

Howard Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124801
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	328216
Inspection dates	30 September –1 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Rhona Seviour 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 special
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	309
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter Rose
Headteacher	Mrs Fiona Bromley
Date of previous school inspection	26 January 2006
School address	Beard Road Bury St. Edmunds Suffolk IP32 6SA
Telephone number	01284 761405
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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

Howard Middle is a smaller than average middle school. The vast majority of its pupils are from White British backgrounds and few pupils do not speak English as their first language. Most pupils come from an area where disadvantage is above average and slightly more are eligible for free school meals than is found in most schools. There are also more pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities than average. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is below average.

The school holds the Healthy School Award and the national Sportsmark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Howard Middle is a good school. At all levels, there is a strong commitment to pupils' personal development and well-being and this is evident in the good relationships that exist between adults and pupils. These relationships, together with the good quality of the care, guidance and support provide a secure foundation for pupils' academic achievement. During their time at the school, pupils make good progress and achieve well. When they enter, their attainment is well below their expected level and, by the end of Year 8, standards in the core subjects are in line with the levels expected at that stage of pupils' education. However, the school recognises the need to have a continued push on further raising standards, particularly English for the younger pupils.

Most pupils enjoy school and are eager to take part in activities such as assemblies, clubs, charitable events and productions. They behave well towards each other and are generally attentive and keen to learn in lessons. They benefit most from those lessons in which they are able to play an active part. Teaching quality is good but not consistently so. In a minority of lessons, the work is unchallenging and, on occasions, pupils are required to complete mundane tasks and listen to the teacher for too long. The assessment of pupils' attainment is thorough and, in contrast to the findings in the last inspection, pupils are well aware of the progress they are making and what they need to do to improve. A carefully designed curriculum includes aspects that are very creative and highly motivating for the pupils.

Against the unsettling background of the local authority's re-organisation of schools and the decision to close the school in 2013, the leadership and management of the school have continued to strive for improvement and have successfully maintained the good quality of education identified in the previous inspection. Systems for tracking pupils' progress, the planning of the curriculum and the use of targets to challenge pupils to strive for higher standards have all improved. Although the school gives much attention to monitoring and evaluating its work, some of its processes, especially in monitoring teaching, are insufficiently robust and, as a result, it is not always able to identify and remedy weaknesses quickly enough. Governors fulfil their responsibilities well; they provide good support for the school and monitor its work closely. The school uses its resources wisely and pupils benefit from the relatively small classes, the attractive environment and the excellent facilities. The good leadership and management provide the school with the capacity it needs to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards across the school, especially in English in Years 5 and 6.
- Implement rigorous systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of the school's work, especially teaching.
- Ensure that lessons consistently engage and challenge pupils in their learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Although national data indicate that the pupils' attainment at the end of Year 2 was broadly in line with the national expectation, the school has convincing evidence that, on entry in Year 5, the attainment of around half the pupils is below or well below the expected level. Since the last inspection, standards in English, mathematics and science have generally been below average. By the end of Year 8, standards in these subjects are much improved and are in line

with the levels expected at that stage of pupils' education. This indicates that, during their four years at the school, pupils make good progress.

The school's very detailed tracking data show that nearly all pupils, including those with learning difficulties or with English as an additional language, make at least satisfactory progress in Years 5 and 6. Around half of the pupils progress at a good rate. In Years 7 and 8, progress accelerates and is good in the core subjects. In some other subjects, including art and music, pupils' work is of an above average standard because of the inspirational teaching and excellent curriculum they experience.

Since the last inspection, the school has not met all the challenging targets set for pupils' attainment in English and mathematics at the end of Year 6. Nonetheless, actions to improve standards, particularly in mathematics and science, are making an impact. In English, a sharper focus on writing and the more accurate identification of pupils in need of additional support, ensure that all pupils make satisfactory progress during their first two years. However, because of their low starting points, this is still not good enough to enable them to achieve the nationally expected level.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' strong sense of right and wrong underpins their good behaviour. They readily co-operate with each other and with adults and work well in teams. They reflect maturely on belief and in art, for example, on aspects such as beauty. Their appreciation of cultures other than their own is not well developed. Pupils feel secure in the school and report that the rare cases of bullying are quickly and effectively resolved. They understand how to keep themselves safe and show a strong commitment to healthy living by taking plenty of exercise and eating well. They enjoy most aspects of school and this is reflected in their good attendance. Nonetheless, they do not enjoy a small minority of lessons where they have to copy work and listen to the teacher for long periods and are not actively involved in learning. They respond enthusiastically to the opportunities they have to take responsibility, for example as members of the school council or sports leaders' group, and are keen to collect for charity. In particular, they take a very active interest in a school in Uganda for which they raise funds. Pupils enjoy the opportunities to become involved in the local community, particularly through productions, fundraising and music performances, and would like the school to do more in this area. Their positive attitudes to work and growing awareness of careers opportunities are helpful for their future economic well-being, but average standards in literacy and numeracy mean that this aspect of their personal development and well-being is satisfactory rather than good.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Generally, good teaching in the school enables pupils to make good progress in their learning. Teachers give careful attention to lesson planning and their increasing use of data on pupils' performance is enabling them to plan work that better meets the needs of all pupils. In most lessons, relationships are positive, behaviour is good and stimulating and interesting work fully engages the pupils. As a result, pupils are keen to learn and work hard. In these lessons, teachers use a wide range of activities that involve pupils in their learning and this accelerates their progress. A minority of lessons fails to capture pupils' imagination and interest because learning

