

Breckland Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124793
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	329279
Inspection dates	24–25 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Robert Drew

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 (total)	330
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sharon Field
Headteacher	Mr Duncan Reed
Date of previous school inspection	11 July 2007
School address	Crown Street Brandon Suffolk IP27 0NJ
Telephone number	01842 810485
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Age group	9–13
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is smaller than average, serving the town of Brandon and the surrounding rural area. The great majority of pupils are White British, with a small but growing minority of pupils from other European backgrounds. A small proportion of pupils use English as an additional language. Attainment on entry is a little below the expected levels. The school holds the Sportsmark Award. At the time of the last inspection in July 2007, the school was placed in the category of 'Notice to Improve'.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school's overall effectiveness is satisfactory. In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. Leadership and management have strengthened substantially since the last inspection and are now good. Their impact is clearly seen in the rapidly improving progress pupils make, their rising standards, their excellent enjoyment of school and the very high regard with which the school is held by parents and the local community. The school's approach to self-evaluation is honest and accurate and lays the foundation for successful improvement.

Strong direction and a keen sense of purpose are provided by the headteacher. His senior colleagues support this well and add a range of other skills, forging a very diverse but effective team. They have restored strong morale amongst staff and pupils. Both groups show impressive commitment to the school, and staff strongly support the recent measures introduced by the headteacher. Senior leadership alone has begun to transform the school. However, subject leadership and governance are both improving and are currently satisfactory - a stronger position than at the time of the previous inspection. Given the already proven skills of the senior leadership team, the overall capacity for further improvement is good.

Standards are rising in all core subjects. They have been above average for some time in other subjects, including art, music, physical education and modern foreign languages. In 2008 English, mathematics and science results show marked gains since 2007 and, where achievement was once weakest, in the current Years 7 and 8, there has been the greatest improvement. These gains reflect more effective tracking by the school, although staff are not yet making full use of the new system's potential. Improved progress also stems from the recent eradication of inadequate teaching and more rigorous planning of lessons. Monitoring by staff at all levels, coupled with well-focused training, has upgraded the collective quality of teaching since the last inspection. The school recognises there is more to be done and that there are still too few pupils gaining the very highest levels. Whole school targets are too low to fully stretch the school's many highly motivated pupils.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory and improving. All lessons are at least satisfactory, are well structured and demonstrate good teacher-pupil relationships. A significant minority of lessons are good, being well paced, with varied activities and substantial involvement of pupils. Occasionally, teaching and learning are outstanding, with excellent self-assessment, very challenging levels of work and high expectations of able pupils. Some teaching and learning lacks consistency in the provision of tasks matched to all abilities and in the quality of marking.

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral social and cultural development, is good. Their obvious enjoyment of school is a real strength. Behaviour is good, attendance above average and awareness of safety and health issues good. Pupils are keen to contribute to others in school or beyond. For instance, many act maturely as monitors, helping organise movement around school during breaks. Others act as playground buddies and a large number regularly provide music for local fetes and other events. Preparation for the next stage of education and future economic well-being is limited by current standards in mathematics, English, and information and communication technology (ICT), but is nevertheless satisfactory. Care, guidance and support very effectively promote pupils' personal and social development

and meet all statutory requirements. Academic monitoring has been weaker but is now satisfactory.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and is enhanced by very good extra-curricular provision, especially in sport, music and school trips. Implementation of a new national approach to Key Stage 3 is behind schedule, so that the promotion of skills and flexibility is underdeveloped. Current schemes of work for subjects generally give too little prominence to providing tasks and approaches for able pupils, and while some additional events are offered to gifted and talented pupils, this provision is relatively limited.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise expectations to a new, significantly higher level by working to challenging targets in all subjects.
- Improve teaching and learning by ensuring greater consistency in the provision of extension work for more able pupils, by better planning and marking, and matching work to pupils' levels of ability.
- Help staff become adept at using level descriptions for assessment and monitoring the progress of pupils across the full ability range.
- Fully implement the changes to the curriculum in Years 7 to 9, increasing the focus on developing pupils' skills and creativity.

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

Teacher assessments and an analysis of pupils' work show that by the end of Year 6 standards in English, mathematics and science are broadly average, although standards in science are still a little lower than the other two core subjects. Pupils make satisfactory progress from slightly below average attainment on entry. When pupils leave at the end of Year 8, standards in all three subjects are broadly average. This was not always the case. As recently as 2007, standards were below average and many pupils, including the most able, were not achieving as well as they should. Since 2007, there has been a concerted effort to raise standards in all three core subjects, with particular success in English and mathematics. Even so, the number of pupils attaining the higher levels remains a little below average. Overall, achievement, including that of pupils who sometimes find learning hard, is satisfactory. In the last twelve months, standards attained by pupils in Years 7 and 8 have improved significantly, to the extent that they are achieving well. This recent improvement means that their overall achievement since starting at the school is now satisfactory. Throughout the school, pupils do well in music and physical education.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

