

Seahouses Middle School

James Street, Seahouses, Northumberland, NE68 7YF

Inspection dates 11–12 February 2014

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Standards declined in Key Stage 2 in 2013 compared to 2012 particularly in English and mathematics. Girls' performance was particularly weak in each subject. Overtime pupils' achievement has been significantly below average in Key Stage 2.
- Too often teaching requires improvement and there has not been enough consistently good teaching to drive learning forward and raise achievement with the urgency required.
- There is no consistency in the quality of marking and feedback that pupils receive. Much is celebratory but lacks the detail pupils need to show them how to move on in their learning. It is particularly weak in French.
- Middle leaders have only recently been given the opportunity to play a key role in making improvements in English and mathematics. They have lacked the time to influence the quality of teaching in both key stages.
- Governors lack the detailed knowledge of the school's performance to challenge the leadership about the decline in standards in English and mathematics since the previous inspection. While they commit time to visiting the school, they do not have the range of skills needed to review the actions being taken and judge whether these are proving to be effective in improving teaching and raising standards.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders are getting to grips with the decline in standards in English and mathematics, particularly at Key Stage 3, and there is evidence that positive change is now happening in Key Stage 2, mostly in writing.
- Pupils are keen to learn and show very positive attitudes to their studies. It is to their credit that they persevere even when tasks lack enough challenge or fail to engage their interest.
- The behaviour of pupils around the school is consistently good.
- The pupils are very well cared for and feel safe.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching in 10 lessons, two of which were joint observations with the headteacher. The inspector also heard pupils read in Year 5.
- The inspector looked at work in pupils' books to assess achievement currently and over time and to check the quality of teachers' marking.
- The inspector spoke to groups of pupils to get their views on the quality of teaching, what they enjoy doing in school and what they feel about safety and behaviour. The inspector took account of 33 responses from parents to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View).
- The inspector observed the school at work and looked at a range of documentation, including internal and external information relating to pupils' progress, school improvement planning and the school's procedures for gaining an accurate view of its own performance. He also considered reports written by the local authority, minutes of governing body meetings, records of accidents and bullying incidents and safeguarding and child protection documents.
- Meetings were held with a group of parents of pupils at the school, members of the governing body, school leaders and a representative of the local authority.