is too passive and mechanical. In these lessons, there is not sufficient challenge and the pace is not fast enough to promote good learning. Marking, regular assessment and other feedback provide pupils with clear guidance as to how they can improve their work. Teaching assistants make a positive contribution to learning, especially for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school has a good curriculum that has been adapted well in response to national initiatives and developments. Much importance is placed on planning the curriculum to ensure that it reflects pupils' needs. There is good provision to support pupils who are at risk of underachieving and those with learning difficulties, and booster and intervention classes have a beneficial impact on pupils' attainment. The arts, especially music and art, are a strength that adds significantly to pupils' enjoyment of school. Provision for physical education, personal, social and health education and assemblies support aspects of pupils' personal development very effectively. The school has more than sufficient computers to support learning within information and communication technology (ICT) and in other subjects. The wide variety of extra-curricular activities, including clubs in sport, music, dance, games and drama, adds significantly to pupils' enjoyment of school life and widens their horizons. There are, however, too few planned opportunities to develop pupils' understanding of the diversity of British culture, for example, through work with members of the minority ethnic communities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides a calm, caring and supportive environment for pupils. Pupils are reassured to have a number of adults to whom they can turn for help, including the school nurse. Procedures for managing behaviour are clear and consistently applied and these, together with the system of rewards, are successfully promoting good behaviour. There is good support, sometimes from external agencies, to help those pupils whose behaviour is exceptionally challenging. There is also good support for the most vulnerable pupils, including those who are bereaved. The school draws effectively upon the services of the local authority to meet the needs of pupils who do not speak English as their first language and this, together with the welcome they receive from other pupils, ensures that they settle well and quickly acquire language competence. Target setting has developed successfully since the last inspection. Pupils now have meaningful and challenging targets in all subjects and are very well aware of the progress they are making to achieve these. The school adheres to health and safety requirements but does not always complete incident records or risk assessments in sufficient detail.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. At all levels, leaders and managers are highly committed to the school, supportive of its work and keen for it to succeed. The headteacher leads the school confidently and, aided by the senior management team, has forged a common sense of purpose amongst the staff. Subject leaders are highly focused on raising standards and improving

achievement. They readily embrace new ideas, take the initiative and change practice when needed.

Systems and processes for tracking pupils' progress, developing the curriculum and for target setting have improved since the last inspection. Consequently, the school now has a comprehensive record of the progress of each pupil and uses this information effectively to support target setting. It has set itself challenging targets for pupils' attainment at the end of Year 6 but has had variable success in meeting these. The school monitors and evaluates its work conscientiously and its view of itself, while broadly accurate, is too positive in some areas. This is because some of the processes used for evaluating the school's effectiveness are not rigorous enough. For example, the school has not always evaluated the impact of its actions on achievement and standards well enough or monitored teaching quality with sufficient regularity or depth. On occasions, this has meant that it has not identified or remedied weaknesses in teaching quickly. This has also led to some over-generous judgements of teaching quality. While the arrangements for safeguarding meet requirements, the updating and evaluation of procedures does not have sufficient priority.

The governance of the school is good. Governors understand school's strengths and weaknesses and are supportive, well informed and involved in its work. The school's plans for the future are ambitious, very detailed and well informed by consultation with pupils and a biennial survey of parents. In their responses to the inspection questionnaire, the majority of parents, like the pupils, are positive about all aspects of the school's work. The school is making a satisfactory contribution to community cohesion. It has formed very productive links with a primary school in Uganda and with a number of local services and charities. Despite its good efforts, however, it has not succeeded in forging closer links with the local primary to improve the progression and continuity of pupils' learning in Key Stage 2.

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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?	2
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	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

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?	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
The extent to which 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	2
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 learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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**

2 October 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Howard Middle School, Bury St Edmunds, IP32 6SA

As you will know, we recently visited your school and this letter is to tell you about the results of the inspection. First, I would like to thank you all, on behalf of the inspection team, for your help during our visit. We appreciated your comments and views and thoroughly enjoyed all our conversations with you.

We think Howard Middle is a good school. The very attractive building and grounds impressed us and we noticed how well you and the staff care for them. The school has very good resources and excellent facilities, such as the food technology and drama areas. There are good relationships between you and the adults and we think that these are an important reason why so many of you enjoy Howard Middle and do well there. During your four years at the school, most of you make good progress and by the time you leave, you are meeting the expected levels. Teaching is good and some of it is outstanding. Like you, though, we feel that the activities in some lessons should be more varied and interesting. The curriculum provides you with some very good opportunities for practical work, for example in art, music and physical education, and we know that you enjoy these. We were impressed by all the extra help given for those of you who struggle with aspects of your learning and by the way the school supports and cares for you. Your behaviour in lessons and around the school was good and we were pleased to see so many of you wanting to contribute to school life.

Mrs Bromley is right to be proud of the school. Even so, she knows that there are things the school needs to improve. We want Mrs Bromley and the staff to check the work of the school more closely in order to pick up any weaknesses more quickly. This includes checking the teaching so that the school can then take action to make sure that all teaching is as good as the very best we saw. We also want the school to continue to do all it can to raise standards, particularly in English and mathematics. You can help with this by working hard to achieve your targets. Your parents can also help by giving you as much support and encouragement as they can to do well in your education. What you achieve at school is vital for your success in the future. We wish you all the very best.

Yours sincerely

Rhona Seviour

Lead inspector