

Alvechurch Church of England Middle School

Birmingham Road, Alvechurch, Birmingham, B48 7TA

Inspection dates 13–14 September 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- This is a good and improving school. Pupils feel safe and happy here, enjoy their learning and are achieving well. Parents agree.
- Pupils' attainment is consistently above average at the end of Key Stage 2 and Year 8. They make good progress as they move through the school.
- Improvements in achievement have been driven by senior leaders introducing systems that now accurately identify the progress pupils are making. Teachers use this system well to match teaching to the needs of pupils.
- Teaching is typically good and sometimes outstanding; it is characterised by high expectations and challenge.
- Behaviour and safety are outstanding because pupils' attitudes to learning are consistently positive and their behaviour, both in and out of lessons, is exemplary.
- The school has recently experienced a very difficult period in its history but, due to the clarity of purpose shown by the headteacher and her team, it has remained focused on the well-being and progress of pupils as well as supporting children, their families and the wider school community.
- Leadership and management at all levels are good, the curriculum is creative and there are good opportunities for pupils beyond lessons.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Recent rapid improvements in pupil progress are not yet sustained over time.
- The most able pupils are making good progress but they are capable of achieving more.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 23 lessons taught by 17 teachers.
- Meetings took place with: groups of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 pupils, senior leaders, curriculum leaders, the special educational needs co-ordinator and the Chair of Governing Body. A telephone conversation took place with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors looked at the school improvement plan, the self-evaluation document, schemes of work and departmental action plans. Inspectors also looked at pupil progress data, performance management systems and safeguarding procedures. Anonymised teacher performance data was also examined.
- The inspection team considered 60 responses to Parent View and one letter sent by a parent in planning the inspection.

Inspection team

Liz Talmadge, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Harkireet Sohel	Additional inspector
Robin Sidaway	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized middle school though smaller than most secondary schools. It serves the village of Alvechurch and the surrounding area.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage but a very small proportion come from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- The numbers of pupils eligible for free school meals is very low and the school has a very stable population. A smaller than average number of pupils is eligible for the pupil premium.
- An above average number of pupils are supported by a statement of special educational needs or at school action plus. The proportion of pupils supported by school action is lower than average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Sustain and further improve the recent rapid rise in pupil achievement by:
 - ensuring that all staff make consistently good use of tracking information to help them identify the precise learning needs of all pupils
 - continuing to emphasise the development of reading and ensure that the focus on writing includes spelling and presentational skills.
- Ensure that teaching in all subject areas meets the learning needs of the most able pupils by:
 - increasing the level of challenge by designing learning activities that demand more from the most able pupils
 - providing the most able with additional opportunities for learning independently and giving them the time to explore more complex ideas.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Achievement overall is good. It is not outstanding because the rapid improvement in pupil progress has yet to be sustained over time.
- Pupils join the school with higher than average attainment. The school has developed a good understanding of the learning needs of Year 5 pupils by working with many of their feeder schools to moderate standards. This has enabled better interventions to be put in place for any pupil making less than expected progress. Attainment for all year groups is good and improving.
- The progress pupils made between Year 5 and Year 8 last year was good with all pupils making the expected progress in reading and writing and most making better than expected progress in mathematics.
- Key Stage 2 achievement last year was much better overall than the previous year. Small numbers of pupils with special educational needs and those identified as gifted and talented who previously had made less than expected progress in reading, exceeded their expected progress in mathematics and made the expected progress in writing.
- The proportion of pupils making better than expected progress has increased significantly, including for those pupils in receipt of the pupil premium, demonstrating that the tracking and monitoring systems introduced by the school two years ago are now having a positive impact.
- The school uses a wide range of intervention activities such as: rapid reading and guided reading schemes to support reading; mathematics booster classes; social skills teaching; and workshops for the most able pupils. Teaching assistants work well with small groups of pupils and individuals during lessons to develop their literacy and numeracy skills.
- The school has a well-developed literacy strategy and all pupils read regularly. Writing skills are not as well developed for all pupils. The school has identified writing as the focus for literacy teaching this year. Presentational skills and spelling in English and some other subjects require improvement.
- In lessons, inspectors observed pupils making good progress. Pupils work well individually, in pairs and in small groups. Pupils are enthusiastic and keen to learn new things. They enjoy opportunities to learn independently and do so in many lessons.
- Pupils with statements of special educational needs and those who are at school action plus achieve well. While these pupils' standards in reading and writing are lower than average at Key Stage 2, by the time they reach the end of Year 8 they have caught up. A new teaching scheme for mathematics has led to improved attainment in mathematics for these pupils and the gap is closing quickly.
- Almost all of the parents who responded to the online survey feel that their children are making good progress at school.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching in most subjects is at least good and contributes to the good progress made by pupils. Teaching cannot be outstanding until the recent rapid improvements in progress are sustained over time and the most able pupils are making outstanding progress.
- Teachers plan carefully and explain clearly to pupils what they will be learning so that they know what is expected of them. Good teaching seen in lessons reflected good subject knowledge and was enthusiastic and confident, resulting in pupils' evident enjoyment and good progress.
- Pupils frequently work together with their 'learning partner', enabling them to test out ideas together before sharing them with the whole class. This is effective in helping them to develop self-confidence. When pupils work in small groups, their very positive attitudes to learning mean that they listen well to each other and give support in developing ideas.
- There are good opportunities for pupils to learn independently and these are enjoyed by all pupils. In a Year 7 French class, for example, an able group of pupils were expected to deduce the meaning of words from their context. This was a challenging activity but pupils were given time to think about what was required, were fully engaged, enjoyed the challenge and made rapid progress. Where teaching does not encourage independent learning the progress made is less rapid.
- The best lessons enable pupils to actively participate in their learning. In a Year 5 mathematics lesson, for example, pupils were developing the concept of estimation by physically forming a number line across the classroom. This was effective in helping them to remember number order when dealing with written problems.
- Teachers use questioning well and expect pupils to reflect on their work and review it in order to make improvements. Pupils do this well both independently and with their learning partners.
- Pupils read well and often, and writing is now a key school improvement target for all year groups. In an English lesson in Year 6, the development of writing skills was a key feature as pupils explored more interesting ways to begin sentences.
- The very good support offered by the teaching assistants makes a major contribution to the good progress made by pupils with disabilities and those with special educational needs. Teaching assistants work closely with teachers to structure learning so that pupils know which steps they need to take to learn effectively.
- During lessons teachers regularly check pupils' understanding and encourage pupils to identify the progress they are making. Marking is regular and includes helpful advice for making improvements.
- The majority of parents say that their children are well taught and inspectors agree.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils' attitudes to learning are exemplary. Pupils' enthusiasm for learning is outstanding and they make a valuable contribution to the calm, orderly and purposeful atmosphere found throughout the school. Attendance is high and pupils are always punctual to lessons.
- In their roles as 'learning partners' pupils support each other well in lessons; they challenge

