

Harrold Priory Middle School

The Green, Harrold, Bedford, MK43 7DE

Inspection dates 18–19 September 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		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The school has improved since its last inspection because the head of school, the executive headteacher and the governing body have set high standards and helped the staff and pupils to achieve them.
- The range of subjects and courses is carefully planned to ensure that pupils of all abilities receive an engaging educational experience.
- Progress is rapid in Years 7 and 8, and by the time pupils leave the school they have reached high standards in English and mathematics.
- Attendance has improved and is now in line with national averages.
- The quality of teaching is usually good and sometimes outstanding.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary.
- The welcoming and supportive environment ensures that pupils feel very safe and confident. They enjoy school and their attitudes and approach to learning are always positive.
- Pupils are encouraged to fully engage in the learning process and sometimes take an active role in planning their lessons.
- Pupils are very well prepared for the next stage in their education.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not yet consistently good or better in all year groups.
- Pupils supported by additional funding do less well than others in Years 7 and 8.
- As a result progress is not yet outstanding for all groups of pupils.
- Not all teachers use the information gathered on pupils' progress quickly and accurately to support their lesson planning.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors visited 21 lessons across all four year groups. Ten of the lessons were seen together with members of the senior management team. They also carried out a 'learning walk' to assess the progress of pupils for whom the school receives extra funding.
- The inspection team held meetings with three groups of pupils, senior leaders, and the heads of both key stages and subject leaders. They also spoke to three members of the federation's governing body.
- Inspectors heard pupils read and talked to them about the work in their books.
- Inspectors looked at a range of policies, including those for safeguarding and for managing the performance of staff. They also looked at information kept by the school on the quality of teaching and learning, records of pupils' standards and progress, and the school's own review and improvement plans and evaluation of its own performance.
- The 40 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and 13 questionnaires completed by staff were taken into consideration.

Inspection team

Gillian Scobie, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
David Wolfson	Additional Inspector
Shan Oswald	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is smaller than the average middle school.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding to help certain groups is below the national average. In this school the funding only applies to pupils known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The majority of the pupils come from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils supported by school action is in line with national averages, but the proportion supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well below average.
- None of the school's pupils are educated in other schools or units.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' achievement and progress.
- The school is part of the Sharnbrook Academy Federation, which is a 'hard federation' where a number of schools have come together under a single governing body.
- The school, as part of the federation, became an Investor in People in April 2013 and was awarded Artsmark Gold certification in September 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the achievement of the majority of pupils to outstanding by ensuring that:
 - teaching is consistently good, and more is outstanding
 - all groups of pupils, especially those for whom the school receives pupil premium funding, make equally rapid progress in all year groups
 - all teachers can use the available information accurately and effectively to support lesson planning, and to identify where pupils need more help or are able to move on more quickly.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Achievement is good, but it is not outstanding because progress is not consistent across all year groups.
- When pupils join the school in Year 5 many of them are working one term ahead of pupils nationally in English and nearly a term and a half ahead in mathematics. After an initial dip in Year 5, by the end of Year 6 the majority have made nationally expected progress in both English and mathematics. Progress then accelerates in Years 7 and 8 and when pupils leave the school at the end of Year 8 a large proportion of pupils are working at least three terms ahead in English and mathematics.
- The school uses the Year 7 catch-up funds it receives from the government to support pupils who made slower progress in English or mathematics at the end of Year 6. School information shows that pupils who were given this extra help were able to improve their progress in English by two terms and in mathematics by nearly three terms.
- Pupils make good progress across all their subjects. The school has worked to make lessons more challenging since the last inspection, and the proportion of pupils exceeding nationally expected progress has increased in English and particularly in mathematics.
- Excellent help and guidance for individual pupils who have special educational needs in the full range of subjects ensure that they are able to fully participate in lessons and make progress in line with other pupils.
- Pupils love reading and are encouraged to read widely. They read a good range of complex and sometimes challenging texts in their lessons. This has raised achievement in reading across the school and helps pupils to understand the importance of being able to read well.
- School leaders have readily embraced the growing emphasis on developing pupils' skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar. As a result pupils are writing accurately and at length in most of their lessons.
- At the end of Year 8, school data show that the pupils eligible for pupil premium funding have made expected progress but are still working on average two terms behind their classmates in English and mathematics. However, at the end of Year 6 the attainment gap has closed between these pupils and the rest of the school in both English and mathematics. This shows that the achievement of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is improving, but not yet consistently well in all year groups.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. Guided support and careful monitoring by school leaders have resulted in most of the teaching in the school now being good with some examples of outstanding practice.
- All the teachers show that they have high expectations for what the pupils can achieve. They usually provide a good level of challenge in lessons, and ensure that everyone is able to take a full and active part. As a result pupils who have special educational needs and those eligible for pupil premium funding are increasingly able to make equal progress with their classmates.

