

Edwinstree CofE Middle School

Norfolk Road, Buntingford, Hertfordshire SG9 9AW

Inspection dates

15–16 March 2016

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Standards have declined since the previous inspection.
- The progress made by pupils over time is not good enough. The school's work with disadvantaged pupils is not demonstrating impact. The most-able pupils do not achieve as well as they should.
- Too much teaching requires improvement and pupils are not challenged sufficiently in lessons.
- Low-level disruptive behaviour in some lessons acts as a barrier to pupils' learning and progress.
- Pupils' and parents' perceptions are that there are too many incidents of bullying in the school.
- Senior leaders' evaluation of the school's performance is over-optimistic and they do not monitor the school's work sharply enough to drive forward improvement.
- The quality of the school's middle leadership is not consistently strong. Assessments of pupils' progress are insecure.
- The school's engagement with many parents has weakened over time, and parents are not always supportive of what school leaders are aiming to achieve.
- Governors acknowledge that they have not held the school's leaders sufficiently to account for the school's performance.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils with special educational needs or disability make similar progress to other pupils in the school.
- Pupils' attendance is high.
- Pupils say they feel safe in the school.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development particularly well.
- Pupils are offered a broad and balanced curriculum as well as a large choice of extra-curricular activities.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to enable pupils to make better progress, particularly disadvantaged pupils and those who are most able, by:
 - making sure that teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment and progress are accurate
 - using information on pupils' progress to plan more accurately for learning
 - making sure that the most-able pupils are consistently challenged by the teaching they experience
 - making sure that targets set by teachers for pupils help them to make better progress in their subjects
 - ensuring that teachers constantly check on the progress of disadvantaged pupils to ensure that they achieve as well as they should
 - making sure that all teachers set homework, when it is appropriate to do so, as indicated in the school's homework policy
 - providing pupils with time to reflect on what they are learning
 - making sure that teachers consistently implement the school's marking policy.

- Improve pupils' behaviour by:
 - eliminating the low-level disruptive behaviour in lessons
 - working with all pupils to help them better identify what constitutes bullying and supporting those older pupils who bully to reduce such incidents.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - strengthening the school's systems for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing its work so that leaders can identify what works well and what does not
 - strengthening the school's systems for assessing pupils' progress
 - making middle leadership consistently strong by holding these colleagues to account more regularly and providing them with more opportunities to review the effectiveness of their subject areas
 - improving communication with parents and teachers to secure full support for what the school is trying to achieve
 - making sure that governors act on the findings of their internal review of governance to make the governing body more effective.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have not maintained the high standards achieved at the time of the previous inspection. Although the headteacher has a clear vision for the school, she has not secured full commitment from all members of staff and parents.
- The school's self-evaluation summary document does not reflect the school's current effectiveness because it is over-optimistic. It is too descriptive and not sufficiently evaluative.
- Leaders and managers gather a wide range of information about the school's performance, but analysis of this information lacks the necessary rigour, and is not being used purposefully to identify trends and drive improvement rapidly.
- Middle leaders' impact in driving school improvement is variable because the quality of their leadership is inconsistent. They do not routinely evaluate the effectiveness of their subject areas. They do not meet regularly enough with their line managers on a formal basis. This impacts on the extent to which they are held to account for the quality of their work.
- Senior leaders have yet to gain the full support of parents in what they are trying to achieve. A majority of parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, expressed negative views about the school.
- The school's use of pupil premium funding is not ensuring that the gaps between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and that of non-disadvantaged pupils in school and nationally are closing quickly enough. The fund has been used to finance disadvantaged pupils' participation in school trips and to provide one-to-one support outside the classroom. This one-to-one support has had a variable impact.
- The school's curriculum is broad and balanced. It is supplemented by a wide range of extra-curricular activities in which a large number of pupils participate and that they say they enjoy. The personal, social, health and citizenship educational aspect of the curriculum is promoted well in the school and includes appropriate guidance on careers. The school makes good use of visiting theatre companies to work with pupils in helping them to understand the complex nature of relationships.
- The school has made effective use of the physical education (PE) and sports premium funding. This funding has increased the confidence of staff delivering PE sessions and has also enabled pupils to develop their sporting expertise. The impact of the funding has been increased participation in competitive and non-competitive sporting events.
- The Year 7 catch-up funding has been used to work with lower attaining pupils who need to develop their skills in literacy and numeracy. The appointment of a specialist member of staff has helped to improve pupils' weak literacy and numeracy skills.
- Teaching in the school is observed regularly by senior leaders and, increasingly, by subject leaders. These observations are followed up by discussions with teachers about what is done well and how teachers can develop their practice further. This is a stronger aspect of leaders' monitoring, but their evaluations have not yet secured consistently good teaching over time across the school.
- Newly qualified teachers are positive about the support they receive. A thorough induction programme prepares them well for working in the school. All teachers have access to relevant and up-to-date training provided within the school and by external providers.
- The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and of fundamental British values is a particularly strong feature of the school. This is complemented by the school's promotion of Christian values. Pupils actively engage in helping those who are less fortunate than themselves in society by raising funds for charitable organisations. Inspectors observed pupils enthusiastically practising in Ely Cathedral for their Easter service, which was taking place later in the week.
- The local authority's support is highly regarded by school leaders. Most recently, members of the local authority conducted a review of the school's effectiveness. This review rightly identifies the school's weaknesses, and representatives have plans in place to support the school in improving its effectiveness. The local authority has also worked with the school's middle leaders to support them in observing pupils' progress in lessons and in judging the quality of teaching.

