

Abbey Middle School

Mowbray Road, Bedford, MK42 9XA

Inspection dates 7–8 March 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The vast majority of students make good progress in their studies, including in English and mathematics.
- Students join the school with below-average levels of prior attainment. By the end of Year 8, attainment, for the vast majority, is in line with national averages. This represents good achievement over students' time at the school.
- Teaching has improved well since the previous inspection, contributing well to the students' good achievement.
- Most students make at least good progress in their literacy and numeracy because of the effective work undertaken to hone these skills.
- Behaviour is good and, occasionally, outstanding. Students enjoy school and are safe. They are valued and respected, and enjoy the available range of activities.
- The headteacher sets high expectations and has secured high levels of staff morale and commitment, despite the notice of closure facing the school. He leads by example and is well supported by all members of staff.
- Governors know the school well. They are supportive, visit regularly and are knowledgeable about the stresses that have to be faced as the school moves towards closure.
- Governors hold the headteacher and senior staff to account effectively about the school's performance, including the quality of teaching offered.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- By the end of Year 6, though the gap between the students' levels of achievement and national standards has closed, standards are still below average.
- Some inconsistencies in the level of challenge remain across lessons. In a small minority of lessons, planning lacks sharpness and accuracy. In these lessons, learning slows because the students are not challenged effectively. Teachers do too much of the work, talk for too long and this limits the extent to which students can learn through their own efforts.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 20 lessons. All available teaching staff were observed once, with a small minority observed more often. Some lessons were jointly observed with a senior member of staff. In addition, a number of other lessons were visited to determine how well the needs of specific students are planned for, to look at the quality of marking and assessment and to look at the help offered to students to improve their work.
- Meetings were held with four different student groups and with the Chair and one other member of the Governing Body. Meetings were also held with different members of staff, including senior leaders. A meeting was held with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 14 responses to the online inspection questionnaire (Parent View). Questionnaire responses from 31 members of staff were also considered.
- Inspectors scrutinised examples of students' past and present work and looked at various documents. These included the school's self-evaluation and planning, information on students' academic progress and records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Bill Stoneham, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Margaret Jones

Additional Inspector

Michael Lafford

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average-sized secondary school.
- About half the students are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils from a broad range of minority ethnic backgrounds is well above average.
- The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is over twice the national average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, who are looked after by their local authority or who have a parent in the armed services) is well above the national average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is twice the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus or by a statement of special educational needs is average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The school does not make any use of any alternative off-site provision for students.
- The arrangements for primary and secondary education in Bedford have recently been reviewed. This particular school will close to students at the end of the summer term 2014.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement further, especially by the end of Year 6, so that by the end of the current academic year, learning in all lessons is at least good, by ensuring that:
 - all students are fully and appropriately challenged in every lesson
 - teachers spend less time talking and explaining so that students have more time actively engaged and involved in learning for themselves.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- When students join the school in Year 5, their starting points are below average. Staff work well to develop their skills in reading, writing and mathematics so that they make good progress across a range of subjects and in all years.
- The emphasis on improving skills in reading, writing, communication and mathematics has been successful. All groups of students, including those who are disabled and those who have special educational needs, make good progress. Thus, by the end of Year 8, standards are at least in line with those expected for students' ages.
- Additional funding available through the pupil premium has been used well to improve outcomes. The progress made by students in Years 5 and 6 is improving through the additional support they receive. In addition, the school utilises effectively the new Year 7 catch-up funding for students who did not reach national expectations by the end of Year 6.
- Students receiving pupil premium funding do better than such students nationally, including in English and mathematics, because specifically funded and directed support is used effectively and monitored accurately. In 2012, in English and mathematics, the attainment in Year 6 of students known to be eligible for free school meals was almost identical to that of their classmates. By Year 8, those known to be eligible for free school meals continue to do as well as their peers and better than similar students nationally.
- Careful targeting of additional support for disabled students and those who have special educational needs sees these students making good gains in their learning and narrowing attainment gaps with other students.
- Target setting and support have improved considerably since the last inspection. All students are set challenging targets in each subject they study and their progress against such targets is regularly and carefully assessed. Students know what they need to do to improve. These changes have made a significant contribution to improving the progress made by different groups of students and ensuring good rates of achievement.
- The school identified that some students, for whom English is not their first language, were making less progress than their peers. Appropriate support has been provided and the gaps in performance are now being closed.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching has improved well since the previous inspection. In most lessons, and over time, teaching is at least good. In a significant minority of lessons, teaching is outstanding.
- In a number of lessons, especially in Years 5 and 6, students made at least good progress because of the opportunities they were given to read. Those students heard reading aloud usually did so well; showing confidence and reading confidently and with clarity.
- High-quality teaching featured in a number of lessons and covered many subjects. Particularly outstanding teaching was seen in a Year 8 music lesson. Highly competent and knowledgeable teaching served to inspire the students. Their progress in learning about bars, rhythms and other musical terms was rapid. The students showed an ability to read music and their self-confidence

was promoted very well through the opportunities they had to model their work.

