

Howard Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124801
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	380988
Inspection dates	27–28 September 2011
Reporting inspector	Ian Seath 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	271
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Susanne George
Headteacher	Colin Sinclair
Date of previous school inspection	30 September 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. A total of 21 teachers were observed in 33 visits to classes. In addition to whole-class lessons, inspectors observed one-to-one and small-group intervention and support sessions. Meetings were held with senior managers, teaching staff, governors, a representative of the local authority and students. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at documentation including policies and the school's own assessment records. A considerable amount of students' written work was carefully scrutinised. Inspectors received a total of 67 completed questionnaires from parents and carers, in addition to those from staff and students.

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

- How effectively the school has raised standards and progress, especially in Years 7 and 8.
- The support and intervention provided for those with low prior attainment on entry.
- The extent to which recent turbulence in staffing has impacted on students' experiences.
- The effectiveness of self-evaluation and school improvement processes.

Information about the school

The school is smaller than most middle schools. The proportion of students of minority ethnic heritage is low, as is the proportion whose first language is not English. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is a little above the national average, as is the proportion of those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school has a Healthy Schools Award and the national Sportsmark. This school is subject to the ongoing reorganisation of Suffolk schools from a three-tier to a two-tier system. The headteacher and senior leaders are relatively new in post.

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 that is improving quickly. Despite recent changes, staff have ensured that the focus has remained on children's education. Governors have supported the school well through this period, and leaders and managers are now quickly building confidence and ensuring that progress and standards are rising. The school is demonstrating a good capacity for sustained improvement.

On entry, standards are well below average. Students make better than expected progress in Key Stage 2 so that they enter Key Stage 3 with attainment that is just below average. These improvements accelerate as progress continues to be good in Years 7 and 8. For literacy, the improvements seen are good and for mathematics they are exceptional, with students attaining higher than average standards when they leave the school.

These improvements have been brought about because the quality of provision is good. Teachers assess student attainment very effectively. Because of this, those needing support and intervention are identified quickly so that help is provided promptly. These students make progress that is at least as good as their peers and they often show a good appetite for learning. Together with the good curriculum, improvements in these areas mean that outcomes have improved since the last inspection. Attendance and punctuality are excellent.

In class, the majority of teaching is good. Lesson planning is good but at times a little too detailed so that it does not allow for flexibility. Students are attentive, keen, and enjoy their work. Behaviour in class is good. However, in a small minority of classes there is too much emphasis on activity and tasks rather than learning and thinking. In these classes some students occasionally become bored and low-level disruption develops.

Systems to improve the school are good. Self-assessments are largely accurate, including the school's own judgements of teaching. Target setting is good, with an appropriate level of challenge and ambition. However the school's monitoring of teaching does not pay sufficient attention to learning or the extent to which literacy, numeracy and learning skills are developed in subjects other than English and mathematics. Governors bring much to the school and have supported the school well through a difficult period. However, this support has not been matched by the level of challenge given. The extent to which governors monitor outcomes and set targets for their improvement is satisfactory.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By Easter 2012, ensure that all lessons enable students to acquire key skills of independent learning by:
 - devising systems to ensure that the lesson observation system evaluates learning and standards in class
 - ensuring that all lessons are planned to give students opportunities to work independently and progress between attainment levels
 - planning lessons to ensure that opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy are fully exploited in all subjects
 - devise systems to ensure that governors set targets for, and monitor, the progress made towards achieving these processes.

- By Easter 2012, improve the extent to which governors challenge the school by:
 - ensuring that, where necessary, governors undertake appropriate training on the evaluation of school performance data
 - devising and implementing systems to rigorously monitor progress towards performance targets
 - improve systems to ensure that governors monitor the effectiveness of policies, and in particular those concerning equalities.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students enter the school with levels of prior attainment that are well below those expected, and this was confirmed both in classroom observation and work scrutiny. At Key Stage 2 they make good progress and attain standards in mathematics and English that are just below average. In Years 7 and 8 their progress accelerates rapidly, being most marked in mathematics where it is excellent. This acceleration of progress occurs across all groups and abilities and there is little difference between boys and girls, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities or those eligible for free school meals. Furthermore, the school's own trend data indicate that these patterns are improving year-on-year. When students leave the school, most have attained standards close to national averages, and above for mathematics.

Students feel safe and talk well of their school. Their behaviour is good both around school and in class, although sometimes they are hesitant to ask questions. Independent learning skills are weak on entry, but in those classes where students are given the opportunity to practise them these skills develop well. Most students are keen to help each other learn. Students enjoy their time at school, a view echoed by almost all parents. Consequently, attendance is very high, having improved since the last inspection. Punctuality is excellent. Students have a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. In addition to having three hours per week of physical education, they participate well in the school's wide range of extra-curricular sport.

