

Middleton School

Walnut Tree Walk, Ware, SG12 9PD

Inspection dates 23–24 January 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Outstanding leadership by leaders, managers and governors has enabled the school to respond most effectively to the change in the range of needs of pupils for whom the school provides.
- Teachers and their assistants are very well trained and supported in continuing to extend their knowledge and skills. As a result, the teaching is outstanding.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make excellent progress because staff plan their learning in detail.
- Pupils of all ages make exceptional progress in all subjects. Their achievement is outstanding because their specific needs are met very well.
- Teachers aim high and use exceptional questioning skills to involve pupils in checking how well they are learning. This has addressed the area for further improvement in the school's last inspection.
- Additional adults make a very strong contribution to learning in lessons through their excellent help and guidance for pupils' academic, medical and physical needs.
- Senior leaders, including governors, work extremely well together to improve the rate of progress of pupils and to check the quality of teaching. The well planned teaching of skills in phonics (the sounds letters make) has led to rapid improvements in reading across the school for pupils of most groups.
- A few pupils who have speech, language and communication difficulties make better progress in mathematics than reading. The school is aware of this and is addressing it.
- Pupils' behaviour, attitudes and relationships with one another and adults are outstanding and are a key strength of the school. The school provides many opportunities for pupils to speak up for themselves and get involved in discussions. This very successfully encourages their social development.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 11 lessons, eight of which were joint observations with the headteacher and her deputy. In addition, the inspection team made short visits to other lessons, looked at pupils' work and heard them read.
- Meetings were held with staff, pupils and governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and the vice chair. A telephone discussion was held with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 23 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) as well as other testimonies from parents and carers, and 30 questionnaires completed by staff.
- The inspection team observed the school's work and looked at a range of school documents including the school's self-evaluation, the school's improvement planning, the information it keeps on pupils' current progress, records, safeguarding policies and documents relating to performance management of staff (the setting and reviewing of targets to help them improve their work).

Inspection team

Justina Ilochi, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Patricia Barford	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Middleton has been recently designated by the local authority as a school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties, speech, language and communication difficulties and pupils on the autistic spectrum. Previously, the school provided for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. All pupils have statements of special educational needs.
- An average proportion of the pupils are supported through the pupil premium (additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or who are looked after by the local authority).
- Almost all pupils are White British with very few children from Black African and other minority backgrounds.
- The school offers advice, support and training to local mainstream schools as part of the local authority's provision for pupils with additional needs in mainstream schools. This service is called Outreach.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the teaching of language skills for pupils with speech, language and communication difficulties is well resourced and as effective as the teaching of phonics.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- From very low starting points in the Early Years Foundation Stage, pupils make outstanding progress in Reception. This is because the teaching here is excellent. Teachers plan carefully using small steps in learning and children move on rapidly.
- Pupils, including those who have moderate learning difficulties, speech, language and communication difficulties and pupils on the autistic spectrum, make outstanding progress in Key Stages 1 and 2. This is achieved through the well-targeted training provided for teachers and additional adults.
- Progress is exceptional in English for a majority of the pupils because the teaching of literacy in all subjects is a strength of the extremely well-planned curriculum. For example, in a religious education lesson in Years 3 and 4, pupils successfully focused on learning to write full sentences in response to the teacher's prompts.
- Pupils make rapid progress in mathematics because resources are used very successfully to help them develop mental mathematics skills. Younger pupils use resources such as building blocks to help them count but by the time pupils reach Years 5 and 6 pupils apply mental mathematics skills to solving problems.
- The school uses the additional money it receives, such as the pupil premium, exceptionally well. Last year the pupil premium funding was used to train staff to carry out one-to-one and small group teaching. This increased the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals making outstanding progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils in receipt of this support did just as well as other pupils because of this extra staff encouragement and support

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Over time the quality of teaching has been outstanding and no teaching seen during the inspection was less than good. In the great majority of lessons careful planning builds well on earlier learning and staff are successful in securing pupils' interest and attention. Pupils' positive attitudes, coupled with their good knowledge of what they need to do to improve, mean that they push themselves that little bit further every day.
- Teachers have high expectations of all pupils and use exceptional questioning skills to ensure that pupils are always involved in checking their learning and finding out how they can improve. In an outstanding lesson in Years 5 and 6 the teacher allowed pupils to respond to the meaning of 'more or less' in a variety of ways. Pupils who were non-verbal used an electronic device to do the task. Consequently all pupils made outstanding progress.

Praise is often used effectively to help pupils recognise how well they are doing and when to move on. Consequently, lessons move at just the right pace. This keeps pupils highly interested and motivated. Staff are adept at providing many opportunities for pupils to practise and make secure their recently acquired skills.

- Teachers are skilled at getting the best out of pupils and stimulating them to listen, think and try their best. All forms of communication including verbal, signing and visual prompts are used extremely well. Parents and carers say, rightly, that their children are supported extraordinarily

well by experienced teachers who know how to explain things and interest them.

