

# Bridgewater Middle School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	117541
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	379439
<b>Inspection dates</b>	3–4 July 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	John Daniell HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Middle deemed secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	9–13
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	406
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Robert Williams
<b>Headteacher</b>	Rachel Swaffield
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	12 December 2006
<b>School address</b>	Bridle Way Billet Lane Berkhamsted HP4 1ES
<b>Telephone number</b>	01442 871231
<b>Fax number</b>	01442 873658
<b>Email address</b>	admin@bridgewater.herts.sch.uk

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<b>Age group</b>	9–13
<b>Inspection date(s)</b>	3–4 July 2012
<b>Inspection number</b>	379439



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## Introduction

Inspection team

John Daniell

Her Majesty's Inspector

Mina Drever

Additional Inspector

David Turner

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 21 lessons taught by 19 teachers. Inspectors also visited a number of lessons to monitor achievement for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and four groups of pupils. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View survey in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at school improvement documentation, minutes of meetings, performance data, records of lesson observations, and school policies, including for the safeguarding of children. The inspection team scrutinised responses to questionnaires from 164 parents and carers, 101 pupils and 40 members of staff.

## Information about the school

Bridgewater Middle School is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. Although Berkhamsted itself offers a three-tier school system, the surrounding area is exclusively two-tier, and this school, along with others in the town, is currently in the process of deciding whether to revert to a two-tier system with effect from September 2013. Up to 25% of pupils leave the school at the end of Key Stage 2 to continue their education in selective schools or in the independent sector. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. A below-average proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic groups and very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus is well below average, as is the proportion of those with a statement of special educational needs. The school meets the current floor standard, which sets the government's minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

The school hold the International Schools Award (Intermediate) as well as Healthy Schools status.

## Inspection judgements

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Achievement of pupils</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Quality of teaching</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Behaviour and safety of pupils</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>1</b>

## Key findings

- Bridgewater Middle School is an outstanding school. Pupils are exceptionally well catered for, and all members of the school community strive to achieve the highest standards.
- Pupils' achievement is outstanding. A significant and noticeable strength of the school is its ability to enthuse pupils and nurture their eagerness for learning. Pupils' progress is striking and accelerates rapidly as they move through the school, so that they achieve levels of attainment which are significantly above the national average.
- The quality of teaching is outstanding. Teachers have an excellent understanding of how pupils learn, and skilfully plan lessons which meet the needs of different groups of learners, including for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. Teachers' marking is of a high quality, but a small proportion does not provide as much detailed guidance on how to improve as does the majority. A very few teachers do not insist that pupils respond to their written guidance.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They are notably courteous towards each other and towards adults. They are rightly proud of their school and respond with perseverance and resilience to the high demands put on them from their teachers. When in lessons, and moving around the school, they model excellent behaviour. Pupils feel very safe in school and their attendance is well above the national average.
- Leaders, managers and members of the governing body are highly intuitive and their strategic approach towards leading the school has secured outstanding outcomes over a sustained period of time. They have created a cohesive school community in which everyone is valued and makes a positive contribution towards driving up standards. Excellent practice in teaching is very much in evidence, but there are occasional missed opportunities to share this with other members of staff.

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

- Sustain the outstanding quality of teaching by:
  - ensuring that the quality of all teachers' written feedback is as good as the very best

- encouraging pupils to respond to the written guidance provided by teachers
- maximising every opportunity to share the widespread existing good practice in teaching.

## **Main report**

### **Achievement of pupils**

Pupils enter the school in Year 5 with above-average levels of attainment and progress rapidly, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics, so that by the end of Year 6, standards are significantly above the national average. Progress is sustained and accelerated further during Years 7 and 8 which secures outstanding achievement over time. The improvement of reading among lower-attaining pupils has been significant in driving up standards of literacy. Pupils show a great passion for reading and their strong development of this skill, as well as writing and numeracy, contributes towards their outstanding achievement. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make outstanding progress over time. The very few pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, as well as pupils who speak English as an additional language and those from minority ethnic groups, all achieve outstandingly well. Consequently, there are no significant gaps in achievement between different groups of pupils.

The overwhelming majority of parents and carers rightly believe that their children achieve well at the school. Pupils' positive attitudes towards learning coupled with teachers' deep understanding of effective learning strategies ensure that all pupils make substantial gains in their learning outcomes. A particularly positive experience observed involved Year 5 pupils in a history lesson evaluating Greek wars through readings from Homer's *Iliad*. The entire class was so enthralled during the reading session that they were sitting on the edge of their seats in awe and wonder. Pupils' knowledge of the raw brutality of hand-to-hand combat was exceptionally well developed, and their contribution to the final discussion revealed ingrained and well-established learning and thinking.

### **Quality of teaching**

As a result of outstanding teaching, pupils' outcomes are excellent and continue to improve. The vast majority of parents and carers rightly believe their children are taught well. An initiative to target a small group of boys who have lower levels of literacy has had a remarkable impact on their attitudes to reading and has nurtured their fascination for language. Typically outstanding teaching matches the work to the needs of different groups of pupils exceptionally well and develops their reading skills highly effectively. This is because teachers make excellent use of pupils' prior attainment when planning for learning over time, and they link the learning to previously acquired knowledge. Teachers check regularly for understanding using a range of effective strategies, including asking pupils to assess their own progress as well as that of their peers. Teachers convey their very high expectations throughout the entire lesson and use their excellent subject knowledge and skilfully targeted questioning to deepen pupils' understanding. Strong relationships between teachers

and pupils foster the most positive attitudes towards learning. Additional adults are deployed particularly well in the classroom, knowing exactly when to intervene, and when to step back. They take delight in watching disabled pupils and those with special educational needs work independently and make great gains in their learning. Indeed, there is little, if any, need to withdraw these pupils from the classroom, as the quality of teaching is so strong. Outstanding teaching was seen in a Year 8 mathematics lesson involving the use of Pythagoras' theorem. Pupils were challenged by the teacher first to understand the theory, and then to apply it practically in a range of contexts. The teacher had planned the lesson expertly to ensure all pupils made rapid progress.