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

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	3
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	3
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	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is consistently good. Planning is thorough, though occasionally it does not allow for flexibility. Students actively participate in many of their classes, and teachers are often enthusiastic about their subjects, for example in art and music where students work in a stimulating environment. Assessment practice is well-embedded throughout the school. Assessments are accurate and are used extensively in class. Most students know what levels they are at, though they are sometimes less clear about what they need to do to progress. Homework is given regularly and is marked thoroughly. In a minority of classes, however, the emphasis is on teaching to the levels that students are at rather than moving them to the next level. In these classes, expectations are too low. Occasionally, teachers do too much for students instead of stretching them to develop their own skills of independent learning. Despite this, the majority of classes are lively, interesting, and well behaved with students making good progress. Teaching assistants work well to support those who need it in class.

The quality of care, guidance and support is good, with some exemplary practice demonstrated. Students' support needs are accurately evaluated early and help is provided promptly. Links with feeder schools and the main high school to which students progress are good, and are developing fast. Notably, a specialist appointment had been made to coordinate intake arrangements and ensure that transition from primary school is smooth. Links with external agencies are well-

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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developed. Intervention and support sessions are exemplary. Targets are clear and students understand what is expected of them. Teaching in these sessions is purposeful, patient, and supported by very good assessment and identification of next steps. As a result, these students make the good progress seen in their peers. Students understand the school’s requirements and the procedures for poor behaviour. As a consequence, incidents of bullying are rare.

The school’s broad and balanced curriculum effectively caters for the needs of all. At Key Stage 2, the introduction of a faculty system is enabling better planning and coordination of teaching and learning activities. Provision for intervention and support is extensive and well-targeted. A wide range of extra-curricular activities provide additional opportunities for students, and participation rates are high. For example, students enjoy Friday sessions on crochet, sports, photography and creative writing. The school has undertaken much professional development of its curriculum. Staff recognise the need to develop the extent to which key skills of literacy and numeracy are coordinated and taught across subjects other than mathematics and English. The school’s gifted and talented group undertakes an additional range of activities.

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?

Leaders and managers have provided the school with a good direction for improvement. Following recent turbulence, they have galvanised staff to give their best for students, while planning for and successfully delivering an improvement in standards. Since the last inspection, progress, attainment and the standard of teaching have all improved. The school has rightly provided much professional development for the improvement of teaching and the use of assessment, and these are both carried out systematically and effectively. The school’s self-evaluation is broadly accurate and managers have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement. School improvement plans are sensible, suitably self-critical, and are monitored regularly by senior managers. Good practice is identified and shared well. Staff feel well-supported.

The school manages its teaching well. The lesson observation system has been an effective tool in identifying where development is needed and it is broadly accurate. However, the system places too much emphasis on teacher activities rather than learning. Consequently, opportunities to evaluate the extent to which lessons foster

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the development of literacy, numeracy, and independent learning skills are lost.

Members of the governing body bring many strengths to the school. They have successfully given support where needed and have ensured that the school meets requirements for safeguarding well, and that procedures are effective. Together with senior staff, they have played an important role in building productive relationships with partner schools. However, the support that the governing body has given has not been matched by challenge. Although targets are set within the school, the extent to which governors monitor progress towards them is limited. For example, the monitoring of aspects of equalities and the achievement of different groups is only adequately developed. The school’s engagement with parents and carers is good, and this is confirmed by the overwhelmingly positive responses in parental questionnaires. The school understands the community that it serves. It actively promotes cohesion within the school and is involved in a number of developments within the wider community. However, the impact of these has not been evaluated.

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	3
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
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 overwhelming majority of parents and carers are positive about their children’s experiences at the school. A very small minority expressed concern about the school’s dealing with unacceptable behaviour. Overall, inspection findings supported the majority of positive responses.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Howard 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 67 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 271 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	28	41	37	54	4	6	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	30	43	39	57	0	0	0	
The school informs me about my child’s progress	19	28	40	58	3	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	22	32	37	54	2	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	25	36	38	55	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	19	28	41	59	3	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	15	22	50	72	1	1	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)	18	26	41	59	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	20	29	43	62	1	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	16	23	44	64	5	7	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	17	25	42	61	3	4	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	28	41	36	52	1	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	28	41	39	57	1	1	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 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 2010/11 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.

29 September 2011

Dear Students



Inspection of Howard Middle School, Bury St Edmunds, IP32 6SA

As you know, I visited your school together with two other inspectors earlier this week. We sat in most of your classes, talked with many of you, looked closely at your work and met with teachers. Throughout this process you were polite, helpful and calm and I would like to thank you for that. Your school has many strengths and one of them is you.

We found that your school is a good one that has improved a lot. You make very good progress because you are taught well and are given good support where you need it. There are also lots of activities and after-school clubs to become involved in. You have played a part in this improvement, for example by attending very well and being punctual. We also found that behaviour in lessons is good and that the vast majority of you work hard.

We have asked the school to look at improving two areas. The first is to give you more opportunities to practise working independently so that you can solve problems and find things out by yourselves. The second is that we have asked the governing body to keep a closer eye on how fast the school is improving and how well you are doing.

You and your parents told us many things about the school. You said that you enjoy your time there, and that you feel safe. You also told us that there is very little bullying, although a handful of your parents had some concerns about it. Remember that you can help keep bullying low by talking to an adult if you are affected, or if you see someone else suffering. It is your education and you have a right to enjoy it.

Once again, thank you and I wish you all well.

Yours sincerely

Ian Seath
Her Majesty's Inspector

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