- The whole-school policy on homework has had a positive effect on pupils' learning outside the classroom. Specific programmes for mathematics and English have helped pupils to monitor their own progress, and teachers can quickly spot the strengths of each pupil and identify areas which need further improvement.
- The quality of marking is improving and in some subjects it is outstanding. Pupils are encouraged to respond to the teachers' comments and there are instances of an active dialogue developing between the pupil and the teacher, which focuses on how to improve work.
- Pupils are encouraged to be active participants in their learning, and some pupils commented that they felt their writing could be improved and were going to join the Writing Club. This is a club run by teachers to help pupils improve their writing skills, and other pupils commented that it has helped them make good progress in writing and has improved the quality of work in their books.
- There is a school-wide system for recording and monitoring pupils' progress, and teachers often use it effectively to inform their planning and teaching. However, it is not yet used consistently well. For example, teachers sometimes miss opportunities to adapt activities to suit individual learning needs in a class, or to encourage the more-able pupils to move forward quickly in their learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils enjoy their lessons and have excellent attitudes to learning. They have a thirst for learning, are always ready to share what they are doing, and are able to reflect thoughtfully on what they have learnt.
- Pupils want to do well and usually take an active interest in what they are learning. In a mathematics lesson the level of challenge was increased by the pupils themselves, who wanted to see if they could work successfully with larger numbers than those initially planned by the teacher which were already suitably challenging for the class.
- Behaviour in class and around the school is exemplary and this is reflected in the very low number of recorded incidents of unacceptable behaviour.
- The school takes the opportunity to capitalise on the pupils' initiative and leadership skills through effective use of peer mentors and school prefects. Their contribution adds to the skilled and highly consistent management of behaviour, and leads to the harmonious and tolerant atmosphere that pervades the school.
- Pupils feel that all their teachers are fair and treat them consistently well, and this adds to their confidence as learners.
- The school places a strong emphasis on all aspects of health and safety. As the inspection took place at the beginning of the year, several lessons in science, design technology and ICT (information and communication technology) included a review of basic safety procedures for each subject which the pupils were able to answer quickly and knowledgeably.
- Pupils feel very safe at school and this is endorsed by the parents and staff in their responses to questions about safety in the questionnaires. Pupils are well informed about different kinds of bullying and know how to keep themselves safe in their daily lives and on the internet.

The leadership and management are good

- The school leadership team is ambitious for the school and consistently communicates high expectations. This is reflected in the excellent working relationships that contribute to a positive and supportive working environment.
- The school knows itself very well and involves leaders at all levels in the continuous programme of self-evaluation. This is thorough and accurate and is developed thoughtfully to fully cater for the pupils and the staff who support them.
- The school has worked hard to improve the quality of teaching since the last inspection. This has been achieved by the implementation of careful and supportive monitoring, effective training and performance management that is consistently well matched to the needs of the staff and the school.
- The school uses its limited financial resources well and makes full use of the extra funding to help pupils supported by the pupil premium and the Year 7 catch-up funding to ensure that individual pupils are able to make good progress. The school has appropriate plans to improve the already strong programme of PE and sporting activities with new national funding to develop this area of pupils' experience.
- The school benefits from the expertise of a federation team well-qualified and experienced subject leaders, who work across the three middle schools to ensure that the systems for planning and assessment are rigorous. This also ensures that many creative links between subjects support the pupils' thirst for knowledge and extend their engagement and interest in their learning.
- The school is working hard to strengthen its links with parents and carers. Regular newsletters and an increasing dialogue stemming from carefully conceived homework activities help involve parents in monitoring the quality and progress of work completed beyond the classroom.
- A good range of carefully formulated policies ensure that pupils are well looked after and are able to make at least good progress across the full range of subjects available. The school's arrangements for safeguarding meet current national requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body spans the federation, with a smaller Academy Local Group which closely monitors the improvement and progress of Harrold Priory. The school benefits from the expertise of a strong group, some of whom have been governors for more than 10 years. Rapid improvement since the last inspection has been driven by the governors, who took drastic measures by reorganising the senior leadership team. The improvements are the result of constant challenge consistently tempered with careful, considerate and perceptive support. A strong emphasis is placed on developing an effective teaching team by the insightful use of performance management and well-chosen training to encourage and reward good work and improvement. The governing body monitors the limited budget carefully and checks the effective use of the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding. The governors play an active role in the life of the school and know it well. They recognise that some things need to be improved, such as the school website and the quality of communication with parents, and are working to eradicate minor problems in order to concentrate on improving the overall effectiveness of teaching and learning for the pupils.

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	136472
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	427172

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	370
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Hugh Carr-Archer
Headteacher	Hilary Dilley
Date of previous school inspection	27 June 2012
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