■ The governance of the school

- Members of the governing body acknowledge that, although they are committed to improving the school, they could be more effective in their role. Consequently, they have commissioned their own review of the effectiveness of the governing body, which is currently under way.
 - Governors visit the school to look at the work of subject areas and they produce helpful notes with action points after their time spent in the school.
 - Governors regularly review the school's policies. They implement the school's performance management policy satisfactorily so that the teachers' performance is taken into account when deciding whether or not they should progress up the pay scale.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school's single central record of recruitment checks of staff is compliant with current regulations. Staff receive up-to-date training in the safeguarding of children. Risk assessments are detailed and thorough.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- The quality of teaching in the school is too variable. Teaching over time varies from outstanding to requiring improvement and the quality varies within subjects and across different year groups.
- Teachers' planning does not ensure that the needs of pupils of all abilities are met consistently well. This acts as a barrier to progress. Too often, inspectors saw pupils being required to do exactly the same work when it was not appropriate for them to do so. Consequently, the most-able pupils were not challenged and less able pupils could not always access the work.
- Teachers' assessments of pupils' current levels of attainment are not secure. This means that, in many cases, teachers are recording pupils' attainment and rates of progress inaccurately. When this information is used to inform their planning, this acts as a barrier to progress. This also calls into question the accuracy of pupils' progress that is being reported to parents.
- Teachers adhere to the school's marking policy, in that they mark pupils' books every two weeks. However, the policy also requires them to indicate how pupils can improve their work. Inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' books shows that this is an exception rather than the norm. Too often, teachers write comments such as 'well done' or 'good work', without offering any ways forward.
- Although the use of target sheets in pupils' books is part of the school's assessment policy and procedures, many are left blank, and teachers' targets, rather than being subject specific, are too general in nature, such as 'underline your title' or 'don't waste paper'.
- Not all teachers regularly set homework for pupils to consolidate their learning at home. Teaching is often rushed towards the end of the lesson. This acts as a barrier to progress because pupils are not given time to reflect on what they have learned.
- Relationships between pupils and teachers are positive, particularly when the teaching engages their interest. Teachers' subject knowledge is typically strong. However, a few teachers are expected to teach subjects in which they have no specialist knowledge.
- The presentation of pupils' work is typically neat and tidy. Most pupils take pride in their books and come to lessons with the correct equipment.
- When teaching is more effective, it secures better progress over time. In a Year 8 English lesson for high-attaining pupils, pupils were confidently applying skills they had acquired to read a complicated text from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. They were able to read between the lines for inference and nuance. The teacher then encouraged pupils to reminisce and to express their emotions about their childhood by asking them to blow bubbles using a special liquid. Pupils impressively used the analogy of the bursting of the bubble to the breaking up of relationships between characters in the play.
- Inspectors saw some good examples of pupils writing at length across a wide range of subjects. They also noted pupils routinely using subject-specific terminology and vocabulary in their written work. Examples were also seen of numeracy being developed in a wide range of subjects.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Pupils' and parents' perceptions are that bullying is a concern in the school. There are indeed incidents of bullying recorded by the school, more so in the older year groups. Pupils' understanding of what constitutes bullying requires further work by school staff. The school is attempting to reduce the number of recorded incidents by empowering pupils as anti-bullying ambassadors to help tackle this matter directly. The impact of the anti-bullying ambassadors has not yet been evaluated.
- Vulnerable pupils are well cared for in the school's 'Bridge' facility. This serves as a safe haven for vulnerable pupils and is open three days a week. Here they can talk openly about any problems they are having. This provision has helped raise the self-esteem of these pupils.
- Pupils have a good understanding of e-safety and the dangers associated with the misuse of the internet and social media sites. They say that they feel safe when in school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Pupils and teachers told inspectors that too many lessons are affected by low-level disruptive behaviour. This typically occurs when teaching is lacklustre and pupils lose concentration. Inspectors witnessed only a few examples of this, but the school's records validate the views of parents, teachers and pupils.
- The school's records of incidents of unacceptable behaviour indicate that these occur more often in the older year groups and involve physical contact between pupils. While the school presented inspectors with records of such incidents, there were no details of any trends or how the matter had been resolved.
- Inspectors observed pupils moving around the school sensibly and socialising well with each other while having lunch in the school hall and while at play outside.
- Pupils attend school regularly and have high levels of attendance.
- The proportion of pupils excluded from school is very low.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Information on pupils' entry to the school indicates that they enter the school with high levels of prior attainment. Pupils' progress over time from their different starting points is not yet consistently good. This is linked to the quality of teaching they receive. Progress in mathematics, reading and writing has not been rapid enough by the time pupils reach the end of Key Stage 2. This has been the case for the last three years.
- Although the school asserts that pupils make good and better progress as they move through the school and from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, inspectors do not concur with this view. Inspectors' observations of pupils' learning in lessons and their detailed scrutiny of pupils' books across all years and subjects indicate that pupils' achievement requires improvement. Teachers' assessments of pupils' achievement are also too unreliable to support the school's view.
- Progress made by different groups of pupils across a range of subjects is too inconsistent. Pupils' progress over time has been less strong in mathematics, science and modern foreign languages.
- The most-able pupils are not consistently challenged by the teaching they receive. Teachers do not take sufficient account of their needs when planning for learning and they are frequently asked to do the same work as their peers. Teachers' planning for the most-able pupils does not make clear what they are expected to achieve. For example, in a Year 5 science lesson where pupils were planning a test to identify the best conditions for germination, the teacher's planning for the most-able pupils was for them 'to move on to the next section as soon as possible'.
- The achievement of disadvantaged pupils across the school is variable and requires improvement. In some lessons, they make more effective progress when the teacher is more vigilant and aware of the need to ensure that these pupils achieve as well as others. Inspectors' scrutiny of these pupils' books in lessons and through a more targeted work review shows that, typically, leaders have overestimated pupils' levels of attainment and hence progress. The gaps between the disadvantaged pupils in the school and others nationally are not closing rapidly enough.