and encourage each other to improve and develop their ideas and contributions. This was illustrated well in a Year 5 physical education lesson where peer coaching was used to develop skills in hockey. Pupils' sensitive and supportive feedback to each other led to good progress for all groups.

- Pupils respond extremely positively to the high expectations of good behaviour set by the school. There are good systems of supervision in place and behaviour in lessons and outside lessons is consistent and exceptionally good.
- Pupils express strong loyalty to the school and say they feel part of a 'family' where they are known individually and looked after well. Year 5 pupils, for example, were keen to show inspectors the excellent outside environment that they enjoy at break and lunch times.
- Assemblies are used to reinforce the values and ethos of the school and this is well supported by strong relationships between teachers and children.
- Pupils are well aware of different forms of bullying, including cyber bullying. They report very few instances of bullying but they know what to do if it does occur and have confidence in staff to respond very quickly.
- Safe behaviour was seen throughout the inspection and pupils report that they feel safe in school and understand how to avoid potentially dangerous situations when out and about. Parents also report that their children feel safe in school. Pupils spoke about visits from Child Line helping them to learn more about unsafe situations.
- The school has very good procedures to care for pupils and to support pupils and families whose circumstances may make them vulnerable.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and her team share a clear vision for the school. Parents say that the school is well led and managed and inspectors support this view. Leadership and management are not yet outstanding because the recent improvements in pupil progress have yet to be sustained and improved further over time. The school knows what it has to do to ensure that this happens.
- Issues identified at the last inspection have been addressed and this shows that the school has good capacity to sustain improvement.
- The leadership of teaching and learning is good and improving as leaders at all levels track pupils' progress and measure the impact of interventions for individuals and groups of pupils. The most able pupils are achieving well but have the potential to do even better.
- Subject leaders are fully engaged in measuring pupil progress, setting targets for improvement and being held accountable for meeting those targets.
- The values and ethos of the school are well supported by staff and pupils on a daily basis. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good.
- Performance management systems are closely linked to school self-evaluation, planning and review and ensure that all staff contribute to achieving school improvement priorities.
- There has recently been a restructuring of staff at the school that has led to better

alignment of staff salaries with appropriate levels of responsibility.

- The local authority offers the school 'light touch' support in supporting improvements in teaching and achievement.
- The curriculum is good because it combines a coherent focus on core learning with opportunities for creativity that enhance pupils' experience of learning. The inclusive music provision in the Wednesday Wonder is, for example, a strength of the school. An Arts Week also enables pupils to develop and express their creativity.
- There are many opportunities for pupils to engage in activities beyond taught lessons. Pupils reach high standards in a wide range of sporting achievements, enjoy school visits and join clubs that include activities such as singing, gardening, poetry and science.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - is good and clearly focused on the key priorities for improvement
 - knows the school well and offers expert and appropriate challenge to school leaders
 - ensures that safeguarding is robust, with all requirements being regularly checked.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	116983
Local authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	403304

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	365
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Bryan Maybee
Headteacher	Karen Jordan
Date of previous school inspection	9 July 2008
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