

Blackminster Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116960
Local Authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	312458
Inspection dates	5–6 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Marion Thompson

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	10–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	333
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tom Bean
Headteacher	T M S Holland
Date of previous school inspection	27 September 2004
School address	Station Road South Littleton Evesham WR11 8TG
Telephone number	01386 830311
Fax number	01386 832024

Age group	10-13
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a small school, where most pupils come from White British backgrounds. On entry to the school, pupils' standards are broadly average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. There have been a large number of staffing changes during this academic year, especially in a number of key management roles.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This school provides a satisfactory standard of education, which is improving. Parents, rightly, are delighted with the lively and exciting extra-curricular and enrichment activities the school provides. There are particularly good opportunities to participate in music, sports and arts activities, which build pupils' self-esteem and develop their confidence. A well-planned programme for gifted and talented pupils is increasing higher attaining pupils' motivation and enthusiasm for learning. Pupils enjoy school, behave well and safely, and attendance is good. They make an outstanding contribution to the school and wider community, with large numbers of pupils displaying high levels of commitment to projects such as the annual music festival. The school's reputation in the locality is enhanced by the large number of pupils who represent the school successfully in sports and other activities, A 'mock trial' competition in 2006, for example, was won against tough competition. The good level of care and welfare provided by the school is also highly valued. As one parent, typical of many, correctly wrote, 'I feel confident that my children's safety and well-being are fully catered for.'

During the last academic year standards and achievement in the key subjects of English, mathematics and science dipped as a result of severe staffing difficulties. A small minority of pupils did not make as much progress as they should have done, especially in science. These difficulties have been resolved, and pupils' achievement is now satisfactory and frequently good. Standards are broadly average and pupils are beginning to make more rapid progress, particularly in science. The highest attainers often achieve well. However, lower attaining pupils occasionally do not make as much progress as they should, especially in mathematics. This is because the work set does not consistently match their needs. Progress for all pupils in most other subjects is satisfactory, but again, is improving. They do particularly well in French, music, physical education and history, where energetic, well-planned teaching engages pupils' interest.

The school has worked hard on a number of broad priorities, and this is leading to the rapid improvements in pupils' achievement. More effective tracking identifies underachievement at an earlier stage, and realistic, but challenging targets are now set for individual pupils. Broad areas of weakness in learning have been identified and the curriculum is being modified to take account of them. Teaching is improving quickly and in some subjects is good. This is the result of better use of assessment information to plan lessons and to provide clearer guidance to pupils, in lessons and in marking, on how to improve work. However, this is inconsistent across the school.

The headteacher, supported by the senior staff, provides strong leadership and has the full support of parents. He has worked hard to incorporate the many relatively new staff into an effective team. Subject leadership, although varied, is sound and improving rapidly. Provision in science and English is improving quickly, because of effective new leadership. In other subjects, feedback from the monitoring of lessons is not always sharp enough in identifying points for improvement. Self-evaluation is broadly accurate and provides a satisfactory basis for planning, but occasionally is insufficiently detailed. Governors provide good support for the school, but do not yet have clear enough information to carry out their monitoring role fully. The school's success in rapidly addressing the dip in standards and achievement over the past year demonstrates that it has sound capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the achievement of lower attaining pupils, especially in mathematics, by ensuring work is consistently matched to their needs.
- Ensure that feedback in lessons and through marking consistently provides guidance to pupils on how to improve their work and reach their targets.
- Ensure that strategies for checking on the school's strengths and weaknesses provide sufficient detail to help governors and staff to perform their roles more effectively.

