

Blackminster Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116960
Local Authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	358064
Inspection dates	15–16 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Kevin Sheldrick 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 of pupils on the school roll	372
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Parfitt
Headteacher	Peter Humphries
Date of previous school inspection	5 December 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 24 lessons taught by 24 different teachers, and held meetings with the governing body, staff and groups of pupils. The inspection team observed the school's work and looked at documentation relating to: planning, monitoring, safeguarding, communications with parents and carers, and 208 questionnaire returns from them and from 154 pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The progress different groups of pupils make, particularly in mathematics and in Year 6.
- The link between teaching and the use of assessment and the progress that pupils make.
- The school's track record of improvement and what this indicates about the effectiveness of leadership at all levels and the school's capacity for sustained improvement.

Information about the school

This middle school is a lot smaller than the average secondary school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The percentage with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is higher than the national average. Most pupils are of White British heritage; a few have minority ethnic backgrounds, including some with Gypsy and Romany backgrounds. The headteacher has been in post since September 2010.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school. It is improving rapidly and provides a good quality of education. As a result, the majority of outcomes are good. Pupils' contribution to the school and wider community is outstanding, largely because of the exceptionally wide range of opportunities they have to influence decision-making in the school. The governing body, parents and carers and pupils reported positively about how the headteacher is valuing their contributions and ideas.

Pupils make good progress because teachers are using assessment effectively. The specific focus on learning and frequent reference to National Curriculum levels are ensuring pupils know what they must do to improve. All respond especially well when they are given the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning. The school has successfully ensured the majority of teachers maintain a good pace to learning. In some outstanding lessons, pupils demonstrated a commendable ability to evaluate each other's learning. Progress diminished at the end of a few lessons because insufficient attention was devoted to reinforcing the key learning.

Although good progress ensures above-average attainment in all subjects by the end of Year 8, pupils, particularly the more able, do not make sufficient progress in mathematics in Year 6. Despite this shortcoming, effective care, support and guidance ensure pupils progress smoothly from their first schools and eventually to their high schools. The school's impressive record in overcoming the barriers to learning for those with a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities is further proof of the effectiveness of the care and support it provides. Although there are major strengths in pupils' moral and social development, cultural understanding is relatively less well advanced, largely because they have insufficient opportunity to interact with those from a range of different ethnic backgrounds.

The leadership of the headteacher is highly instrumental in accelerating the rate of improvement. The school's self-evaluation is highly perceptive and is resulting in the school focusing on the right priorities. For instance, the school has identified that there is variability in the effectiveness of middle leaders and there are inconsistencies in how effectively assessment data are used to monitor progress. The school also recognises how it can further improve its already good curriculum so that literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) are better promoted through the full range of subjects. Insights of this kind and the school's positive track record since the last inspection confirm its good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- In order that pupils make outstanding progress:

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- ensure all staff emulate the best practice in the school in their use of assessment in lessons
 - ensure opportunities are not lost to reinforce learning at the end of lessons
 - use all the subjects of the curriculum to better promote literacy, numeracy and ICT
 - improve the effectiveness of partnerships in order to raise standards in mathematics in Year 6, particularly for more-able pupils
 - develop more consistent approaches to leadership and management of subjects, particularly regarding the use of assessment data.
- Promote cultural development more effectively by improving the school's approach to community cohesion.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Pupils enter the school with average levels of attainment, and make good progress to reach above average levels. In lessons, pupils were observed to be making progress in the majority of lessons. The school has been disappointed with the results attained in the end of Key Stage 2 tests. Mathematics results were below the national average in 2010 and lower than those attained in other subjects. A minority of pupils and parents and carers are understandably confused by some of the targets in Year 6, which do not appear to build on what has been achieved in their first schools. Results at Level 4 and above are predicted to be closer to the national average in 2011. Despite this slow start in mathematics, the rate of progress accelerates well in the years which follow. In the lessons observed, pupils made especially good progress in English and science.

The school ensures that different groups all achieve well. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress in line with their peers. The school's teaching assistants are highly effective in giving support to these learners. For instance, they promote independent learning among them by encouraging them to solve problems without adult support. Well-organised support is highly instrumental in ensuring learners with Gypsy and Romany backgrounds make good progress. The school continues to work hard in ensuring that these individuals are accepted and made welcome by other pupils.

All pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and show a great willingness to take responsibility for their own learning. Inspectors observed pupils working very well with each other in groups, with many demonstrating an ability to lead and manage their peers. Pupils are very keen to improve their work and willing to accept critical feedback from teachers and their peers. These personal attributes mean that behaviour is good; they also contribute very well to the development of the workplace skills pupils need to succeed in the future.

Pupils expressed high levels of satisfaction with the opportunities they have to positively contribute to the community. The school regularly seeks pupils' views and an elaborate system of committees, the house and prefect system provide exceptional opportunities for all to influence decision-making and take responsibility. For instance, pupils take the lead in organising fund-raising activities. They also have extensive opportunities to be involved in the community beyond the school, and they take these up with enthusiasm, for instance in leading sports activities in first schools and helping old people in the locality.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	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	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

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

How effective is the provision?