Inspection team

Mark Evans, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Seahouses Middle School (deemed secondary) is a much smaller than average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of girls on roll is lower than the national average.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium, which is additional funding provided by the government for looked after children, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children of service families, is lower than average.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is below average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The headteacher teaches at Seahouses Middle School for the equivalent of two days a week. She is also headteacher of a neighbouring First school which has its own governing body. This First school is six miles away.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- In order to raise standards and accelerate pupils' progress, particularly in reading and mathematics in Key Stage 2, improve the quality of teaching by:
 - checking that the work given to the most able pupils is sufficiently challenging so that more of them reach the very highest standards
 - providing pupils with more opportunities for mathematical investigations and problem solving
 - making sure that all staff adhere to the leadership's expectations in providing clear and consistent feedback to pupils so that they know how to improve their work
 - ensuring that teachers check that pupils have responded to their marking and that errors have been corrected.
- Ensure good leadership, management and governance by:
 - regularly monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and by making sure that all staff receive the training they need to improve their classroom practice
 - rigorously tracking the progress made by pupils so that any underachievement can be identified and support provided.
 - ensuring that leaders in both English and mathematics are given much greater responsibility for driving improvements in both key stages by coaching and mentoring staff so that all teaching becomes good as quickly as possible
 - ensuring that governors develop the skills required so that they can systematically and rigorously check on how well actions are making improvements to teaching, curriculum and pupils' achievement
 - undertaking an external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the school's use of the pupil premium, in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- The large majority of pupils join the school in Year 5 with skills and knowledge which are broadly typical for their age.
- The achievement of pupils requires improvement because during the last two years the most able pupils and girls have not done as well as they should in Years 5 and 6, especially in mathematics and reading. Progress is more assured in Years 7 and 8 with more pupils making expected gains and reaching standards in line with their capabilities.
- In 2013, boys reached higher overall standards than girls, particularly in reading and mathematics.
- The most able pupils do not consistently achieve as highly as they should in English or mathematics at either key stage because expectations of their competences are not high enough and the work provided does not consistently stretch or challenge them.
- The action taken by the school's leadership is leading to better progress at Key Stage 3 in both mathematics and English. However, inspection evidence confirms that over time at Key Stage 2, learning in mathematics is largely restricted to number work and algebra with not enough evidence of work in other areas of the subject.
- Standards in reading are improving due to more prompt and careful support to help pupils who are struggling with aspects of reading and by the higher profile reading now has in the school. Pupils report that they enjoy reading and are given opportunities to read more widely.
- At the end of Year 6 in 2013, the attainment of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals was approximately two terms behind that of other Year 6 pupils in mathematics. However, current school data show that in other year groups and particularly at Key Stage 3, the gap between eligible pupils and their peers is consistently closing.
- Pupils with special educational needs are well supported with targeted help proving to be mostly effective by offering the level of challenge and range of work which these pupils need. This is helping them to make steady progress. Year 7 catch-up funds have been spent wisely on, for example, a targeted mathematics programme to support pupils' numeracy skills.
- Although the school's systems for checking on pupils' progress and providing feedback are developing, pupils still misspell common words and they do not routinely correct their work.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because standards in Key Stage 2 have been below average in reading and mathematics and too often pupils have underachieved. This is particularly evident for the most able pupils because work does not challenge them enough.
- Expectations of pupils have not been high enough, mostly at Key Stage 2, but there is growing evidence that in English and mathematics at Key Stage 3 standards are rising because teachers expect more of pupils and teaching here is stronger. Pupils in Key Stage 3 are responding well to the way teachers are using their strong specialist skills and purposeful questioning to push learning forward more quickly than in the past. There is, however, limited evidence of teachers giving pupils the opportunity to develop their writing skills in other subjects such as history and this is hindering their progress.
- Teachers' marking is inconsistent. Pupils' work in French, for example, is rarely marked, so pupils are confused about how well they have done and what they need to do next. In English, while there is more detail, too much of the marking is celebratory and lacks clear guidance about what pupils should do next. In mathematics, work is regularly marked but teachers' comments do not always show pupils how to move their learning on. It is evident in pupils' workbooks that they are not being given sufficient opportunities to correct mistakes so these are often repeated in

subsequent pieces of work.