- Good progress and achievement are further aided by the improvements that have been made in target setting and monitoring. This is an area where significant developments have been made since the previous inspections. The improvements are now embedded, so that all students know their target grades in every subject. They are also offered clear guidance on how to improve if their current work is falling below expectations.
- Teaching is at least good because staff expectations about what students can do and achieve are realistic. In most lessons, teachers successfully challenge students and extend their knowledge and understanding. In the small minority of lessons where improvements are required, work is not always pitched at the right level of challenge for the range of abilities in the class.
- Where improvements in teaching and learning are also required, it is because staff talk for too long, offering far too detailed explanations. This limits the time and opportunity for students to learn for themselves.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour over time, around the school and in lessons is good. Where lessons are especially effective and engaging, behaviour can be outstanding, with all students keen to learn.
 - Attitudes to learning are positive. Students told inspectors that they like attending school, that they felt safe, with older students making reference to how the school has improved over the last two or three years. Staff also made references to the improvements in behaviour since the previous inspection.
 - Incidents of bullying based on race, sexual orientation or name-calling are rare. Any reported incidents are dealt with swiftly and appropriately by staff. Students told inspectors that they had faith and confidence in the staff to deal with bullying and other incidents of anti-social behaviour should they arise.
 - Students know how to stay safe and avoid the misuse of drugs and alcohol, for example. The school's well-planned personal education programme ensures that all students are given good-quality information about how to lead safe and healthy lives. There is also a suitable programme to promote e-safety. The use of mobile phones is sensitively managed and the students are provided with detailed information to ensure the safe and beneficial use of the internet.
 - Though in both the parent and staff questionnaires a small minority of respondents expressed concerns about behaviour, inspectors found students to be polite and courteous, showing respect towards their teachers, other adults and to one another. On many occasions, students were seen to work together well in small groups or teams. These qualities contribute well to the good progress they make in their personal development.
 - Evidence of good behaviour is reflected in the improving attendance rates and the decline in incidents of persistent absence. Attendance is now close to the national average. Fixed-term exclusions are also falling and are now below average. Students are punctual to their lessons. These developments contribute well to the improvements that have been recorded in students' achievements.
-

- The only occasions where the quality of behaviour slipped was in the small minority of lessons where the work did not challenge or engage the students sufficiently.

The leadership and management are good

- The school is led and managed well by the headteacher, who is well supported by the staff team, including the senior management team. Senior staff have worked effectively to improve teaching and raise achievement by tackling any underperformance by students.
- Though the recent notice of closure has been a source of uncertainty, staff morale and commitment have remained high. As one teacher commented: 'This is the best school I have ever worked in.'
- Self-evaluation is most effective. Monitoring and evaluation procedures are good, with staff and governors having a keen understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Improved self-evaluation has been key in improving outcomes for students and ensuring that achievement for all groups is good.
- Where staff have identified gaps in the performance of some students, especially in terms of reading, writing or mathematical skills, additional funding via the pupil premium has been used astutely to provide intervention lessons designed to raise standards.
- Teaching and learning are managed well. Staff development is effective, with training linked to improving classroom effectiveness. Any underperformance is quickly addressed and no members of staff are offered salary increases unless justified by their performance.
- The range of subjects offered is managed well and has been adapted so that transition to upper school at the end of Year 8 is as trouble free as possible.
- Opportunities for students to learn beyond the classroom are extensive and sensitively planned. Students are given many opportunities to participate in sport, drama and music, for example. Responsibility is encouraged in many ways, including through the school council. A well-planned programme of educational visits, to places as diverse as the Cutty Sark in Greenwich and the National Space Centre in Leicester, offer students a variety of different and stimulating experiences. The school's well-planned range of subjects and its extensive programme of visits and clubs all help to boost achievement, as well as making a particularly positive contribution to the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Arrangements for safeguarding are thorough, including the risk assessments undertaken for all off-site visits. Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements.
- The school works well with the local authority. This work has been given more prominence following the recent closure notice. The school has found the support offered by the local authority helpful.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have a realistic understanding of just how well the school is performing. They know that teaching and learning have improved considerably and they rightly judge that the education provided is good. They know the school's strengths and where further

improvements are necessary. They hold the headteacher and all other members of staff to account for the school's performance. They carefully analyse outcomes, including examination and test results, and they are fully involved in ensuring that there is a close link between salary progression and the effectiveness of classroom teaching. Through their training, they are aware of how performance management works. They thoroughly monitor expenditure, including the way extra funding through the pupil premium is spent. They are justifiably proud of the school.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	109654
Local authority	Bedford Borough
Inspection number	401065

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

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	322
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tim Simmons
Headteacher	Nigel Williams
Date of previous school inspection	17 June 2010
Telephone number	01234 401401
Fax number	01234 401400
Email address	abbeymidd@deal.bedfordshire.gov.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2013