- Pupils with special educational needs or disability achieve broadly at the same rate as other others in the school, based on their different starting points.
- Some pupils have achieved well, including in mathematics. For example, a small number of pupils who were entered for the GCSE in statistics all achieved A to C grades.

School details

Unique reference number	117554
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10006381

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	450
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Boulter
Headteacher	Julie Michael
Telephone number	01763 271446
Website	www.edwinstree.herts.sch.uk
Email address	admin@edwinstree.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	24–25 May 2012

Information about this school

- This school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. It serves the town of Buntingford and its surrounding villages. The school has recently experienced difficulty in replacing some teachers with those of a similar calibre in a range of key subject areas.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is around half the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs or disability is broadly average. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is well below average.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum requirements for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 16 lessons, sometimes accompanied by the school's senior leaders, to observe pupils' learning and progress. In addition, inspectors visited specific lessons with a key focus, including the progress made by pupils with special educational needs or disability.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, subject leaders, three members of the governing body, a representative from the local authority and two groups of pupils.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of school documents, including: the school's self-evaluation summary; the school improvement plan; information relating to pupils' progress; and records of the quality of teaching. They also reviewed the school's records of behavioural incidents and the single central record of recruitment checks on staff.
- Inspectors listened to four pupils read and carried out a detailed scrutiny of pupils' books across all years and subjects.
- Inspectors considered 155 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, eight responses to the staff questionnaire and 30 responses to the pupil questionnaire. Additionally, two parents submitted letters during the inspection for consideration.

Inspection team

John Daniell, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Helen Bailey	Ofsted Inspector
Simon Harbrow	Ofsted Inspector
Sharon Wilson	Ofsted Inspector

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