The detailed marking of pupils' work is a strong feature of teaching. The majority of teachers provide very helpful marking which indicates clearly how well pupils are performing, and exactly what is required to achieve the next level of attainment. These teachers also expect pupils to respond to their comments. A very few teachers do not yet provide such in-depth comments, nor do they require a response from pupils. Teaching plays a key role in pupils' strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural development across the curriculum. As a result, pupils work very well with each other and demonstrate an impressive and confident awareness of the issues facing today's multi-cultural society, including those relating to equality and diversity.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

An overwhelming majority of parents and carers believe that the school keeps their children safe and that pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. Pupils who responded to questionnaires and who met with inspectors validate this highly accurate perception. Pupils' outstanding behaviour over time has been instrumental in securing the very best outcomes, as teachers can plan imaginative and challenging lessons, knowing that pupils will willingly rise to these challenges. Pupils report that instances of bullying are extremely rare, and any reported incidents are dealt with swiftly and very effectively. They have an excellent understanding of the different types of bullying. Exclusions are rare, with only one fixed-term exclusion over the past five terms, and no permanent exclusions in the history of the school. Teaching and non-teaching staff have willingly volunteered to act as mentors, and offer well-targeted and effective support to pupils, who might otherwise display challenging behaviour.

The school provides a safe and welcoming environment. Consequently, pupils' attendance is well above the national average and their punctuality to school and to lessons is exemplary. Strong support is provided for pupils whose personal circumstances make them vulnerable to underachievement. These pupils achieve as well as others in the school because staff adopt a fully inclusive approach in meeting their needs. An impressive case study of a pupil with complex medical needs demonstrates the school's willingness to use all available resources to ensure all pupils benefit equally from the supportive provision.

### **Leadership and management**

Parents and carers, members of staff and pupils express great confidence in the

leadership and management of the school. The highly effective headteacher and her leadership team are ably assisted by a challenging and supportive governing body in securing outstanding outcomes, which continue to improve. All aspects relating to planning for school improvement are rigorously monitored, evaluated and reviewed. Leadership at middle level is strong and middle leaders are held fully to account for the performance of their areas through an internal review system which is rigorous but openly transparent in its approach. Governors have restructured their committees and make every effort to gather views of pupils, parents and carers as well as staff. The parents' forum has been a particularly effective tool to inform school improvement. The school's accurate systems for self-evaluation are fully embedded and correctly identify areas for development. Pupils' performance is analysed by different groups to ensure that no gaps in attainment emerge. Equal opportunities have a very high profile in the school. This policy, as well as others, is implemented consistently by staff and members of the governing body. The school meets the statutory requirements for the safeguarding of children.

The proficient management of teaching enables leaders and managers to form a precise profile of the quality of teaching over time. Inspectors concurred with senior leaders' judgements during jointly observed lessons. A sophisticated system for recording the key components of effective teaching ensures leaders and managers have an accurate picture of teachers' strengths and areas for development, although there is potential to share this expertise more across the whole school. Accurate records of teachers' performance inform target setting for individual teachers, supported through appropriately targeted training. Very good use is often made of in-house expertise through the effective deployment of advanced skills teachers or teacher coaches. Training relating to the safeguarding of children is regularly delivered to all staff.

The skilfully designed broad and balanced curriculum offers pupils in Key Stage 2 a curriculum often experienced only in Key Stage 3. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 benefit from lessons largely delivered by specialist teachers. Where this is not possible, Key Stage 3 specialists work closely with primary-trained teachers to secure high quality provision. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 benefit from a successfully accelerated curriculum in which they cover three years' study over a two year period and secure outstanding outcomes. All but a very few pupils participate in some form of extra-curricular activity, with music, art and sport particularly enhancing the provision. The curriculum promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development remarkably well through a wide range of activities including: raising funds for charities nominated by the school council; the buddy system to ease transition for Year 5 pupils; links with schools in Africa; and themed curriculum days. During the inspection, pupils were observed proudly rehearsing for their production of *Oliver* and all were eagerly awaiting the Berkhamsted Games 2012, which the school was hosting in the same week.

## 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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.



## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

**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.**



6 July 2012

Dear Pupils

### **Inspection of Bridgewater Middle School, Berkhamsted, HP4 1ES**

Thank you very much for making the inspection team feel so welcome when we visited your school recently. It was a pleasure to meet with so many of you. You are rightly very proud of your school. Every single one of you who responded to the pupil questionnaire told us you were happy with the quality of teaching.

- Bridgewater Middle School is outstanding. Everyone in your school community is committed to achieving the highest standards. You achieve outstandingly well and you make excellent progress during your time in the school.
- Teaching is also outstanding. Your teachers are skilled in planning lessons which meet your individual needs very well. The vast majority of your teachers help you move to the next level of attainment by providing you with detailed written comments
- Your behaviour is exemplary in lessons and when moving around the school. You clearly enjoy school and your attendance is well-above the national average.
- Your school's leaders, managers and members of the governing body are doing an excellent job. They have an accurate understanding of your school's strengths and areas for development.

We have asked your school's leaders and managers to make sure that all of your teachers provide detailed written guidance and to check that you respond to this. We have also asked them to celebrate the excellent teaching and share good ideas more with each other. We ask you to maintain your high standards and to strive to achieve your very best.

Yours sincerely

John Daniell  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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