

Amble Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122349
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	301963
Inspection dates	15–16 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Brian Blake 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 on roll	
School	338
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jane Mackenzie
Headteacher	Mr John Butler
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2003
School address	South Avenue Amble Morpeth Northumberland NE65 0ND
Telephone number	01665 710217
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Age group	9–13
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Amble Middle is a community school for pupils from 9–13 years of age. Because it is deemed secondary, it is smaller than average in size. Almost all the pupils are of White British heritage. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than found nationally, but of these, there is a lower than average number with a statement of special educational need. The school serves a diverse area where there are some below average levels of social deprivation. The school currently holds the Sportsmark award for providing its pupils with a minimum of two hours of physical education and sport each week.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Amble Middle School provides a satisfactory standard of education. All adults who work in the school have a caring approach and work hard to help the school make the improvements it needs in order that all pupils achieve as well as they can.

The pupils start at the school in Year 5 with average standards for their age in the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science. By the time they reach the end of Year 6, standards have remained average in English and science, but have dropped to below average in mathematics. This means that although the pupils' overall progress is satisfactory by the end of Key Stage 2, inadequate progress has been made in mathematics. However, in Years 7 and 8, the rate of pupils' progress improves so that by the time they leave the school at the end of Year 8, standards are average in all three subjects, and progress since they started at the school is satisfactory.

The school's provision for the care, guidance and support of pupils is satisfactory, with some good features. Pupils with identified learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive effective support, which helps them to make satisfactory progress relative to their capabilities. The school makes all reasonable efforts to safeguard the pupils, both in and out of school. The curriculum is helping to develop the basic skills in literacy and numeracy, but this is currently more successful in improving standards in Years 7 and 8, than in Years 5 and 6. A good range of extra-curricular activities provides many opportunities for the pupils to engage in regular exercise. Together with the school's healthy eating campaign, the pupils are being given a good start towards adopting healthy lifestyles.

Teaching is satisfactory and occasionally good. Where it is most effective, pupils are well engaged in their learning, showing interest and enthusiasm for their work. Teachers are beginning to use assessment information to help them pinpoint pupils' progress and standards. There is currently too much inconsistency across the school, especially in the three core subjects, which means that the target setting process used to raise standards is less secure and accurate than it could be.

The headteacher is successful in encouraging a positive and caring atmosphere to exist within the school. Staff and governors are keen to help the school improve, but the school's self-evaluation concentrates far too much on what the school provides, rather than on how this provision is helping to raise standards. The school's plan for improvement lacks sufficient detail of actions and timescales, which is a barrier to helping all leaders and managers, especially the governing body, assess whether the school is addressing and improving its weaker areas of work at a fast enough rate. Despite these relative weaknesses, the school has satisfactory capacity to improve in the future.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in all three core subjects, especially in mathematics at Key Stage 2.
- Develop more effective systems for evaluating how well the school is performing and improve development planning so that improvements are clear and measurable.
- Develop a more consistent approach to assessment for learning to aid the school's analysis of pupils' progress and inform target setting.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Although there is variation in performance across the three core subjects, overall, pupils make satisfactory progress and achieve average standards by the time they leave the school at the end of Year 8. Attainment on entry is generally close to the the average for pupils' ages in English, mathematics and science. However, the most recent Key Stage 2 results from 2007 show that while English and science remain broadly average, mathematics is below average, as it was in 2006; there are also fewer pupils attaining higher standards than is found nationally in all three subjects. This means that pupils in Years 5 and 6 make satisfactory progress in English and science, and inadequate progress in mathematics. In Years 7 and 8, the first two years of Key Stage 3, there is an improving trend in performance in all the core subjects so that on transfer to the local high school in Year 9, pupils have made satisfactory progress overall. The school is alert to these issues and is beginning to address this underperformance through improved monitoring of pupils' progress throughout the school. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make satisfactory progress relative to their capabilities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

The personal development and well-being of pupils are satisfactory, as is their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are able to reflect well on personal attributes and qualities during school assemblies, including their personal achievements and goals. The curriculum further develops pupils' appreciation of different cultures and faiths, but there are too few opportunities for them to interact with other communities in a variety of different settings. The extra-curricular sporting programme and school trips to places of local interest, and abroad, enable the pupils to appreciate the wider world outside of the school and also the area in which they live. These enrichment activities also mean that large numbers of pupils have regular opportunities to engage in physical exercise, as part of the school's approach to healthier living. Attendance is above average and the behaviour of the vast majority of pupils in and around the school is good. Pupils show positive attitudes in lessons because they enjoy the varied learning opportunities available to them. Pupils also like school because of the new friendships they make. Pupils enjoy the responsibility that being on the school council or school prefect brings. The paired reading initiative enables older pupils to take responsibility for some aspects of learning within the school, while also helping newer pupils to settle quickly and make positive relationships with the existing pupils. Young enterprise initiatives and business partnership links are helping the pupils to develop their economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, occasionally good. The vast majority of pupils make satisfactory progress in their learning, but some, including the higher attainers, could do better. Where lessons are good, pupils work hard at the tasks set; they are motivated and interested