This area is a strength of the school. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good and when out on visits, pupils are often complimented for their conduct and sportsmanship. They show great pride in the appearance of their environment. Attendance is above average, reflecting the excellent level of enjoyment shown by the pupils. Their confidence and self-esteem are

boosted by excellent participation in sport and music. The choir, steel pan groups and sports teams are highly successful. The Sportsmark Award in 2004 and 2007 is fully justified. The school takes safety very seriously and pupils feel that their fears will be listened to and addressed. The 'Pupil By Your Side' team and 'Anti-Bullying Squad' encourage care for each other and so instances of bullying have fallen since the last inspection. Pupils know about safe and healthy lifestyles, and the school council is helping to promote healthy lunches and access to drinking water in lessons. Pupils work well with the local and wider community through fundraising for children's charities, providing music for local fetes and linking with a primary school. They are keen to take on responsibility; for example, as Year 8 representatives and lunchtime games monitors. Preparation for their next school is good, through induction days and events such as the Pyramid concert. Pupils make satisfactory progress in the skills needed for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and the amount of good teaching has increased since the last inspection. Outstanding teaching is seen in some subjects, for example, in French and music. Many lessons are typified by the good care and support that teachers provide for their pupils. Teachers are swift to recognise and celebrate pupils' effort, which motivates them to respond well and try their best. Just a few lessons remain in which pupils do not concentrate, restricting the progress they might otherwise make. Explanations of what pupils are expected to learn are a feature of many lessons, although there are occasions when they are not sufficiently clear. There are also times, often towards the end of lessons, when some teachers do not do enough to involve pupils in understanding the progress they have made. Inconsistencies in marking also remain and pupils are not always given enough information about how to improve their work. In the best lessons, work set is well matched to pupils' abilities and builds effectively on their prior learning. However, when this is not the case, the work set for the most able pupils is not sufficiently stretching and they find themselves marking time.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

There is adequate breadth and balance to the curriculum and some real strengths. For instance, the extensive and high quality extra-curricular provision greatly enriches pupils' experiences and contributes to their excellent enjoyment. Music, sporting events, school productions and visits all make a major contribution. The day-to-day presentation of many subjects and topics also helps to elicit a positive response from pupils. However, the introduction of a programme for the development of skills and for greater flexibility in Key Stage 3 is behind schedule. More importantly, existing schemes of work do not give sufficient prominence to providing challenging tasks and approaches for able pupils. Gifted and talented pupils have some off-timetable provision but this is relatively underdeveloped.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Arrangements to help pupils' personal development are good. Tracking and promoting academic progress were weak but are now satisfactory and improving. Child protection systems and health

and safety procedures are in place and all staff and teaching assistants are provided with opportunities to take first-aid courses. Awareness of possible dangers in the local area has led to rigorous safety procedures. The school works with governors, the school nurse and outside agencies, such as the police and local authority, to ensure the health and safety of all pupils. The school rewards pupils appropriately and keeps in regular contact with parents, for example, by sending postcards home to report good work. Positive messages and advice from teachers help to encourage all pupils to succeed. Vulnerable pupils are supported by individual learning plans, and the flexible setting of Year 5 and 6 pupils enables work to be tailored to specific needs through effective use of teaching assistants. A recent trip to Kingswood brought together pupils with a wide variety of learning difficulties and helped to increase their confidence and social and physical skills. Pupils are well supported on entering the school. Most know what they need to do to achieve well, but the targets set by the school are not consistently applied.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is well led and managed, leading to the substantial recent improvements. Long-term achievement is now satisfactory, where previously it was inadequate. A renewed sense of purpose has so reinvigorated progress in Years 7 and 8 that achievement in Key Stage 3 is now good. Much of this stems from the strong direction given by the headteacher, along with the effective support of his senior colleagues: their teamwork is impressive. He has restored high morale amongst staff and rightly commands the overwhelming support of parents. Pupils speak of fresh pride in their school. Attention has been rightly focussed on raising the quality of teaching, improving the monitoring of progress, re-establishing good behaviour and raising standards in core subjects. On all fronts, improvements are marked, even where further gains need to be made. In particular, formal targets for future key stage results are too cautious and do not set the school a suitably high collective goal. Difficult issues have been tackled successfully in order to deal with inadequate teaching or poor subject leadership. The latter is now satisfactory overall and in a growing number of cases is good. Staffing has been stabilised and specialists occupy all key posts. The governing body is more informed and influential and has a satisfactory impact on the school's standards. It continues to grow in knowledge of, and impact on, the school.

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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	2

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/or disabilities make progress	3

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	1
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?	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

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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

26 September 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Breckland, Middle School, Brandon, Suffolk, IP27 0NJ

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave my team when we visited your school recently. Special thanks are due to those who gave up part of your lunchtime to come and speak with us. We believe your school no longer needs to be in the category 'Notice to Improve' because it has become a significantly better school since the inspection last July. Your school now provides a satisfactory education and does several things well. We were impressed with:

- Your good behaviour and really excellent sense of enjoyment.
- Recent improvements in the standards you reach in English, mathematics and science. These are now in line with standards across the country.
- The increased progress you now make. This is satisfactory and in Years 7 and 8 your progress is good.
- The headteacher's clear, strong leadership and the good support he gets from senior staff.
- The very wide range of activities, clubs and events you can join in with, outside lessons.

If the school is to carry on improving we have asked it to:

- Make it clear how high you can achieve by setting you all really challenging targets in all subjects.
- Make teaching and learning more consistently good with suitable tasks for all abilities and helpful marking of your work.
- Help teachers to become more confident at using level descriptions to assess your work and in monitoring your progress.
- Make sure the topics you are taught allow you to spend more time on skills and creative activities than they used to.

Best wishes for the rest of your time at Brecklands Middle School.

Yours sincerely

Bob Drew

Lead inspector