- The presentation of work in books and folders is poor for too many pupils because teachers are not making clear the standards they expect. There is no evidence in pupils' books that the school has a consistent approach to handwriting.
- Teaching in music is particularly effective. All pupils make good progress and feel a real sense of achievement. This success in the classroom is underpinning the high proportion of pupils learning a wide range of musical instruments. There is a notably high take up of music tuition among those pupils in receipt of free school meals and those who are looked after.
- While teaching assistants are deployed to work directly with children in lessons, they are not sufficiently involved in lesson planning so they are not able to influence the work provided for those pupils they routinely support. This is a missed opportunity. However, there is good evidence that the leader of mathematics is effectively sharing her knowledge and skills with teaching assistants to help improve their role in supporting pupils' mathematical development.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils show a real delight in learning and enjoy coming to school. When asked why they liked school, one pupil replied, 'I love learning things.' They move around the school with care and consideration for others. They are polite, courteous and extremely well mannered.
- Behaviour in lessons is good. The inspector saw no examples of poor behaviour or of low-level disruption. Even when the pace of progress in some lessons flagged and tasks were repetitive, pupils were seen to be patient and well behaved.
- Pupils are keen to take on responsibilities. For example, the school has used part of its primary sports funding to develop its sports leader programme. Pupils report that they are enthusiastic about this and enjoy the opportunities to take on lead roles.
- In lessons, pupils work well on their own and when in groups. In a geography lesson, for example, pupils were practising their use of four and six figure grid references in competing teams. There were high levels of collaboration with pupils helping each other with real care and enthusiasm. This is characteristic of their commitment generally.
- In an assembly, pupils entered and left quietly without having to be reminded and they contributed fully to the activity within the assembly, volunteering readily.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils feel very safe. They talk knowledgeably about how to avoid danger and take care when using computers. The school regularly checks on the safe use of computers and this is a major aspect of the information and communication technology curriculum.
- Pupils are very well aware of the various forms that bullying can take and report that bullying is a very rare occurrence. Pupils know what to do if bullying takes place and are very confident it will be dealt with promptly and effectively by adults at the school.
- When asked to describe the attitude of the school community, one pupil replied, 'Nobody who came here would ever feel alone or left out.'
- In the on-line questionnaire (Parent View), the vast majority of parents agree that the school takes good care of their children and keeps them safe. A group of parents, in discussion, described the school as very caring for the pupils. They fully endorsed the strong communication between the school and home as being a very strong feature of the school's work. The headteacher's role in this respect was singled out for particular praise.
- Pupils' attendance has been slightly below average since the last inspection. The school, working with its partner First schools, has only recently introduced a more rigorous approach to refusing parents' requests for holidays during term time. There have been no exclusions.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because actions to tackle the decline in pupils' achievement in Key Stage 2 since the last inspection are only recently underway. The headteacher has ensured that at Key Stage 3 improvement is more secure in English and mathematics because the work of middle leaders in these key subjects is clearly having a positive effect.
- Middle leaders are aware of what needs to be done and are playing a fuller part in driving up standards at the school. To date, opportunities for them to do so have been limited. For example, while the leader for English is well aware of the need to establish a school-wide literacy policy in both key stages, and has well developed plans to do so, not enough time has been made available for this to be seen through.
- Where middle leaders have been afforded the opportunities to develop the work done to help those pupils who are struggling to improve their basic skills, there is clear evidence of success. The school is identifying these pupils more quickly and acting more promptly by ensuring that support is effective and well targeted.
- The school's improvement plans lack the detail needed to provide a focus to drive improvement across all identified areas and there is too much reliance on the headteacher to lead on initiatives. Governors are not engaged enough in monitoring the work of the school and the information they receive to hold the school to account is limited.
- Links between professional development and the management of staff performance are increasingly effective and arrangements for pay and promotion of staff are now linked directly to staff performance and pupils' progress.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is a priority at the school and it is promoted well. The school's curriculum offers opportunities for reflection and for pupils to work together; there are extensive opportunities both in and outside the taught curriculum to take part in musical and sports activities.
- The headteacher's role as the head of one of the partner First schools has helped to forge links with this school and this is greatly benefitting transition between Years 4 and 5. Initiatives to foster better curriculum continuity and data sharing with the other First schools are more recently in place but are benefitting from the work being done by the leaders for English and mathematics.
- The local authority has not provided effective support and challenge to help the school to improve. Changes in local authority personnel have resulted in a lack of continuity of support and, more recently, an inflated view of how well the school is doing. This has not helped the school to address issues robustly enough.
- Safeguarding procedures are effective.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are committed and loyal but they do not hold the school to account as well as they should or would like. They do not always ask sufficiently challenging questions and rely too often on the headteacher for information about the school's work. While they are a regular presence in the school, the focus of their visits is not securely focused on checking whether initiatives to raise standards are proving to be effective. Although governors attend the training offered by the local authority, the governing body has not received the targeted training required to equip them with the skills they need to carry out their work as effectively as they would want. A review of governance and carefully planned training are both urgently required. Their knowledge about how well pupil premium funding is used is limited.

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	122315
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	440869

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	98
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Margaret Brookes
Headteacher	Julie Harris
Date of previous school inspection	30 March 2011
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