to learn, and their progress is good because they show a good level of knowledge that aids their deeper understanding of challenging lesson content. Pupils show respect by listening carefully to teachers and other pupils' views, and the majority are keen to answer questions in lessons. Teachers' planning is satisfactory, but includes too little information of how different ability groups will be challenged to work more in line with their identified capabilities. Teachers' explanation of lesson content is appropriate to the needs of the pupils, and includes a helpful sharing of learning objectives at the beginning of lessons. In the best lessons, teachers skilfully question pupils to test their understanding, as well as reminding them of what they are trying to achieve in their learning. Teaching assistants and teachers work well together to provide appropriate support for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Teachers mark pupils' work consistently, although the extent to which they offer comments for further improvement varies in quality. The use of ongoing assessment of pupils' progress is improving, but there is inconsistency across the core subjects, which means that the target setting process for all pupils is less secure and accurate than it could be.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is leading to satisfactory achievement. The school is adapting to new national strategies for literacy and numeracy, with the curriculum having a suitable emphasis on developing the pupils' basic skills in the core subjects. However, this strategy has currently been more successful in improving standards in Years 7 and 8 than in Years 5 and 6. All pupils develop their information and communication skills effectively, and are now confident users of a range of computer programs that aid their work across the curriculum. The provision for personal, social, health education and citizenship is well established and a strength in promoting improved personal development outcomes for pupils. The promotion of healthy living has had a positive impact on pupils' enjoyment and well-being. Visits, including residential opportunities for many pupils, and visitors to the school, broaden pupils' horizons and enliven the learning in lessons. The school provides a good variety of extra-curricular opportunities, particularly in sport and music, which are well attended. School concerts and other productions, in particular, give pupils opportunities to develop further their oral skills and self-esteem.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support of pupils are satisfactory, with some good features. Teachers have good relationships with the pupils, and take their care and general welfare very seriously. Good teacher management provides effective support to pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, which enables them to make satisfactory progress relative to their capabilities. There are effective partnerships with specialist local authority services and schools, which works well in providing good advice and support for those pupils most in need, particular at the point of transition to and from the school. The school has in place relevant health and safety policies, which means that all reasonable efforts are made to safeguard the children. The criminal records bureau checks are fully compliant and appropriate risk assessments are carried out for all school activities. The school recognises that the tracking of pupils' progress is inconsistently applied across the school, especially in the core subjects. Recent work by middle managers is helping to improve the quality of information that the school collects about the pupils, including their attainment on entry and their progress as they move through the school. However, this tracking is still underdeveloped in terms of ensuring that the pupils know exactly what to do to improve

the quality of their work and achieve the learning targets that have been set for them. The good quality behaviour seen during the inspection is, in part, a result of all staff applying the new behaviour policy consistently, and providing suitable support to those pupils at risk of exclusion. The school embraces healthy living through exercise and healthy eating, both of which are preparing the pupils well for their future well-being.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The management of the school from the headteacher, staff and governors is satisfactory. The headteacher successfully sustains a positive and caring atmosphere for the pupils, which makes them feel valued and consulted. Although the key policies for race, gender and disability are yet to be made sufficiently clear and coherent, senior leaders are careful to ensure that all pupils are treated fairly and equally, including open access to a range of extra-curricular activities. The great majority of parents are happy with the school and praise the safe, welcoming and nurturing environment. The school's view of its effectiveness has tended to be over optimistic in some aspects of its work because it has focused too much on what is being provided, rather than what pupils are achieving. Formal self-evaluation and monitoring are not yet sufficiently rigorous and accurate, although the senior leaders are aware that improvement is needed in monitoring the progress of pupils as they move through the school. However, the current systems used by middle managers for tracking pupils' progress vary too much and are not giving the school a sufficiently clear enough overview of standards and achievement, especially in the three core subjects. The school development plan lacks sufficiently clear and measurable outcomes, which makes very difficult the task of senior managers and leaders, including the governing body, in assessing the school's progress against its identified actions. Governance is satisfactory. Governors support the school well and are proud of its achievements. However, they are not robust enough in holding the school to account. Satisfactory progress has been made in resolving the key issues from the previous inspection. Overall, the school achieves satisfactory value for money.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

17 January 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Amble Middle School, Northumberland, NE65 0ND

You will know that I recently visited your school with two colleagues to find out how well you are doing in your lessons, and how well your teachers are helping all of you to do the best that you can. I should like to thank all those of you who met with, and spoke to inspectors. We listened very carefully to what you said. I should also like to thank those parents who completed the pre-inspection questionnaire and, in particular, those who wrote additional comments about the quality of education that the school provides for you. We read all of these forms very carefully.

Given that we visited lessons in all year groups, heard from you, your parents and the staff, we are able to say that Amble Middle School provides you with a satisfactory standard of education. You will, of course, also want to know what we liked, and if we are asking the school to improve upon anything that it currently does. Some of the positive things that we found included the following.

- Your behaviour is generally good, and almost all of you show positive attitudes in lessons, listening carefully to what teachers say.
- The vast majority of your parents praise the school, although some are concerned about the behaviour of a small minority of pupils.
- Teaching is at least satisfactory, and some is good.
- The curriculum supports you in developing basic skills in literacy and numeracy.
- There are lots of opportunities for extra-curricular sport and music.
- Teachers care for you well when you are in school.
- The headteacher helps the school to provide a caring and positive atmosphere for learning.

However, there are some things the school needs to improve upon, these include:

- Raise standards in all three core subjects, especially in mathematics at Key Stage 2.
- Develop better ways of knowing how well the school is doing, including a better school plan that helps your headteacher and governors know whether the school is progressing as fast as it should.
- Ensure that teachers, especially in English, mathematics and science, develop a more consistent way of knowing what you have achieved, and how well you are progressing in your work.

You have an important part to play in helping the school to improve. All of you must continue to work hard, listen carefully to what teachers and others say in lessons and behave well so that all of you achieve the very best of which you are capable.

I wish you a very successful future.

Brian Blake HMI