The school's senior leaders have ensured a high degree of consistency in the planning of lessons. In all the lessons observed, teachers were clear about the learning that should take place and ensured pupils worked hard. Pupils progressed particularly well, where teachers used assessment effectively and there were opportunities for them to apply their skills. In an outstanding French lesson, pupils were highly motivated by the scenario that involved them in applying their learning in a speed-dating role play. Concentration levels were very high because pupils knew they might have to indicate the level of attainment associated with any responses made by their peers. Often, pupils' good awareness of the assessment criteria enabled them to take a great deal of responsibility for their learning. Some staff used competition well to dramatically improve work rates. Although there is generally good practice in the use of assessment, in a minority of lessons, weakness in its use slowed progress. Occasionally, insufficient account was taken of previous learning and pupils devoted too much time to activities that were insufficiently challenging. Consequently, learning was reduced because pupils did not always apply their knowledge and skills well enough and they were not actively involved in identifying the next steps in their learning.

The curriculum is varied and pupils have many opportunities to participate in special events. For instance, during the inspection, the normal timetable was suspended so pupils

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had the opportunity to meet a time traveller from the English Civil War. A food lesson was skilfully used to deliver aspects of the English curriculum. There is an extensive range of extra-curricular opportunities and the school takes effective steps to ensure all pupils have the opportunity to participate in these. The school is sensibly developing opportunities for all to begin courses that are continued when they transfer to the high school.

The school is more effectively targeting interventions, for instance to increase the proportion of pupils gaining Level 4 or above in mathematics in Year 6. The strong relationship between staff and all learners strongly aids the provision of effective care and support. Recent, sharp improvements in attendance, low exclusion rates and the progress made by pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities all point to strengths in this aspect of provision. The school goes out of its way to include all pupils in the life of the school. The school's learning mentor programme includes all, for instance a pupil with special educational needs was observed supporting younger pupils in a food lesson. Pupils are well prepared for their transfer to high school because of the effective guidance they receive.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: 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	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders have successfully focused the school on improving pupils' progress by ensuring more consistent teaching and much more effective use of assessment. This has enabled key aspects of provision to become good. Leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning and effective action is taken to address any identified weaknesses. Professional development at a whole-school level is effective. Leaders are beginning to ensure the sharing of good practice and recognise that the key to further improvement hinges on making the best practice consistent throughout the school. Although assessment information is used well in lessons, the full use of data on learners' performance as a further check on the impact of teaching over time is at an early stage of development. The school is working hard to improve the effectiveness of its partnerships, in order to ensure the more effective use of data in Year 6, There are inconsistencies in subjects, reflecting variability in leadership at this level. That said, there are strengths at middle leadership, particularly in English and science. The school has sensibly recognised that it can bring about higher levels of consistency in the use of data by reducing the range of subjects taught by teachers.

The headteacher has taken steps to involve the governing body in determining the future direction of the school. The governing body bring considerable expertise to the school and have played a key role in increasing the effectiveness of senior leaders by making them

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more accountable for the outcomes the school achieves. The school's record in ensuring all groups achieve well is proof of its commitment to ensuring equal opportunities, as is its work to improve pupils' attitudes towards different ethnic groups in the local community. The school meets all statutory requirements relating to safeguarding very well. The governing body have taken account of pupils' and parental and carers' views in improving site safety. There are strengths in the school's approach to community cohesion at a school and local level. The school has begun to promote global and national aspects. However, the school recognises that weaknesses in pupils' cultural development means that there is more it can do, particularly in terms of preparation for life in today's United Kingdom.

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	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
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	2

Views of parents and carers

The response to the questionnaire was much higher than that of most schools. The vast majority of the parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire agreed with the statements that leadership and management and teaching are good at this school. The very large majority of the parents and carers agreed with all the other statements. This response indicates that parents and carers hold very positive views about the school. A very small minority did not agree that the school deals effectively with unacceptable behavioural issues. Inspectors looked into these concerns carefully. Inspectors endorsed the views of the few parents and carers who thought that some targets in Year 6 were not sufficiently challenging.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Blackminster 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 208 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 372 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	82	39	112	54	9	4	1	0
The school keeps my child safe	84	40	117	56	4	2	2	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	80	38	108	52	15	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	56	27	130	63	17	8	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	54	26	141	68	3	1	1	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	39	19	135	65	19	9	1	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	44	21	140	67	16	8	1	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)	61	29	125	60	6	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	58	28	136	65	3	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	52	25	119	57	22	11	7	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	38	18	149	72	9	4	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	70	34	129	62	3	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	79	38	112	54	9	4	0	0

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 all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 pupils' 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.



17 March 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Blackminster Middle School, Evesham, WR11 8TG

I would like to thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. Extra special thanks go to those of you who we interviewed, for their perceptive comments that helped inform our conclusions

Our main finding is that your school is good. It gives you a good quality of education. You told us that you think your school is improving and we agreed with you. We concluded that behaviour is good, as is teaching. We decided that you make an outstanding contribution to the community because you enthusiastically take up the very extensive range of opportunities to take on responsibilities and influence decision-making. We were impressed with how well you respond when you are given opportunities to take responsibility for your own learning - for instance, in organising teams when taking part in physical education lessons. The school does well in making sure all of you make good progress. Assessment is used effectively so that you usually undertake work that is appropriate to your abilities. However, we consider that younger, more-able pupils would benefit from experiencing more challenging mathematics. In the best lessons, teachers enable you to see for yourselves what levels you are achieving and what you must do to improve.

To make the school even better we have asked your senior leaders to ensure all teachers use assessment well in every year group. We think that more could be done to improve your cultural development by ensuring you have increased opportunity to interact with groups not represented in your immediate area. You can help by politely telling your teachers when you think the work you are doing is not sufficiently challenging.

I wish you all the best for the future and I hope you raised lots through your Red Nose Day activities.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Sheldrick

Her Majesty's Inspector

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