

Edwinstree Church of England Middle School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	117554
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	395302
Inspection dates	24–25 May 2012
Lead inspector	Stephen Walker

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	454
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark King
Headteacher	Julie Michael
Date of previous school inspection	24 September 2008
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Introduction

Stephen Walker	Additional Inspector
Natasha Campbell	Additional Inspector
David Turner	Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors visited 30 lessons and observed 21 teachers. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body, an additional governor, senior leaders, staff and groups of pupils. The inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work and looked at a range of evidence, including the school development plan, the tracking system to monitor pupils' progress, safeguarding documentation, and a sample of pupils' work. They also analysed questionnaires completed by staff, pupils and 354 parents and carers.

Information about the school

The school is of average size, serving the town of Buntingford and local villages. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds, with a very small number from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is below average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is also below average. The school meets the current floor standard, which sets the government's minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

The school has recently reorganised the senior leadership team. The school has received the Sportsmark, Activemark, ECO School Bronze and International Schools awards, and has achieved National Healthy Schools status.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key findings

- This outstanding school is high achieving and provides a very safe and happy environment. Standards have been consistently maintained at a very high level. The school has made substantial improvement to the quality of teaching since the last inspection, when it was judged to be good.
- Pupils' achievement is outstanding and by the end of Year 8, their attainment is well above average in both English and mathematics. Pupils make a good start in Year 5 and Year 6 and most pupils continue through school making rapid and sustained progress in all subjects.
- The overall quality of teaching is outstanding so that pupils make excellent progress over their time at the school. There is a very positive learning atmosphere in lessons and teachers have high expectations for all pupils. Although teachers are very conscientious with their planning of lessons, they do not always fully check pupils' understanding of the work.
- Pupils' behaviour is excellent. They feel very safe, are polite and respectful, and have very positive attitudes to learning. They enjoy school and develop into friendly and considerate individuals. Attendance is well above average and reflects pupils' real enjoyment of school.
- The school is exceptionally well led and managed. The headteacher has a precise understanding of the areas for development, including the performance and professional development needs of staff. Senior leaders and subject leaders provide high quality leadership of teaching and learning. The school has embraced the need for continuous improvement and has been successful in raising standards further since the last inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all teachers check that pupils understand both the work in lessons

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and the tasks which are set for them.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Most parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire feel that their children make excellent progress. The inspection found that achievement is outstanding for pupils during their time at the school. Pupils enter the school with standards that are above the national average and make outstanding progress during their time at school. By the time pupils leave the school, attainment is well above average across the range of subjects. The large majority of pupils in Year 8 exceed the national standards expected of pupils at the end of Year 9 in all subjects. For example, pupils demonstrated outstanding progress in mathematics in 2011 with over 70% of pupils gaining level 6 standards; (level 6 is higher than expected nationally).

Pupils make excellent progress in reading because this is a key focus in the school. By the end of Year 8, standards in reading are well above the national average. The school has been active in encouraging parents to read with their children at home. In addition, each class has a reading period every week which has greatly supported the improvement in reading standards across the school.

Pupils' current work and lessons show that the majority are making rapid and sustained progress in most subjects. The school has been particularly successful in accelerating the progress of boys in English through an emphasis on structured writing and ensuring that there is wide range of suitable reading material for them. In lessons, most pupils learn very well. Their attitudes are very positive and they work extremely well with others, respecting each other's views. They are able to reflect and are growing in confidence when discussing issues in class. They persevere with challenges and enjoy taking responsibility for their own learning.

The well-developed tracking system and range of intervention strategies are used exceptionally well to identify and support any pupils who are at risk of underachieving. Subject teachers are effectively developing and implementing action plans for pupils who are not making the required progress towards their challenging targets. Most disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make progress in line with their peers because of excellent additional support from teaching assistants, which helps them overcome barriers to learning and take a full part in lessons with the other pupils. The very small number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds also make outstanding progress.

Quality of teaching

The vast majority of parents and carers who returned questionnaires feel that their children are taught well and pupils agree. Much of the teaching is outstanding and it

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is never less than consistently good, with the result that the pupils are making exceptional progress over time. Lessons involve a range of interesting activities so that pupils display great enthusiasm and sustain high levels of concentration. Pupils learn particularly well because activities are very well matched to their different abilities. Displays in classrooms provide a stimulating environment for learning and celebrate pupils' work. Disabled pupils and those who find learning difficult or have special educational needs are very well supported and challenged by teaching assistants in class or withdrawn on a regular basis in small groups for extra help in reading, writing and numeracy. Teaching is excellent in these small group sessions. Marking is supportive and is increasingly more detailed and helpful in showing pupils how they can improve their work. There are occasional inconsistencies in the classroom when teachers assume too much and do not always check that pupils understand both the work in lessons and the tasks which are set for them.

