

# Howard Middle School

Beard Road, Bury St Edmunds, IP32 6SA

**Inspection dates** 25–26 February 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Require improvement	3
Leadership and management		Require improvement	3

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 is too low. Pupils do not make enough progress in their first two years at the school to fill the gaps in their learning.
- Pupils make slower progress than they should when teachers require them to repeat tasks that they have already mastered.
- Initiatives to develop pupils' writing skills are not yet making a difference.
- Teachers do not provide activities which allow pupils to develop a range of skills by being creative or working things out for themselves.
- More-able pupils are given work that is too easy for them.
- Not all pupils participate fully in lessons because some are quietly inattentive.
- Subject leaders do not know precisely what they need to do to tackle weaknesses in teaching. As a result, the school is not improving as quickly as it should be.
- Governors and subject leaders are not all closely analysing the progress made by year groups or different groups of pupils.
- The governing body does not challenge senior leaders enough about pupils' achievement, particularly in Key Stage 2.

### The school has the following strengths

- Leaders help pupils gain a clear sense of moral boundaries. Pupils get on well with staff and each other.
- The arrangements to keep pupils safe and secure are good.
- Teachers give pupils good advice on how they can improve their work.
- Strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural education supports pupils' personal development.
- The many after-school clubs give pupils the opportunity to learn new skills.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 24 lessons, six of which were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors undertook a thorough work scrutiny that examined pupils' progress across several year groups.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior and subject leaders, groups of pupils, the Chair and members of the Governing Body, and a representative from the local authority who supports the school's work.
- Inspectors considered the views of the 42 parents who responded to Parent View, the online questionnaire. They analysed the results of the 23 replies to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors looked at the school's data on pupils' progress, lesson plans, minutes of meetings and records relating to behaviour, safety and attendance. They also reviewed the school's checks on how well it is doing and school improvement plans.

## Inspection team

Lisa Fraser, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Terence Cook

Additional Inspector

Richard Owen

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The school is smaller than most secondary schools.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below average.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is above average. The pupil premium provides additional funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, those looked after by the local authority and those with a parent in the armed services.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- Suffolk County Council is currently in public consultation on plans to close the school in 2016 as part of its reorganisation of schools. This has had an impact on staff turnover, with a number of new staff joining the school in September 2013.
- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards for Key Stage 2, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and hence achievement, especially in Key Stage 2, by ensuring that:
  - teachers move on more quickly when pupils show that they have already grasped the main learning points
  - pupils are given more opportunity and help to develop competent writing skills
  - teachers provide challenging activities for more-able pupils
  - pupils develop a range of skills by being creative and working things out for themselves in lessons.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
  - school improvement plans show exactly what will be done to improve teaching, so that subject leaders can tackle weaknesses in their departments
  - all teachers are consistent in supporting and developing pupils' writing skills
  - subject leaders and governors track closely the achievement of different groups to ensure that all pupils achieve well.

An external review of governance, including the school's use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- In Key Stage 2, pupils' attainment is too low. By the time they leave the school at the end of Year 8, however, pupils have made more rapid progress and achieve levels broadly in line for their age in mathematics and reading. Pupils' writing skills are much weaker and this affects their progress across the range of subjects.
- Pupils start at the school in Year 5 with skills in reading, writing and mathematics which are well below average. In their first two years, pupils do not make enough progress to catch up from these low starting points. As a result, the percentage of pupils reaching the level expected for their age (Level 4) at the end of Key Stage 2 remains below average. In each year since the last inspection, pupils have been the equivalent of a year behind pupils nationally in the Year 6 tests.
- Several changes of staff had a negative impact on pupils' achievement in Key Stage 2 in 2013, particularly in mathematics, but pupils also told inspectors that they often find the work too easy. Inspectors did not observe consistently good progress in lessons or in pupils' work over time across the range of subjects. More-able pupils do not always make the progress they should because the work they complete is not challenging enough.
- In Key Stage 3, pupils achieve better in mathematics than in English. Senior leaders recognise that pupils' writing skills are weak and this has been a particular focus for teachers. However, there is not yet a consistent approach to developing pupils' writing skills across all subjects. Pupils who speak English as an additional language communicate less well in writing than they do verbally.
- Subject leaders do not yet use data well enough to identify how far new initiatives, such as the focus on writing, are making a difference to different groups of pupils' achievement. In contrast, senior leaders make extensive use of data to track and monitor achievement. Leaders' predictions of pupils' attainment have been accurate to date and they are confident that pupils currently in Year 6 will achieve the minimum standards expected for their age in the national tests in 2014.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make similar rates of progress to their peers as a result of additional support sessions arranged to meet these pupils' needs.
- Additional funding for pupils eligible for the pupil premium is used to provide breakfast club and after-school activities, including the 'fighting fit' club which develops pupils' sense of self-belief and confidence through martial arts. School data indicate that these pupils make more rapid progress in reading than their classmates. Nevertheless, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals are still a long way behind their peers. In Year 6 in 2013, they were more than a year behind in English and mathematics.
- Year 7 'catch-up' funding is making a difference to pupils' better progress in Key Stage 3. A full-time specialist teacher helps pupils catch up through tailored reading and writing work. Pre-learning sessions (extra support that covers topics which will be delivered in future lessons) boost the confidence of less-able pupils.

### The quality of teaching

### requires improvement

- Too much teaching requires improvement. During the inspection, only a few examples of good

teaching were observed, although no teaching was inadequate.

