

Robert Bruce Middle School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 109660 |
| Local Authority | Bedfordshire |
| Inspection number | 310056 |
| Inspection dates | 26–27 February 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | John Williams HMI |

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

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| Type of school | Middle deemed secondary |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 9–13 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 622 |

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| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr J Roberts |
| Headteacher | Mr M Short |
| Date of previous school inspection | 9 February 2004 |

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| School address | Bedford Road Kempston MK42 8PU |
| Telephone number | 01234 301222 |
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Robert Bruce Middle School is a larger than average middle school serving the local community. It has achieved a number of awards including Investors in People, Healthy School, Sportsmark and Artsmark. Pupils begin school with standards that are below national average. A higher than average number of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, mostly Asian, and a significant number have English as an additional language. This proportion has increased year on year. Above average numbers of pupils are eligible for free school meals. There is a local authority special support centre attached to the school for up to 16 pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. These pupils are integrated into the school's activities for at least some of the time. The buildings, whilst kept clean and made as attractive as possible by the staff, are poorly designed and dated and are not able to provide a good environment for learning. Consequently, the school has submitted a redevelopment bid in the 'building schools for the future' national programme.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Robert Bruce Middle School now provides sound value for money after struggling in recent years with low standards and underachievement. Its effectiveness is satisfactory because standards, achievement, teaching and learning have improved to a satisfactory level. Currently, leadership and management are also satisfactory because leaders have begun to sort out underperformance. This is against a backdrop of a poor school building and a deficit budget. The headteacher and senior leadership team are supported well by the governors and heads of subjects. Self-evaluation is satisfactory; it has accurately identified the key issues for improvement and sound progress on a number of issues has been made, though there remain some key ones to deal with such as the quality of teaching in mathematics. The school can demonstrate sound capacity to improve further.

Standards over three years have crept up from a low point. A range of evidence demonstrates that the current Year 6 pupils are, in general, on track to achieve their targets, though these targets are set at below national expectations. Many Year 8 pupils are also set to achieve their targets. In both cases, there is some underachievement for those who should be gaining the higher levels. In the past, pupils' progress in their first two years at the school has been unsatisfactory. It is now much better, especially in reading where it is good. Pupils make better overall progress in Years 7 and 8, especially in mathematics. The overall effect of this is that by the time they leave school, their standards range from broadly average to below average and progress is satisfactory. Progress would be better if there was more consistently good teaching.

Therein lies the main reason that achievement is not good. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. However, it is very variable across the school and within each subject. For example, whilst it is sometimes outstanding in mathematics, it is also at times inadequate. So the impact of teaching overall is only satisfactory, though the impact of good teaching on individual pupils is clear to see in the progress they make. Pupils respond well to lessons that engage them in practical tasks and in these lessons their behaviour is good. In a small number of lessons pupils are passive learners and they sometimes switch off and become disengaged from learning. Parents rightly have a number of concerns about the inconsistent way some teachers manage pupils' behaviour and the number of exclusions is too high. However, inspectors found that behaviour around the school when pupils are being supervised is mostly good. At times when they are unsupervised by an adult, behaviour can become boisterous and this can faze and upset some pupils and provide opportunities for bullying.

The curriculum is satisfactory, providing pupils with a sound experience though those pupils with particular gifts and talents and the more able are not well enough provided for with activities designed to challenge them. Information and communication technology (ICT) is also not used enough and this adversely affects pupils' preparation for their future economic well-being. Pupils' care, guidance and support and personal development are satisfactory and there has been much improvement in their academic guidance. Attendance is good and many pupils clearly

enjoy coming to school and their lessons. All pupils are clear about what they need to do to improve their work. They also know how to keep themselves safe and how to stay healthy.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and progress in order to achieve the higher levels, especially in mathematics, through improved quality of teaching.
- Become a more inclusive school by engaging all learners, removing low-level misbehaviour, and reducing the incidence of both bullying and exclusions.
- Prepare pupils better for their future economic well-being.

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 begin school with standards that are below national averages. The proportion of pupils on target to achieve the expected levels by the end of Year 6 is now just below average; in the past it has been well below average. The school has been successful in boosting the number of pupils achieving the expected levels in the current Year 6 classes. It acknowledges there is scope for further improvement in mathematics and for all pupils at the higher levels. By the end of Year 8, many pupils are reaching their targets and standards are at or below average. Achievement from the time pupils enter the school to when they leave is satisfactory. There is considerable scope for improvement on these figures in terms of the more able pupils, in mathematics in Key Stage 2 and writing in Key Stage 3.

Pupils can be enthusiastic learners when the teaching is good. They are confident speakers, though their listening skills are much weaker which slows down progress in lessons because instructions have to be repeated. They work well in pairs or groups when allowed to do so and progress here is good.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Despite pupils attending from a variety of differing cultural and social backgrounds, they integrate and achieve a whole school sense and identity. They develop good understanding of spiritual, social and moral issues. However, the school's race equality policy is now out of date and the racist incident book is not always completed correctly.

When under the supervision of the school, pupils adopt healthy lifestyles. They conduct themselves in a safe manner and are aware of hazards in practical lessons. Almost all of the pupils remain on the school site during the lunchtime and they eat and drink sensibly. The student council is active in helping shape school policy. Recently, it has assisted in the construction of an anti-bullying policy and this became the topic of some focus. However, pupils and parents have expressed

concern with regard to bullying. Pupils feel less secure during unstructured times of the school day and when they are not supervised.