All pupils have regular periods of literacy and numeracy, and this aspect of the curriculum greatly supports the teaching of basic skills. Teaching in the school actively supports the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils. Pupils are encouraged to think about and express their own beliefs and values as seen in the Year 7 English lesson where pupils analysed how texts influence personal opinion.

Outstanding teaching was seen when teachers challenged their pupils with high quality questioning and tasks as well as encouraging them to take greater responsibility for their own learning. Highly skilled teachers were able to engage the whole class, including both boys and girls, in discussions and ensured that most pupils had an opportunity to contribute to the lessons. For example, Year 6 pupils made rapid progress when they were set the task of creating board games to demonstrate recently learnt mathematical concepts and then explaining their rationale to the rest of the class.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The vast majority of parents and carers are highly positive about behaviour in the school. The behaviour of pupils is excellent and this contributes to an ideal atmosphere for learning and personal growth. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding in lessons and around the school, and this contributes to a calm and orderly environment. In lessons, pupils consistently meet the school's expectations and, typically, pupils respond well to teachers' good use of praise and encouragement to promote high standards of behaviour. Pupils as a whole are highly proficient in managing their own behaviour in lessons and around the school. For example, pupils can be trusted to work on their own, move around the corridors and play outside at break and lunchtimes with minimum supervision. Pupils are considerate, polite and courteous to staff and each other and this has a very positive effect on learning. They make every effort to ensure that the other pupils learn and flourish in an atmosphere of respect and dignity.

Although bullying of any kind is extremely rare, pupils, parents and carers say any

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unkind behaviour, such as teasing and name calling, is dealt with quickly and effectively. All class groups are actively engaged in supporting the school's anti-bullying policy and pupils are very aware of the different forms of possible bullying such as cyber-bullying and prejudice-based bullying related to sexual orientation, gender, race and disability. Teachers and other adults take good steps to ensure that all groups of pupils have an equal chance to thrive in an atmosphere of fairness and trust, and without fear. The Resilience Programme in Year 7 is greatly supporting self confidence and respect for others so that all pupils feel valued as individuals in the school. Pupils feel very safe in the school and display an excellent understanding of the issues relating to safety. They talk confidently about how they would keep themselves safe in a variety of situations such as using the internet, talking to strangers and crossing the road.

Leadership and management

The headteacher is providing very effective leadership so that staff work very closely on the shared vision to gain the very best academic and personal outcomes for all pupils. The newly formed senior leadership team is developing well and greatly supporting the improvements in the school. Rigorous systems of monitoring teaching and tracking pupils' progress are responsible for the high standards in literacy and numeracy. Professional development of staff is a key focus in the school so that teachers are continually reflecting on their teaching practice in order to improve the quality of learning further in their classes.

The governing body is well informed of the school's progress and areas for development. Its members are fully involved in monitoring progress and in holding the school to account. They are reviewing the milestones of the success criteria of the school development plan so that it is a more effective tool in the monitoring process. Robust procedures for safeguarding meet statutory requirements and underpin the school's very caring approach. There is a strong commitment to promoting equal opportunities and tackling discrimination.

The school has developed an imaginative and engaging curriculum which is highly relevant to pupils' needs and provides an exciting range of enrichment activities. For example, visits including those to Normandy, Derbyshire, London and Cambridge provide excellent enhancement for the curriculum as well as a range of extra curricular activities which greatly increase pupils' enjoyment and experience of school. The broad range of experiences within the curriculum contributes very well to pupils' achievements and to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils gain confidence and self-esteem, and develop excellent social skills and a genuine respect for each other. The International School award recognises that the school is very active in developing pupils' awareness of different cultures through links with a school in Rwanda and frequent multicultural activities in assemblies and religious education, personal and social education lessons.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



28 May 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Edwinstree Church of England Middle School, Buntingford, SG9 9AW

Thank you for making us so welcome and for sharing your views with us during the inspection and through your questionnaires. We greatly enjoyed watching your lessons and looking at your work. It was also good to see you during assembly, at playtime and lunch. Your school is an outstanding one which has made considerable improvements since the last inspection. We know that your parents and carers are very supportive of the school and value the education provided for you. There are many positive things about your school.

- You enjoy school, attend regularly and work hard in your lessons.
- You make excellent progress in your subjects and attain well-above-average standards.
- You are exceptionally well behaved and feel very safe in the school.
- You are considerate, respectful and courteous to staff and each other.
- Your teachers provide a range of interesting activities which engage and challenge you.
- Your school is outstanding in its support of both your academic and personal development.
- Your school is led very effectively by the headteacher, senior leaders and the governing body.

The headteacher and staff are always looking at ways to make your school even better so we hope you will continue to use the school council to put forward your ideas for improvement. We have asked your teachers to make sure that they are consistently checking your understanding of work in lessons and the tasks which are set for you. You can all help by asking the teacher for help when you do not understand the work.

We trust that you will continue to work hard, behave well and benefit from the range of opportunities in your school. We wish you every success in your future education.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Walker
Lead inspector

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