- Teaching is not consistently effective because, in some lessons, work is not pitched at a suitable level for pupils to make rapid progress. Pupils are often asked to repeat tasks they have already mastered instead of moving on to new learning. More-able pupils, in particular, are not challenged to reach their potential.
- Few teachers plan activities which allow pupils to develop a range of skills by being creative or taking the initiative in lessons. In some lessons, teachers do not pick up on a few pupils who choose not to participate fully. As a result, these pupils make less progress than they could.
- Recent initiatives to make sure that pupils are clear about what they need to do to improve their work have had some success. Inspectors observed several examples of marking that indicate teachers give high-quality advice on what pupils need to do to improve their work. However, not all teachers pick up on basic spelling, punctuation and grammar errors in pupils' written work.
- Teaching assistants sometimes give good support to pupils in lessons, but they are not always effectively directed by the teacher. In these instances they do not give high-quality support to pupils because they are not sure about what the teacher wants pupils to achieve in the lesson.
- Inspectors observed good progress in lessons where the teacher moved learning on once it was clear that pupils had already grasped the main learning points. For example, in a Year 7 mathematics lesson on equations, pupils made good progress as a result of challenging activities, good resources and the teacher reshaping tasks in response to feedback from pupils.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** require improvement

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Although the majority of pupils are positive about their learning, there are a few who choose not to take part fully in lessons. These pupils are inattentive. They find it difficult to motivate themselves to get involved in learning. Younger pupils say their progress is very occasionally affected by classmates' lack of concentration in lessons.
- Nevertheless, fixed-term exclusions are low and the number of pupils who are referred to the school's internal base for poor behaviour is reducing. The school is a calm and friendly environment and pupils get on well with each other and staff. There have been no permanent exclusions for several years.
- Attendance, although improving, has not yet reached the national average. A small number of pupils do not arrive punctually to school. Leaders have brought about the improvements in attendance through good communication with parents.
- Around the school and in the dining hall, pupils demonstrate respect for the environment. They conduct themselves sensibly between lessons. Pupils' work is attractively displayed in classrooms and corridors. There is very little litter.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Both pupils and their parents agree they are safe at school. Pupils have a good awareness of the different types of bullying. They are confident that any instances of bullying are sorted out quickly by senior leaders.
- The school council gives pupils the opportunity to both have their views heard by leaders and to make a difference to their school community. New bike sheds were installed as a result of school

council involvement and its members regularly interview new members of staff.

## **The leadership and management** require improvement

- Together with the deputy headteacher, the headteacher has ensured that the school remains a calm and welcoming environment for pupils during the difficult period of uncertainty about its future. However, leaders have not been successful in ensuring that pupils at Key Stage 2 attain the minimum standards expected for their age and teaching is not consistently good.
- While school improvement plans clearly outline what the school aims to achieve over the next few years, they are not specific enough in identifying the actions leaders need to take to tackle weaknesses in teaching. As a result, new subject leaders are not clear about their role in improving the quality of teaching in their subject areas.
- Although joint observations during the inspection indicated that senior leaders are accurate in their evaluations of teaching, school records show that the quality of teaching is judged to be good in a high proportion of lessons. This gives the school an unrealistic picture of the overall quality of teaching, because the detailed scrutiny of pupils' work undertaken by inspectors with school leaders indicated that teaching requires improvement.
- Arrangements to manage the performance of staff have recently been revised and are now more rigorous. However, subject leaders are not yet fully involved in monitoring the quality of learning in their departments.
- Nevertheless, senior leaders have not been afraid to take difficult decisions to eliminate inadequate teaching. Newly launched policies to improve the quality of marking have had some success. Subject leaders are enthusiastic and a number benefit from national training schemes to improve their skills. These factors demonstrate that the school has the capacity to improve.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong, reinforced by assemblies which encourage pupils to show resilience and to persevere through potential challenges. An extensive range of after-school clubs and visits overseas give pupils the opportunity to learn new skills and broaden their horizons. Strong leadership of behaviour helps pupils to be very clear about moral boundaries.
- New primary school sport funding is making a particular difference to girls in Years 5 and 6 who are reluctant to get involved in sport. A wider range of activities in physical education lessons is now on offer and girls have the opportunity to take part in more competitive matches. Leaders are committed to securing equality of opportunity.
- The range of subjects taught broadly meets pupils' needs. Leaders have sensible plans to increase the amount of time allocated to English in order to tackle weaknesses in pupils' writing.
- Leaders now work closely with feeder primary schools to gain a clear picture of pupils' attainment before they join the school.
- All requirements regarding safeguarding are met.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors have used local authority support to improve their understanding of the school's performance, but this has not led to a realistic and accurate view because their assessment is

too generous. As a result, governors do not challenge senior leaders enough about pupils' achievement, particularly in Key Stage 2, and they are too positive about the overall quality of teaching. Recent training from the local authority has developed governors' knowledge of published data but they do not have a clear understanding of the performance of different groups of pupils, including those eligible for the pupil premium, across all year groups. The governors are aware of the arrangements for the management of teachers' work and understand that teachers' pay rises and promotion should be tied to the progress of their pupils, but this is not yet applied by the school. Governors are very aware of the day-to-day running of the school because they make regular visits.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	124801
<b>Local authority</b>	Suffolk
<b>Inspection number</b>	440622

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

<b>Type of school</b>	Middle deemed secondary
<b>School category</b>	Maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	9–13
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	290
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Sue George
<b>Headteacher</b>	Greg Sadler
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	27 September 2011
<b>Telephone number</b>	01284 761405
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