Progress in literacy is satisfactory overall but would be better if a small number of disaffected boys were more engaged. Further development in numeracy through better teaching is required and the provision for ICT as an aid to learning is underdeveloped. Consequently, pupils' development for future economic well-being is unsatisfactory. Where teaching is stimulating, engaging and delivered with pace, pupils' attitudes to learning and behaviour are good. This is not the case when teaching is less effective whereby low-level disruptive behaviour interrupts learning. Despite efforts to be inclusive, exclusion rates are too high. However, attendance is good and above the national average; many pupils clearly enjoy coming to school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are variable but overall satisfactory. Good teachers manage behaviour well but across the school behaviour management policies are not applied consistently. Resources are mostly good and used well, though many lessons would benefit from the use of ICT. Unfortunately it is not always available. Teachers consistently make clear the expectations of lessons but the learning outcomes are not always couched in 'pupil friendly speak' so that time has to be spent making sure pupils understand them. Pupils enjoy lessons and make good progress where they have the opportunity to work practically and with their peers in pairs or small groups. In these lessons, effective classroom management creates positive relationships and pupils respond well to their tasks. Here, pace is good and the starter activities are particularly effective in setting the tone for the rest of the lesson and what it is the teacher is expecting of the pupils. Where lessons are less good, the style of learning results in passive pupils who on occasions disengage from learning or, at worst, become disruptive.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school meets the statutory requirements for the curriculum and makes effective use of its subject specialists. Subject leaders are making significant contributions to developing the curriculum, particularly in mathematics and science. The learning that takes place in lessons is extended well through extra-curricular sports activities. The curriculum also supports pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities but the school recognises that it has yet to develop a fully personalised curriculum for all. For example, more able pupils are given some opportunities to extend their learning in the classroom but this has not impacted yet on standards. Planning for the gifted and talented is beginning to develop and pupils in Year 8 are usefully given the opportunity to learn German in a project that provides an effective transition into upper school. The school has recently achieved Artsmark status and music is represented admirably in the creative and artistic curriculum, though other elements such as drama and dance are not represented as well as this.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school's provision for pupils' care, guidance and support is satisfactory. Pupils are safeguarded through strong protection systems that fully meet current requirements. A sound personal and social curriculum is supported well by tutorial periods and reflective assemblies. Pupils receive appropriate careers advice, although the links with the upper schools to aid transition remain patchy.

Academic assessment has been recently developed from a low starting point and pupils now have an informed view about the progress they are making and what they need to do in order to improve. A significant number of pupils do not have English as a first language. Where support is provided, it is used effectively so pupils make sound progress. Pupils have adults in school who they feel they can talk to and get advice from and members of the support staff ably lead pastoral work. The school also makes good use of the support provided by a range of external advisors including police liaison and specialist counsellors.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory because their impact on achievement is satisfactory. Governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses and are supportive of the changes being made in order to improve achievement. The headteacher took over a school with falling standards, poor buildings and a large budget deficit. These issues are being addressed and progress is being made, though this is not communicated well to parents and some staff. A significant number of parents do not feel that they are kept well informed about both the schools' progress and specific issues that are being dealt with relating to their children. This is a pity as there is a clear vision, strategy and plan for the future linked to reducing the budget deficit.

The evaluation of teaching and learning has been effective at identifying weakness and putting in a support programme to attempt to improve it, though urgent action needs to be taken to address weaknesses that remain. The analysis of pupils' performance data is now comprehensive, detailed and effective and the impact of the school's self-evaluation is sound; it has led to accurate targets for the coming year. Given the progress to date and the systems in place, the school demonstrates satisfactory capacity to improve further.

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

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

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| 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? | 3 |
| The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage | |
| The effectiveness of boarding provision | |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 3 |

Achievement and standards

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| 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

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|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 3 |
| 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 | 3 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 3 |
| The attendance of learners | 2 |
| The behaviour of learners | 3 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 3 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 4 |

The quality of provision

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|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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? | 3 |

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.

Leadership and management

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| 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 | 3 |
| 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 | 3 |
| 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 |

Annex B



28 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Robert Bruce Middle School, Bedford, MK42 8PU

Thank you for making Mrs Lane, Mr McDonough, Mr Boswell and I so welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting and talking with you. Many of you behave well in lessons when you are interested in what you are doing and the teaching is good. Your attendance is good and you clearly enjoy coming to school, though a number of your parents are worried about some of your behaviour and bullying. We have asked the school to improve this so that you feel happier in all lessons, in the playground and in corridors.

Robert Bruce Middle school is a satisfactory school. Although the building is looking its age, you all help keep it nice and clean and as attractive as possible with displays of your work. The teachers, Mr Short and the governors are trying to make your school a good school and they all take satisfactory care of you. You know really well how to look after yourselves, how to stay safe and how to be healthy.

We like the way you speak but you need to listen more to what you are being asked to do. Many of you work hard. The school is aware that it could help those of you to do better who are able to achieve the higher grades by the time you leave school. We have asked the school to improve teaching, particularly of mathematics, to help you do this. More Year 6's seem to be on track to achieve their level 4's this year so I wish you well and hope you do get the grades!

My very best wishes go to all of you for your future success at Robert Bruce Middle school.

Yours faithfully
John Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector