------------------------|--|
| Attainment:                | the standard of the pupils' work shown by<br>test and examination results and in<br>lessons.   |
| Capacity to improve:       | the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.   |
| Leadership and management: | the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.   |
| Learning:                  | how well pupils acquire knowledge,<br>develop their understanding, learn and<br>practise skills and are developing their<br>competence as learners.  |
| Overall effectiveness:     | inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.  |
|                            | <ul> <li>The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li> <li>Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li> <li>The quality of teaching.</li> <li>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, induding where relevant, through partnerships.</li> <li>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li> </ul> |
| Progress:                  | the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.  |

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



9 July 2010

**Dear Pupils** 

Inspection of Arnold Middle School, Bedford, MK45 4JZ

Thank you for being so welcoming when the inspectors came to see you. The inspectors have judged that you go to a good school and were pleased with your good behaviour and the way you all try hard. We really enjoyed talking to you and were impressed with the maturity of the school council and many other pupils we spoke to. You are making good progress and this is helping an increasing number of you to reach or exceed the standards expected for your age. Your teachers and support staff provide you with good enrichment opportunities such as visits and special projects. Inspectors were extremely impressed with the high quality of music and art. We heard that you recently participated in a music festival and art exhibition and that these were very successful. Well done. The headteacher, staff and the governing body have been effective in working together to check how well you are doing and to help the school grow and improve since its last inspection. The inspectors were pleased to see that there have been good improvements to the school and that the staff take extremely good care of you. You have a very good range of out-of-school activities which help you to develop your interests and particular talents, such as in sport, as well as encouraging you to contribute to your school and community.

We have asked your teachers to help you do even better. Some of you could still do better in writing so that you all achieve as well as you do in reading, mathematics and science. We have asked your teachers to give you opportunities to write more extensively so you can improve the accuracy of your writing. We have also asked teachers in Years 5 and 6 to help some of you to reach higher levels by providing more challenging work in all lessons. Many lessons that inspectors visited were pitched at the right level for all of you but some of the tasks that teachers provided could still extend some of you more. We have also asked your teachers to increase the amount of checks being made on how well you are doing to make sure that you all reach your learning targets.

You can all help too by carrying on trying hard and checking the accuracy of your writing. The inspectors thought that you were really mature and sensible, and attendance rates are high, so keep it up. I wish you, your parents, staff and governors

the very best.

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou

Her Majesty's Inspector

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