A small proportion of the 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

Most pupils make steady progress throughout the school because of their positive attitudes to learning and sound teaching. Achievement in English, mathematics and science is sound and is improving rapidly. This is, in part, because earlier identification of underachievement enables teachers to help pupils catch up more quickly when they fall behind. However, there is some variation in how well different groups are doing in different subjects. Higher attaining pupils make good progress because they are given work that extends their skills and thinking. Lower attaining pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, occasionally do not make the progress that they should, particularly in mathematics, as work is not always set at the right level for them. Pupils' achievement in scientific investigation, which the school identified as a weakness, is improving rapidly, as a result of the challenging work set and teachers' high expectations. This was evident when a Year 8 group worked on the effect of exercise on pulse rate at a very sophisticated level, because the teacher insisted they express their ideas clearly and concisely, using very precise scientific terminology. Work on improving standards in reading, especially the higher-level skills of deduction and inference, and in calculation in mathematics, again identified as weaker areas, is also contributing to pupils' more rapid progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy coming to school as demonstrated by their good level of participation in lessons and extra-curricular activities. Behaviour is generally good. Pupils are courteous, treating each other with respect. The majority engage well in their learning and support each other. They feel safe, as rare instances of bullying are swiftly and dealt with effectively. Pupils develop a healthy lifestyle through their active engagement in sporting activities and the choices they make when eating. They take their considerable responsibilities seriously. Many pupils make an active contribution to the running of the school through their participation on the school, ECO and sports councils. Year 8 pupils act as peer mentors to younger pupils, a large number have taught French in their local first school and others are training to be sports leaders. They have a clear understanding of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Large numbers are active in fund raising, including sponsoring a child in an African school. As one parent correctly commented, 'I feel children's potential is recognised and encouraged.' Pupils' satisfactory academic skills, together with their good social skills and well-developed awareness of how to live a healthy lifestyle, prepare them soundly for their transition to high school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is improving rapidly which is contributing to pupils' faster rate of progress. Most lessons have clear learning objectives and are planned to ensure that pupils make sound progress, building effectively on prior learning. The pace is steady and pupils are engaged in their learning by a reasonable range of activities. In an increasingly large number of lessons, in subjects such as French, lessons are planned to present a high, but appropriate, level of challenge, to which pupils respond well. In a small minority of lessons, plans do not take sufficient account of the needs of the lowest attaining pupils, presenting them with an inappropriate level of challenge. For example, in a Year 8 mathematics lesson on problem solving, while some lower attaining pupils completed the task within moments, others struggled to understand the question. Improved teaching of scientific investigation is contributing to faster progress in science. Feedback in lessons often provides good guidance on how well pupils are doing and what to do next to reach individual targets in, for example, English and science. However, this is not well established in all subjects, including mathematics.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the needs of most pupils. Provision is being strengthened further because there is more rapid intervention for pupils who are experiencing difficulties in areas such as reading and calculation. This is starting to improve achievement. Involvement in the gifted and talented programme has raised the aspirations of some higher attaining pupils who were really enthused by a recent art trip to Venice. However, occasionally the curriculum is not fully matched to the needs of the lower attainers. Provision for religious education and the use of literacy, numeracy and, information and communication technology across the curriculum, which were weaknesses in the last inspection, are now satisfactory. A key strength of the school is the range of extra-curricular activities on offer. Pupils voiced their enthusiasm for the sports and music provision in particular and, during the inspection, were having great fun preparing for the Christmas pantomime.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Procedures to ensure pupils' health, safety and welfare are comprehensive and effective and are much appreciated by parents. Teachers complement this by giving pupils good guidance on how to avoid the risks they might face as they grow up. There are good links with the local authority and other external agencies so that vulnerable pupils are well cared for. The school has improved attendance figures efficiently, working with outside agencies to reduce the unauthorised absences of a few pupils. Academic guidance is satisfactory. Regular assessment provides information on each pupil's progress. Systematic whole-school procedures now check on pupils' academic progress and this has contributed to better standards, especially in science. Targets are set in consultation with pupils and their parents, and pupils' progress is more effectively monitored and supported. Marking in some subjects such as English, French and science provides clear guidance to pupils on how to improve their work, but this is not consistent in all subjects.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher provides a clear sense of direction for the school and promotes a positive ethos, which supports pupils' good personal development. School self-evaluation provides an adequate basis for planning, but occasionally lacks sufficient detail. There is not always a close analysis of pupils' progress in order to help staff and governors to assess precisely the benefits of actions taken to bring about improvements. The quality of subject management is varied, but is improving. For example, a better organised curriculum in science are contributing to pupils' rapidly improving achievement. A number of staff are new to their management roles and still getting to grips with strategies for monitoring the areas for which they are responsible. The targets the school has set are realistic and present pupils with a satisfactory level of challenge.

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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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
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	1
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	3
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

7 December 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Blackminster Middle School, South Littleton, WR11 8TG

Thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We very much enjoyed the visit. Many of your parents and carers wrote to give their opinion of the school, so please discuss this letter with them. I am sure you will be pleased to hear that your school provides you with a satisfactory education that is improving rapidly.

Here are some important things about your school.

- Standards are broadly average and you make satisfactory progress.
- You are beginning to make faster progress, especially if you are quick to learn, because many aspects of the school's work are improving rapidly.
- Teachers are keeping a better track of the progress you make, so that they can help you catch up more quickly when you fall behind.
- The school provides a wide and exciting range of activities that many of you participate in with great enjoyment and benefit.
- You enjoy school, behave well and safely and help each other. Your attendance is good and you have good attitudes to learning. Your personal development is good and you know how to keep healthy.
- You make an outstanding contribution to the school and wider community, by taking on a wide range of substantial responsibilities and treating them seriously.
- The school works hard to ensure you are safe, happy and well looked after.
- The headteacher, supported by the staff of the school, makes sure that the school is improving.

This is what your school has been asked to do to make things even better.

- Make sure that the work that is set for those who sometimes struggle to learn new things is always at the right level, especially in mathematics.
- Make sure that feedback in lessons and when your work is marked always gives you a clear idea of how to improve and how well you are doing with your targets.
- Make sure that the plans for improving the school are based on sufficiently detailed information.

With best wishes

Marion Thompson Lead inspector