

Brewers Hill Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109659
Local Authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	337345
Inspection dates	17–18 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Alison Thomson

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 of pupils on the school roll	212
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Christopher Pine
Headteacher	Anita Harvey
Date of previous school inspection	6 June 2007
School address	Aldbanks Dunstable Dunstable
Telephone number	01528 666668
Fax number	01528 672708
Email address	brewershill@deal.bedfordshire.gov.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 16 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work and analysed 88 questionnaire responses from parents, 110 questionnaire responses from pupils and 23 questionnaire responses from staff. The team also looked at the data the school had collected about the pupils' progress, and at the school's records of their monitoring of the quality of teaching.

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

- attainment and progress in 2009, particularly the attainment and progress in writing and of higher attainers
- how teachers use assessment to help pupils to improve their work, particularly the extent to which pupils are involved in checking the effectiveness of their own learning
- the effectiveness of leaders at all levels in monitoring and evaluating areas that are less strong such as attainment in writing.

Information about the school

Brewers Hill is a smaller than average sized school. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is higher than average. Most students are of White British heritage and there are very few from other ethnic backgrounds or who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is higher than average. An average proportion of pupils have a statement of special needs. The school has many awards including Investors in People 2009 and the Healthy Schools award 2007 for the promotion of a healthy lifestyle.

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

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**3****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****2**

Main findings

Brewers Hill Middle School is providing a satisfactory and rapidly improving standard of education. Following a period when standards declined, there have been many improvements recently, resulting in significant gains in both pupils' achievement and in their personal development. Pupils are very appreciative of the improvements and typically say, 'The school is now a great learning, educating school' and 'We have excellent gymnastics and sports which everyone enjoys'. Parents too are very positive about the school and believe that it gives their children a 'well-rounded' education.

Central to the success of the school is the strong leadership of the headteacher. Together with her leadership team, she has been instrumental in bringing about significant and beneficial change. For example there have been improvements in attendance, pupils' behaviour, the standard of teaching and academic outcomes. Standards have improved significantly, and in particular, some groups of students who were previously underachieving, such as higher attainers, now make satisfactory progress in line with their peers.

Teaching is satisfactory leading to satisfactory achievement. The school has improved standards overall so that they are now broadly in line with the national average at the end of Year 8 and above average in mathematics. The school has identified that standards could be higher still, particularly in writing, partly because pupils do not have enough opportunities for producing longer pieces of work by themselves. Relationships in lessons are very positive and pupils are eager to answer questions and to participate. Their behaviour contributes well to their learning. Pupils welcome the chance to work independently. However, they are not always given enough opportunities to assess for themselves how well they are learning or clear enough success criteria to help them, and staff, judge their progress in lessons. Sometimes there is a lack of challenge and questioning does not extend pupils' thinking enough. As a result, pupils do not always progress as quickly as they should. The school tracks the progress of pupils regularly. This ensures the early identification of any underachievement. Good individual and small group support ensures that where pupils have lost ground in their learning they quickly make it up. This is particularly effective in mathematics and science. The curriculum is adapted well to meet the needs of all pupils and it is enhanced by many visits and visitors, but the use of writing in other subjects is not as well developed.

Pupils are very polite, courteous and responsible. They feel very safe in school and feel that the school values their views. They have good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Whilst the spiritual, moral and social aspects are particularly strong, their understanding of different cultures is less well developed. The school recognises this and is developing links with schools, nationally and internationally, that reflect a

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different cultural and socio-economic make up to that of its own. This is strengthening its already satisfactory community cohesion. The school has good links with parents and with the local community.