- Additional adults make a very strong contribution to learning in lessons through their excellent support for pupils' academic, medical and physical needs. Their outstanding help and guidance has ensured that activities in and outside the classroom are focused on continuous learning.
- The well planned teaching of skills in phonics (the sounds letters make) has led to rapid improvements in reading across the school for pupils who have moderate learning difficulties and some high functioning pupils on the autistic spectrum.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils say they love their school. They are polite, respectful to each other and adults, and want to do their best. Pupils form excellent working relationships with the staff.
- Those who find it difficult to behave consistently well on entry to school make remarkable progress in managing their own behaviour. This is because the school provides very clear guidance to staff, who are highly skilled at motivating pupils and managing their behaviour positively. Well designed behaviour action plans enable pupils to do their best to improve and provide them with the help to do so.
- All parents and carers agree that their children are kept safe. They are delighted with how happy their children are to come to school, and this is reflected in the high attendance of the last three years.
- Pupils get on with each other extremely well; bullying of any kind is very rare indeed and pupils know that they can talk to an adult if they are being bullied. There has been only one fixed-term exclusion in the last three years.
- Non-academic targets set for pupils by their teachers to improve life skills such as self-help for some pupils on the autistic spectrum, challenge pupils to achieve even more and, consequently, they do. Their self-confidence grows as they proceed through the school and become increasingly independent.
- Pupils with medical and physical needs, such as those with epilepsy, are very well supported by highly trained staff who are well briefed on how to keep pupils safe. Parents are confident that their children are safe while in the school's care.
- Weekly assemblies are used effectively by the school to encourage and reinforce outstanding behaviour through calm reflection. Assemblies also provide many opportunities for pupils to speak up for themselves and get involved in discussions that are rich in opportunities to encourage their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, during an assembly for older pupils, while reflecting on 150 years of the underground trains, pupils showed awe and amazement at man's ingenuity.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The determination of the headteacher and her deputy to improve the rates of progress for all pupils in the school is evident in all the actions taken by the school and has led to outstanding

achievement in the last three years.

- Senior leaders and governors share a very strong sense of ambition and drive to manage change and improve the work of the school. They understand and celebrate strengths and keep a sharp focus on any underperformance.
 - Strong, skilled leadership is evident in the exemplary work leaders have done to provide an outstanding curriculum that is continually reviewed so that it is well suited to the needs of all pupils. This supports the excellent teaching because it takes exceptional account of the precise needs of pupils and helps to ensure that all, including those with complex medical needs, make outstanding progress. Pupils on the autistic spectrum are extremely well catered for in a special class and, like other pupils, they are making outstanding progress in their social skills.
 - School leaders regularly gather information on how pupils are progressing. They check this information against how similar pupils are progressing nationally through frequent internal and external checking of the accuracy of assessments. As a result the planning for development is realistic and based on accurate judgements about the school's performance.
 - The school meets all statutory requirements including safeguarding and promotes equal opportunities for all its pupils exceptionally well. Excellent working of the school family support liaison officer with parents and carers ensures that the well-being and learning of all pupils continues to be a priority for the school.
 - Leaders are constantly looking for new and better ways of doing things and updating teachers' skills. For example the school has rightly identified that a few pupils especially those who have speech, language and communication difficulties have slightly lower reading levels when compared to other groups because sometimes staff do not always have the resources they need to develop language and phonics (the sound that letters make) skills simultaneously. The local authority maintains a 'light touch' link with the school. Through the Outreach, the local authority ensures that the school shares its expertise, particularly on pupils with autism, with several other mainstream schools. The Outreach worked with 28 mainstream schools last year and many of these schools reported how effective the provision was.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - The work of the governing body has contributed to the sustained, outstanding quality of education the school provides. Governors carry out their statutory responsibilities exceptionally well. They know the strengths and weaknesses of the school particularly well and hold leaders to account for the progress of its pupils. Governors are highly knowledgeable about the school's work and quick to check on how well new initiatives are going and that they are making a difference. They keep a close eye on how well the additional pupil premium funding is being used and know what difference it made in the last year. Governors are clear about how the school's self-evaluation, the training that follows and the management of the performance of staff are linked to teachers' pay. For example, the governing body has in the last three years supported the headteacher in encouraging the sharing of responsibilities amongst key staff. This has led to the development of a strong middle leadership team and ensured that teachers on higher pay scales are given more responsibility for pupil progress. Governors are well trained and their training is continuous. The governing body receives regular comprehensive evaluations of the school's performance and understands how pupils are improving each year. They know that pupils have made outstanding progress overall and are clear about the next steps in the school's development.
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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	117676
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	408914

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	70
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gemma Jeffrey
Headteacher	Donna Jolly
Date of previous school inspection	7 December 2009
Telephone number	01920 485152
Fax number	01920 486738
Email address	admin@middleton.herts.sch.uk

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