

Edwinstree Church of England Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117554
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	312650
Inspection date	24 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Heather Weston 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	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	449
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs J Brook
Headteacher	Mr K Knowles
Date of previous school inspection	22 March 2004
School address	Norfolk Road Buntingford Hertfordshire SG9 9AW
Telephone number	01763 271446
Fax number	01763 274005

Age group	9–13
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: comparisons in standards between English, mathematics and science; the impact of action taken to improve boys' writing; the extent to which the school's work in relation to its specialism impacts on the local community and supports community cohesion; and safeguarding procedures. Evidence was gathered from visits to lessons, pupils' work, assessment data and documents, parent questionnaires, and discussions with staff, pupils, and governors. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Edwinstree Middle School is of similar size to other middle schools nationally, and serves the town of Buntingford and local villages. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average. There are significantly fewer pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds or with English as an additional language than is typical nationally. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is about average, although only a very small proportion has a statement of special education need.

In partnership with another middle school and the local upper school, the school has specialist status in humanities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

In the words of one parent, 'This school is great'; a view echoed by many other parents, and also by pupils. They are right, their school is outstanding and pupils are justified in being so proud of it. Amongst a number of other things, pupils appreciate the great facilities and the enjoyable, interesting lessons, which they say are 'fun but also serious'. They also feel that 'everyone is nice', that pupils behave well, are respectful and 'are positive'. This is because pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Behaviour is exceptionally good. Those pupils who have difficulty in managing their behaviour are well supported by staff and by the extremely positive attitude and high level of responsibility of their peers. Pupils are extremely motivated to learn. They do not want to be distracted and work together to ensure a calm, harmonious atmosphere. They enjoy school, and so attendance is very high. However, rightly, the school is concerned that too many parents take their children out of school for holidays. Pupils say they feel safe, are safety conscious and are highly aware of how to lead healthy lifestyles. Their high level of social skills is due to the school's emphasis on team-building skills, and on the practical collaborative nature of their daily activities. An equally strong emphasis is placed on spiritual and moral development, demonstrated by an assembly focusing on the theme of forgiveness, and featuring a video of the 2006 World Cup. Cultural development is excellent, pupils are actively involved in the life of the school and broader community. The school council value and recognise their important role, but pointed out that 'everyone in school has a say'. Individuals, class councils and the school council know that they can make suggestions and will be listened to. In the words of another parent 'Edwinstree treats children for the unique people that they are, and values their views'. Citizenship education, a part of the school's specialism, promotes community cohesion very well, but the school has yet to evaluate its impact to ensure that it is doing as much as it can to enable pupils to understand the diverse nature of the local, national and global communities.

Supporting this rich ethos is an equally rich and varied curriculum. It is brought to life through stimulating, imaginative activities which grab pupils interest while they tussle with the challenges of the task. It is truly outstanding. It promotes pupils' personal development, and develops pupils' skills, concepts and understanding across and beyond the National Curriculum. A strong emphasis is placed on investigation and problem solving. As pupils progress through the school, they are increasingly supported and challenged by specialist teachers, who contribute to both the primary and secondary phases of their learning. The curriculum is enriched by an extensive range of visits, visitors and theme weeks and by a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils spoke of their appreciation of this wonderful provision, and of their appreciation of their teachers. The pupils' remarkable attitude to learning is furthered by teaching which is usually at least good with much that is outstanding, and as a result, pupils make outstanding progress. Teachers know the importance of making sure pupils are actively engaged in their learning throughout each lesson. In whole class teaching sessions for example, pupils might use individual whiteboards to record answers, discuss questions with each other, or engage in 'silent maths'. This was definitely tricky, but the pupils rose to the challenge! Teachers almost invariably plan lessons that are closely tailored to meet pupils' needs. Pupils confirm that they know how to improve. This is due to the consistent use of both high quality verbal and written feedback, which clearly inform them how to improve their work, and to their targets, which accurately pinpoint the next steps in their learning. During lessons, teachers are very well supported by teaching assistants. It is small wonder that pupils make outstanding progress with a daily diet

of consistent, good teaching delivering an outstanding curriculum, backed up by outstanding care, guidance and support.

Parents know that pupils benefit from the school's caring ethos and the careful attention to their needs. To quote a third parent 'our children feel safe, secure, valued and unique. The inclusive practice within the school allows them to be involved in all areas'. Pastoral care is carefully structured and the school goes the 'extra mile' in every way. For example, they consult other professionals not only if pupils have a particular need but also when a pupil carries out an inappropriate action, rather than having a 'one size fits all' approach. Staff meet three times each week to discuss strategies known to help with identified pupils, in order to create absolute consistency. Those pupils who find learning difficult are given highly effective support and make outstanding progress. The school carefully tracks pupils' progress and any pupil at risk of falling behind is immediately identified and action taken to enable them to catch up. Safeguarding meets government requirements and attention is paid to carrying out risk assessments and health and safety procedures.

The outcome of this quality provision is that both achievement and standards are outstanding. The school has maintained high standards over time and all pupils make very good progress. This is demonstrated not only by high end of Key Stage 2 results, but also by regular teacher assessments. There is no subject where standards are consistently lower than others, as any dips are redressed as soon as they are identified. An example of this is the positive impact of action taken to improve the standard of boys' writing. When current pupils in Year 8 take their key stage tests a year early at the end of this academic year, they are well placed to exceed the national standards expected of pupils at the end of Year 9. Pupils profit from the close involvement of parents in their learning. Most parents fully support the school, but a small minority feel that their views are not sufficiently sought out or listened to. However, evidence shows that opportunities for parents to communicate their views are very effective.

Underpinning all this is outstanding leadership and management, and a dedicated, skilled staff. The headteacher and senior leaders have a very clear vision, they want all pupils to do as well as they possibly can, in every aspect of their learning and development. They are rigorous in making sure that this happens. Improvement planning is thorough and detailed. Self-evaluation is rigorous, accurate and highly effective. Middle leaders are responsible for checking the effectiveness of their areas of responsibility and senior leaders quality assure the consistency of practice. Staff very much value the professional development offered by senior leaders. Recently qualified teachers spoke of their appreciation of their very high quality mentoring and development. The school has outstanding capacity to improve even further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Evaluate the impact of provision in citizenship on community cohesion to identify and carry out steps for further improvement.

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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?	1
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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

25 September 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Edwinstree Church of England Middle School, Buntingford, Hertfordshire SG9 9AW

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school. I thought that not only do you really know your school well but that you are also very perceptive and reflective. I was impressed by the way you get on with each other so well and how committed you are to your work. You told me that your school is an improving school, with everyone looking for ways to make it better. You said it is very good. I agree, but I think that it is outstanding! Your teachers work hard and give you really interesting, challenging and stimulating tasks to carry out in lessons. They really make you think! I had to think hard in the silent maths session I watched! Mr Knowles and all the staff look after you very well and are determined that each and every one of you can do as well as you possibly can.

There was only one thing that your senior leaders need to do that they are not already doing or are planning to do very soon, and that is to see how well your citizenship education is helping you live in local, national and global communities.

With best wishes

Heather Weston HMI

Lead inspector