The headteacher and the leadership team effectively monitor and evaluate the school's work. The school knows the strengths and areas for development very well. Governors play an important role in supporting the strategic development of the school. They have an increasingly active role in the life of the school and hold the headteacher to account well. The fact that the school has made rapid improvements in so many areas indicates that the capacity to improve even further is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment further, particularly in writing by:
 - embedding writing into as many other curriculum areas as possible
 - making writing tasks more relevant to pupils' interests
 - giving more opportunities for extended writing
 - enriching pupils' vocabulary.
- Ensure all teaching is good or better to accelerate pupil progress by:
- increasing the level of expectation and challenge in lessons
 - improving questioning to encourage pupils to develop their thinking and language skills
 - providing clear and visible success criteria so that the learning of individual pupils can be checked easily
 - involving pupils more in assessing their own learning.
- Provide more opportunities for students to learn about other cultures, including those represented in the United Kingdom (UK) as well as internationally by:
- building links with schools in the UK that contrast with the school in terms of the socio-economic and ethnic mix of pupils
 - setting up links with schools internationally.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

The decline in examination results noted in previous years has been reversed in 2009. Attainment has risen sharply and is now broadly average. Previous underperformance of various groups, including that of higher attainers, has also risen so that differences in the progress of different groups of pupils are narrowing. From below average starting points when they enter school, pupils make satisfactory progress throughout the school. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language make satisfactory progress because of good, focused

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support. Inspection evidence from lessons confirms that standards are rising and the performance of pupils is improving as a result of the improving progress in lessons. For example, in a Year 6 textiles lesson, pupils worked well on individual projects and were encouraged to assess for themselves how well they were doing.

Pupils eagerly welcome members of the local community to school events and they enjoy the role they play singing Christmas carols in the town. They enjoy helping others and are proud to take on roles of house captains, mediators and Activity Leaders, teaching younger pupils, in nearby schools, new playground activities.

Pupils are proud to have been involved in the appointment of the new catering company, even holding a competition to choose the new name, 'Brewstars'. The vast majority of pupils enjoy the good quality school dinners. This has contributed greatly to their excellent understanding of how to have a healthy lifestyle. They enjoy the many opportunities to take part in sporting activities and clubs and are very proud about their reaching the semi-finals of a national dance competition. Several pupils referred to working with visiting dance celebrities as a 'life-changing' experience. Pupils are prepared adequately for their future economic well-being by having good information and communication technology (ICT) skills and a keen sense of co-operation and consideration for others when working together.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

2

How effective is the provision?

Relationships between pupils and their teachers are good. Lessons are usually well planned and organised. In most lessons, tasks are engaging and hold the pupils' interest, but at times there is a lack of challenge and low expectation. Occasionally tasks are too prescriptive preventing pupils from working things out for themselves. Learning support assistants provide good support that enables students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language to have full access to lessons and activities. Teachers usually discuss with pupils what it is they should be learning, but sometimes they do not establish a clear or detailed enough outline of what they expect pupils to have learned. This makes it difficult to check the progress that individual pupils have made during a lesson. Pupils are not involved enough in assessing their own learning at present. The school has improved how teachers mark pupils' work. There are many examples of good and effective marking where pupils' progress has benefited and their work improved.

The curriculum meets statutory requirements and is tailored well to suit the needs of different groups of pupil such as individualised programmes to take account of special educational needs. Many aspects of the curriculum contribute particularly well to the pupils' personal development, for example music and physical education. development. The use of ICT is strong and has made a big impact on learning. Having one to one access to mini-laptops has extended pupils' out of lesson learning. The school is making increasing use of a range of strategies such as 'Literacy Across the Curriculum' to tackle underachievement and this is having some success. The school is looking into more ways of linking topics together and providing pupils with more creative tasks to capture their interests better. The curriculum is enriched well by visits to places of interest, events at school and a wide range of clubs. Many of these opportunities add to pupils' good personal development.

