

Park Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124428
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	314928
Inspection dates	27–28 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Michael Smith HMI

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	404
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sharon Bowers
Headteacher	Gordon Hart
Date of previous school inspection	6 December 2004
School address	Park Lane Knypersley Stoke-on-Trent ST8 7AT
Telephone number	01782 297912
Fax number	01782 297914

Age group	9-13
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Park is an average-sized middle school which serves the local area of Biddulph. The vast majority of pupils are from a White British background. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The school has an extended provision before and after normal hours. The school holds the Active Mark Award and the Schools Achievement Award.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Park Middle is a satisfactory school which has made very good progress in improving the attitudes and behaviour of pupils so that there is now an atmosphere of calm and purpose. The leadership of the school has concentrated on ensuring there is a solid platform for pupils to learn and raising the standing of the school within the local community. This makes a significant contribution to pupils' good personal development and well-being. The school has good community links and has worked well to ensure pupils understand their role and take pride in the local area. The school has exciting plans to enhance the satisfactory curriculum with a local heritage site, including gardening as part of science and geography.

Standards are broadly average in English and science, with science being better than English, but standards in mathematics are well below average. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall, again being better in science and English than in mathematics. Mathematics has been a concern for the school and it has recently worked with the local authority (LA) and used guidance in the National Strategies to identify areas for development. Lessons observed show that some of these recommendations are already in place and the progress of pupils has started to increase.

Pupils enjoy school and many say they particularly like the variety of clubs and activities in which many participate. One parent said her daughter 'always wanted to stay another five minutes when it was time for home'. Pupils are aware of how to keep healthy and increased physical education provision has helped them towards this goal as well as supporting the school's efforts to attain the Healthy Schools Award. Park Middle School works closely with local sporting clubs and effective events are used to enhance the options for pupils both within and beyond school. The strong pastoral support and guidance have ensured pupils' improved attendance.

There are many good aspects of teaching and learning, but inconsistencies in the quality of lessons, particularly with the use of assessments and the engagement of pupils, mean it is satisfactory overall. Good relationships exist between staff and pupils, and between pupils, and these are a result of improved behaviour. Some staff make good use of electronic whiteboards to enhance lessons but rooms often lack additional ways of recording pupils' answers or responses, which cannot then be used for further teaching points. The monitoring of the quality of provision is weak. The school is in the early days of realigning roles and responsibilities at all levels, which means that it does not have systems to consistently monitor the work within subjects. The school is aware of its main strengths and weaknesses and has used the LA well to support this. The school has made very good progress since the previous inspection in improving the standards of behaviour, the standing of the school within the local community and reducing exclusions but its capacity to improve is only satisfactory because of limited success in improving standards of mathematics. Governors are very supportive and spend a lot of time in school helping; for example acting as examination invigilators and scribes, but they have not developed the capacity to adequately challenge the school or hold it to account for its actions.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement in mathematics by building upon the support and advice from the local authority.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring lessons focus on the learning of pupils and by consistently using assessment information effectively.

- Ensure leadership and management, at all levels, effectively and systematically monitor the quality of provision to identify weaknesses and bring about improvements.
- Ensure that the school is effectively held to account by strengthening the challenge from the governing body.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils start school with standards below average for their age. They achieve standards below average in the tests at the end of Year 6. Standards in science are broadly average and English is below average. Boys achieve higher than girls in all three subjects and their results are better than the national average in science. Results in mathematics show that standards have remained low for the last five years, with pupils making poor progress. Improved behaviour has been instrumental in ensuring pupils can achieve better as they have opportunities to make progress in lessons without interruption from their peers.

In Years 7 and 8, pupils make better progress than in Key Stage 2 for mathematics and continue making sound progress in both science and English. The school assesses pupils prior to their transfer to the high school. Their records show standards are above those expected from pupils at the end of Year 8 in science, broadly in line in English and below in mathematics. The school analyses results to identify areas for development and this is starting to impact upon pupils' achievement. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those in the care of the local authority respond well to extra support and make progress at a similar rate to their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school and attendance is good. They respond very well to the many rewards which are used effectively. Behaviour has improved and pupils act sensibly around the school and have positive relationships with each other. However, behaviour is satisfactory because in lessons when pupils are not fully engaged they can be distracted and off task. Pupils say any bullying is quickly dealt with and peer mediators are effective in overcoming problems. Racist incidents are infrequent and dealt with seriously by the school.

Pupils appreciate the responsibilities they are given as house captains, school councillors, prefects and 'buddies'. This, along with work in personal, social and health education (PSHE), where pupils were observed constructing curriculum vitae, helps prepare them for the next stage of their education. However, some pupils' weaker basic skills are a barrier. Pupils make a good contribution to their local community; for example they serve a three-course lunch to a group of old people once a term, but they do not have enough opportunities to develop their understanding of a wider range of cultures and communities. Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory overall.

Pupils know how to stay healthy and safe. They understand the dangers of smoking, alcohol and substance abuse and they know about healthy diets. Work in subjects such as science reinforces their understanding and pupils generally make well informed choices at lunchtimes. The school has worked well with parents by running a 'cooking on a budget' course and by

giving very good advice on how to support their children's safety when using the internet at home and reduce opportunities for 'cyber bullying'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

There are many good lessons within the school where pupils are engaged, enjoy their work and make good progress. However, this is not consistent and in other lessons pupils do not make as much progress because they are not motivated to learn.

