

Cranborne Middle School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 113853 |
| Local Authority | Dorset |
| Inspection number | 325901 |
| Inspection date | 12 February 2009 |
| Reporting inspector | Robin Gaff |

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

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| Type of school | Middle deemed secondary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 9–13 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 383 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Frank Sims |
| Headteacher | Craig Watson |
| Date of previous school inspection | 14 June 2006 |
| School address | Cranborne Wimborne BH21 5RP |
| Telephone number | 01725 517348 |
| Fax number | 01725 517984 |

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|--------------------------|------------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school as a whole and investigated the following issues:

- pupils' achievement and standards and personal development
- how well pupils are cared for, guided and supported
- the effectiveness of leadership and management.

Evidence was gathered from meetings with staff, governors and pupils, observations of parts of lessons, an examination of parents' questionnaires and a scrutiny of school information, including assessment records and the school's self-evaluation. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspection found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

Cranborne Middle School is a smaller than average school for its type, situated in rural Dorset. The headteacher has been in post since January 2009. The overwhelming majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is below average. Most pupils move on to a local upper school at the end of Year 8, and a significant minority leave the school at the end of Year 6 to start secondary school in neighbouring authorities. The school gained the Sportsmark award in 2007 and was accredited as a specialist sports college in September 2008. It holds Healthy School and Eco School awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Cranborne Middle School is an outstanding school. Parents express considerable satisfaction with the school. The comment of one parent who said, 'Both my children have been very happy there, and have made great progress academically', is typical of many. Since its last inspection, the school has consolidated and built upon its strengths and successfully addressed areas of relative weakness. Standards have risen consistently over the last few years and pupils now make outstanding progress over their time in the school. Pupils join Year 5 with standards that are broadly in line with national averages. By Year 6, attainment in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science is above average. The school has succeeded in reversing the apparent dip in standards in English in 2007 by considerably improving pupils' performance in writing. By the time pupils leave the school at the end of Year 8, standards are high. This represents outstanding achievement. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve just as well as their peers, thanks to the expert support they receive and the very good facilities that the school provides for them.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. They very much enjoy coming to school. As one Year 8 girl said, 'I love this school, and I will always remember my time here.' Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent. There is a happy, harmonious and purposeful atmosphere because pupils relate very well to each other and to staff. One parent's comment sums this up when she wrote, 'The community spirit is evident.' Pupils take full advantage of the healthy options in the canteen, and their level of participation in the school's very wide range of sporting activities is impressive. They feel safe and secure in school. They are not worried about bullying because they are confident that the school deals with it very well on the rare occasions when it occurs. They know that there is someone they can turn to if they need help, for example the school pastoral worker or one of the pupils who act as 'buddies'. High levels of academic achievement and outstanding personal skills stand them in extremely good stead for the next stage of their education and for future employment.

Pupils' excellent understanding of the cultures, faiths and traditions of diverse communities living in Britain and beyond exemplifies the impact of the school's outstanding promotion of community cohesion. Its specialist sport status makes a particularly valuable contribution through pupils' participation in national sporting events and joint activities with a local special school. Pupils also act as 'sports leaders', organising activities for younger children in other local schools. Communication and contact abroad are extensive, including regular exchanges with a school in France through video conferencing, as well as an exchange of letters with pupils in Quebec. School council members liaise with pupils from other schools during local conferences to share ideas and initiate improvement. Pupils raise funds for a wide range of charities and organisations, including a school in Sierra Leone. Teaching and learning are excellent. Teachers are passionate about their subjects and communicate this enthusiasm with considerable success. They know the pupils well and prepare lessons carefully to include pupils' different interests and abilities. Skilful questioning ensures pupils have time to reflect before they answer. This approach was particularly effective in a French lesson. As the teacher was not content with pupils' initial response, she gave them the scope to share and develop their ideas, enabling them to reach the 'right' conclusion. Clear and detailed feedback ensures pupils are well aware of their targets and the next steps they need to take in order to improve their daily work. The school's exciting, innovative and flexible curriculum makes a very strong contribution to pupils' academic and social development. It ensures a smooth transition from

first school by using primary trained staff in Year 5. This approach ensures that pupils settle in quickly. Thereafter, pupils benefit from well-qualified subject specialists and an 'accelerated' curriculum in preparation for their move to upper school. Pupils' participation in the extensive range of extra-curricular activities is impressive, particularly in view of the school's rural location and the long journeys many pupils have to make to get there.

The school has maintained its extremely effective systems for care, guidance and support. Parents are highly complimentary about the approachability of the staff and their rapid response when problems occur. Systems for safeguarding pupils are robust and comprehensive, as are arrangements for ensuring their safety on trips and visits. The purchase of specially adapted resources, close liaison with parents, as well as links with a wide range of agencies, ensure that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have the same chances as other pupils to excel. The school has strengthened its systems for dealing with pupil absence. As a result, attendance has increased and is now above average. Academic assessment is strong. Pupils' progress is carefully tracked, so that any underperformance is spotted and support given. Ever mindful of improvement, the school is now in the process of refining these systems further to ensure that individual strengths and weaknesses are clearly and equally well identified and addressed across all subjects. Leaders and managers at all levels are highly successful in promoting the school's continuing improvement, aided by regular, incisive and accurate self-evaluation. The school has set extremely challenging targets for performance, and has succeeded in meeting them. Relative weaknesses, for example in English, have been resolved; so, too, have rare inadequacies in teaching through rigorous monitoring and support, as well as identifying and spreading good practice. These factors demonstrate the school's outstanding capacity for further improvement. Staff and governors have a thorough understanding of the context in which the school operates and constantly seek to widen pupils' experience beyond their immediate community. Governors have steered the school expertly through the period of transition represented by changes to senior leadership and ensured that the school has continued to develop its resources during a period of financial stringency. Together with all the school staff, governors demonstrate a very high level of commitment towards ensuring that the school provides the best possible service to all its pupils, irrespective of their ability or background, and to the community it serves.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further enhance procedures for monitoring pupils' performance in all subject areas so that individuals' strengths are fully developed and weaknesses addressed.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

| | |
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| 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

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| 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

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|---|---|
| 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 | 2 |
| 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

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| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs? | 1 |
| 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

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| 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? | 1 |
| 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**

13 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Cranborne Middle School, Wimborne BH21 5RP

Following my recent visit to your school, I would like to thank you very much for the welcome you gave me and for your very helpful contribution to the inspection. I very much enjoyed meeting you and listening to what you had to say about the school. I am writing to you to tell you about what I found.

Cranborne Middle School is an outstanding school. It gives you an excellent education and is very effective in helping you to develop the skills and qualities you will need when you move on to another school, and for later on in life. The school takes very good care of you. You behave extremely well, and your cooperation with each other and with your teachers is excellent. You show you clearly understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle in your high levels of participation in sporting activities. You feel safe at school and are not worried about bullying because you know that staff deal with it very well should it occasionally happen. You say, and your parents agree, that you very much enjoy coming to school, and the contribution you make to the school and to the local and wider communities is excellent.

The school's curriculum is extremely well matched to your interests and different stages of development, and you benefit from excellent teaching. Your teachers know you well and succeed in involving you in lessons, so that your achievement is excellent. The governors and all the staff show that they understand what makes a school successful. They are working really hard to make sure that your school goes on improving, and you are helping them, through the school council for example, to succeed in this. To help make this happen, I have asked the school to develop even further its systems for checking how well each one of you is doing in your different subjects.

I wish you all the very best for the future!

Yours faithfully

Robin Gaff

Lead inspector