The school rightly says one of its strengths is the way it looks after its pupils as individuals, particularly the most vulnerable. These pupils are well supported through effective links with external agencies. Planning for individuals' needs is robust and increasingly progress is being monitored well. Evidence was seen of significant successes in the way in which the school helps pupils overcome difficulties to achieve well. The school takes appropriate steps to tackle unnecessary absence. It has worked successfully with parents and the community to reduce the number of persistent and holiday absences. Behaviour is well managed and positive attitudes are strongly encouraged. Links with upper schools are strong, preparing pupils well for the next stage in their learning.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has brought together a strong group of leaders with a shared vision and ambition to make the school the best it can be. Although some of the subject leaders are not long in post, their efforts are already having good impact on the rise in standards. The staff questionnaire responses show that staff feel highly valued and are fully involved in what the school is trying to achieve. The school has made great strides towards its goals, helped greatly with partnerships with the local authority and another local school. Challenging targets are used effectively to raise standards. Monitoring and evaluation has improved and is robust. For example, analysis showed that pupils made significantly better progress in 2008-2009 than they did in 2007-2008. Gaps in the performance of different groups of students have been closed in most areas. This, along with the cohesive and harmonious nature of the school community indicates that equality of opportunity is good. Monitoring of teaching and learning is equally comprehensive. There is evidence of support for teachers having raised the quality of teaching, but there is also a recognition that all lessons need to be good or better to further raise standards and accelerate progress.

Arrangements for safeguarding are good, with extensive, clear policies and secure risk assessment systems. The school engages well with parents through regular newsletters and other innovative techniques such as billboard advertising in the town. Community cohesion is satisfactory with clear action plans in place to evaluate impact, particularly those of the developing links at national and international levels. Governors know the school well and have been instrumental in shaping the direction of the school to drive improvements. Although they are involved in evaluating the work of the school, they do not fully evaluate their own contribution at present.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
	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

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The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

Most parents are very positive about all aspects of the school's work. Ninety-seven per cent of those who replied agreed that the school keeps their children safe and ninety-three per cent agreed that their children enjoyed school. These features were very clear to the inspectors. A few parents felt that the school did not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour. The inspectors found that this was something that the school did well. A few parents also felt that the school did not take account of their suggestions or help them to support their children's learning. Inspectors saw evidence of ways in which the school did take account of parents' views, but agreed with the school that they need to expand a bit more on the advice they give to parents to enable them to support their children's learning.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Brewers Hill Middle 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 88 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 212 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	38	38	55	55	7	7	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	33	33	64	64	2	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	23	23	67	67	9	9	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	28	28	64	64	6	6	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	26	26	66	66	7	7	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	18	18	69	69	12	12	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	24	24	67	67	5	5	0	0
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)	19	19	68	68	6	6	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	27	27	62	62	8	8	2	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	26	26	55	55	12	12	3	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	14	14	72	72	9	9	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	26	26	66	66	5	5	3	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	32	32	60	60	6	6	1	1

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 outstanding 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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

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 were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include 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 test and examination results and in 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, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.



19 November 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Brewers Hill Middle School, Dunstable LU6 1AJ

Thank you for welcoming us to your school recently. We enjoyed talking to you and seeing how well you learn in class. We worked very closely with your headteacher and also spent time talking to your teachers and governors and looking at your work. Your questionnaires told us that most of you enjoy coming to school, feel safe and feel that your teachers are interested in your views. You also told us that you particularly like your sporting opportunities and the new catering facilities, 'Brewsters'. We judged that Brewers Hill Middle School is a satisfactory and rapidly improving school. Your teachers know you well and find lots of different ways to help you learn and develop as young people. This helps you to reach standards that are in line with those found nationally. Just as importantly, you develop good personal skills, learn how to get on with others and take responsibility for helping the school.

The teachers make lessons interesting. They mark your work and often make comments to help you to improve. You are making the progress expected of you, and some of you are doing well. You concentrate on your work, and the progress you make is speeding up. We would like to see you all making good progress. This is also the aim of the headteacher and teachers. So we have asked them to continue to raise the standard of work you reach, especially in writing. We have also asked them to make it clear what you have to do to be successful in your lessons and to involve you more in checking how well you are doing. You can help by asking them how you can judge if you are doing well during each lesson. Your understanding of your local community is very good, but that of cultures that reflect the ethnic mix in Britain today is not quite as strong. We have asked the headteacher to find ways of helping you to learn more about people of different backgrounds and cultures, both in the UK and abroad.

We hope you continue to enjoy all the activities that the school has to offer and we send you our best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Alison Thomson

Lead Inspector

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