Relationships are good in classrooms and pupils behave well. They pay attention most of the time, except when too much explanation delays when they start work, and they become restless. These lessons often lack pace and challenge. Assessments are used well in some classes, with pupils being taught how to critically assess their peers' and their own work. However, in other lessons work is not well matched to pupils' different abilities and they all attempt to complete the same work.

The school is focusing on improving pupils' literacy skills and there is a good emphasis on the use of correct vocabulary and spelling, often supported by key words as part of some very good displays. Role-play is used well in some lessons to engage pupils and help them to see others' points of view. However, in other lessons there is not enough creativity in planning to allow for a variety of different activities to better motivate and enthuse pupils. Teaching assistants are used well in some lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school delivers the curriculum with Year 5 classes having the majority of their lessons with the same teacher and then making greater use of subject specialists as pupils move through the school. Increased time has been set aside for mathematics this year in response to poor results in previous years but the changes were not discussed with subject leaders prior to implementation. The school recognises that it needs to develop a clear curriculum model linked to the evaluated needs and aspirations of pupils.

When the curriculum has been reviewed, changes have been made to allow greater time for religious education and to incorporate social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) into PSHE, whilst still ensuring the school delivers the citizenship work. This also incorporates key elements on how pupils can keep safe.

The curriculum supports pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities well. They access the mainstream curriculum and occasionally have activities especially organised to help their learning, for example the circus skills workshops to help handwriting by improving coordination.

Pupils are very well supported to keep healthy. A good range of sports and exercise, through junior sports leaders, competitive sports, break-dancing, cheerleading and gym clubs, are offered by the school and supported by a highly effective school sports coordinator. A range of other non-sporting clubs, including cross-stitch, typing and languages, complements these. Residential trips and day outings help to bring the curriculum alive and pupils have these opportunities each year. Pupils say they really value the added opportunity to learn a musical instrument

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral care and support are good because heads of year and tutors know their pupils well and are very effective in supporting and guiding pupils' personal development and ensuring they grow in confidence. The school works well with partner first schools to ensure an effective transfer of pupils into the school, including close collaboration to support pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Similar close cooperation ensures a smooth transfer of pupils to the high school at the end of Year 8. The school welcomes parental involvement in its work.

Appropriate health and safety checks are in place and safeguarding procedures comply with present expected standards with all staff trained in child protection. Good links with a range of outside agencies, such as the school nurse and education welfare service, contribute well to the support of pupils. The provision of before and after school facilities is particularly well received by pupils and parents.

Pupils are aware of the levels at which they are working and their targets for all subjects; tutors share these with pupils and parents on target days and pupils record them in their planners. Most subject teachers help pupils to understand what they need to do improve and reach targets through marking and discussion in lessons. There are good arrangements to identify and support vulnerable pupils, such as those in the care of the local authority, so that they make similar progress to their peers. Teaching assistants have a positive impact on provision for pupils with learning or behavioural difficulties.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Staff roles and responsibilities have recently been reassigned during a restructuring and this has meant that many developments are in the early stages of implementation and have not become embedded consistently. The headteacher satisfactorily sets the direction for the school to develop. Improvements to the pupils' personal development and well-being and, in particular, to the standard of behaviour, give the school a sound foundation for further improvement. Subject leadership has been successful in some areas to bring about improvement but practice is inconsistent and not all leaders systematically monitor the work of the school to ensure they have a good overview of strengths and weaknesses to help drive improvement.

The senior leadership team work closely together and have an overview of what they need to do to improve the quality of provision and standards. Appropriate areas for development have been identified and used to formulate an improvement plan but some success criteria are too vague and do not link improvements to quantifiable outcomes. Governors have ensured that appropriate policies are in place but they do not always rigorously challenge the school and hold it to account. Parents are asked about their views and most are very supportive of the school.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

28 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Park Middle School, Stoke-on-Trent ST8 7AT

We visited your school recently and met with some of you at lunchtime and talked to others during lessons and at break. We were very pleased with the friendliness you showed us and how helpful you were. Your school seems a happy place to be and many of you told us how much you enjoyed school. We thought that your school has improved and that it is satisfactory overall.

Staff support and guide you well, which helps you to improve your work and ensures you know how to stay healthy and safe. Standards are broadly average but you are not doing well enough in mathematics so we have asked your school to improve this. Many of you told us how much you enjoy taking part in sports. We were impressed with how many of you take responsibility within the school and how important older pupils feel the role of mediator is.

Teaching is generally satisfactory and you enjoy many good lessons but in some lessons the work is not always matched to your abilities and teachers do not use assessments well enough to help you learn. This is another area that needs improving. Behaviour has improved a lot. It is satisfactory rather than good because some of you do not concentrate in class and let yourselves get easily distracted. You told us that any bullying was dealt with quickly and well in the school. The curriculum meets your needs satisfactorily and you enjoy a wide variety of clubs. We were very impressed with the contribution you make to the local community.

Your headteacher and staff have been very successful in improving the behaviour and atmosphere within the school and also the way in which your school is seen by the local community. We saw how supportive your governors were when they came into school, including helping you in your exams and supporting some of you. However, we feel they need to challenge the school more so they can make sure things get better. We have also asked the school to make sure it has a better understanding of what is going on in lessons by looking very carefully at what is happening.

We wish you well in this improving and supportive school and thank you again for your cooperation.

Michael Smith HMI Lead inspector

28 November 2007



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