

Inspection of Middleton School

Walnut Tree Walk, Ware, Hertfordshire SG12 9PD

Inspection dates: 24 and 25 April 2024

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspection because it was judged as outstanding at its previous inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The school has not been inspected under section 5 of the Act since January 2013. The school received an ungraded inspection under section 8 of the Act on 23 March 2017 and on 21 and 22 June 2023.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a remarkable school. All pupils achieve exceptionally well from their starting points. The school does not place any ceiling on what pupils can do. Pupils benefit from a highly engaging academic and personal development curriculum. This is expertly taught throughout the school and precisely tailored to each pupil's needs. Staff pay close attention as to how pupils learn best. This builds pupils' self-esteem and helps them to succeed.

Pupils trust the adults that help them but are not overly reliant on this support. Pupils' independence is deliberately encouraged. They thrive due to consistent routines and the use of visual reminders. Pupils use speech or signing confidently. They express themselves safely and calmly. The highly respectful relationships between adults and pupils create an enjoyable learning environment. Pupils like having friends. Playtimes are harmonious.

All pupils participate in a plethora of opportunities to fulfil the school's mantra of 'learning for life'. Weekly off-site learning, swimming and cookery sessions, to name but a few, allow pupils to explore their interests. These also develop their confidence in navigating life in the wider community. Pupils help in the local shops and garden centre. They enjoy train trips to London and eagerly await a caravan stay at the coast.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school leaves no stone unturned to provide the best possible education for its pupils. All staff ensure pupils experience school life to the full. The school has robustly addressed the areas for improvement from the last inspection.

Through leaders' expertise in special needs education, they have created an ambitious and bespoke curriculum. They use the latest research to ensure pupils excel. The curriculum lays out explicitly the incremental steps pupils need to follow to meet its aims. Staff skilfully identify gaps in pupils' knowledge. The school watches carefully pupils' progression towards their targets on their education, health and care (EHC) plans. This is so staff can immediately adapt activities to fill gaps. Pupils' success is shared regularly with parents.

Staff deliver the curriculum exceptionally well. They constantly find ways to make the learning accessible to everyone. Pupils learn knowledge in manageable chunks. They repeat practical and sensory experiences to fix in their long-term memory. They apply learning in real-life situations via the life skills curriculum offer, such as using their understanding of money when shopping and following a recipe in cooking lessons. Staff continuously check pupils' understanding until they know it is secure.

Reading and communication are real strengths. All pupils know how to use and interpret sign language. Pupils at the early stages of reading are systematically

taught the sounds they need to read. They practise reading fluency with activities that are very well matched to their reading ability. Consequently, pupils enjoy reading. Pupils have stories and rhymes read, acted out or sung to them so they develop a rich vocabulary. Pupils achieve well, including in national tests, bearing in mind their starting points and individual needs.

Staff have a deep understanding of pupils' emotional, physical, sensory and communication needs. They successfully reassure pupils who are anxious. The use of movement breaks, sensory resources and visual prompts supports pupils to manage their behaviour and develop self-control. Hence, pupils cope with different social situations and noisier environments, such as eating together and getting on a minibus. This prepares them for life beyond school.

Very few children have time off school. If they do, leaders quickly get them back into school and learning.

Pupils succeed because the curriculum ensures staff teach independence, resilience and stamina. They are sensitively taught about risks online, how to cross the road safely and about healthy relationships. The school council helps pupils understand about democracy and about life in modern Britain. Pupils know about right and wrong and accepting everyone for who they are.

Governors provide thorough oversight. They proactively seek external assurance of the quality of their provision. Staff feel incredibly well supported by leaders.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at

any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	117676
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10323656
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	109
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair of governing body	Pauline Wallace
Headteacher	Debbie Hartley
Website	www.middleton.herts.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	21 and 22 June 2023, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This school provides education for pupils with learning difficulties that include autism and speech, language and communication needs. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school does not use any alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher, subject leaders, teachers and support staff.

- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading and communication, mathematics, personal, health, social and economic education and science. For the deep dives, inspectors spoke with subject leaders, visited lessons, spoke with pupils, looked at pupils' workbooks and spoke with teachers and support staff. The lead inspector also heard pupils read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors also looked at pupils' work and curriculum documentation across a range of other subjects.
- The lead inspector met with five governors, including the chair of the governing body.
- The lead inspector spoke to the school effectiveness partner from the local authority.
- The inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan. The lead inspector also reviewed minutes of governor meetings.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspectors considered the responses gathered through Ofsted's online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View, which included 38 free-text comments. There were 21 responses to the staff survey. No pupils completed the pupil survey. However, inspectors spoke to several pupils from different year groups during the inspection, as well as a range of staff.

Inspection team

Sara Boyce, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Ruth Brock

Ofsted Inspector

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