

Thomas Middlecott Academy

Edinburgh Drive, Kirton, Boston, Lincolnshire PE20 1JS

Inspection dates

26–27 September 2017

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Pupils underachieve in a range of subjects at this school. The standards they reach and the progress they have made by the time they leave Year 11 are well below national averages.
- Considerable instability in senior leadership has meant that work to drive improvement has lacked direction and been too slow in the past.
- Leaders do not evaluate the impact of aspects of the school's work closely enough. This means they are unable to amend some strategies and plans accordingly. Additional funding has not been used to improve outcomes for pupils.
- The trust has been too slow to take action to support school leaders in the past. Support has not been focused and has lacked cohesion.
- Poor teaching over time has led to pupils' inadequate outcomes. Teachers do not plan to meet the needs of pupils of different abilities. The most able pupils are not sufficiently challenged and the least able are not effectively supported to make progress.
- Teachers do not routinely plan activities which interest or motivate pupils. They are not supported to develop as effective learners.
- Teachers do not have consistently high expectations of what pupils are able to achieve. This limits pupils' progress.
- There is a lack of clarity in roles of governance and school support from the trust. Leaders are not held to account closely.

The school has the following strengths

- Following his appointment in October 2016, the principal has brought much-needed stability to the school. He is passionate about pupils' potential and determined to bring about the necessary improvements.
- Most pupils' behaviour has improved considerably. Pupils are polite and conduct themselves well.
- Pastoral leadership is effective. Leaders and staff ensure that pupils are well supported. Pupils are safe and happy. Attendance has improved.
- The principal has created a clear vision and ethos for the school. Staff and pupils are fully supportive in realising his aims. The school is harmonious and inclusive.
- Leaders are taking effective action to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- There are pockets of stronger teaching practice across the school, where teachers plan effectively to meet the needs of pupils, who make good progress as a result.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - evaluating the impact of the school's work more sharply, and amending plans and strategies accordingly
 - accounting carefully for the allocation of additional funding and evaluating its impact on pupils' progress, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - further empowering middle leaders to take greater responsibility for the quality of provision in their areas and ensuring that staff have the knowledge and skills to do this
 - clarifying the distinction between governance and trust support to ensure that leaders are fully held to account
 - ensuring that the academy trust is more effective in supporting leaders and responding to identified needs, particularly in regard to appointing permanent, high-calibre staff.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that all teachers:
 - use assessment information to plan activities which meet the different needs of pupils
 - have high expectations of what pupils are able to achieve
 - set appropriately challenging targets, including for those pupils who are new to the school
 - plan activities which challenge all pupils
 - plan activities which inspire, interest and enthuse pupils so that they are supported to become more effective learners.
- Further improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - sustaining improvements in pupils' attendance
 - developing strategies to encourage pupils to make a stronger contribution to their own learning
 - maintaining the improvements in behaviour throughout the school.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's weaknesses and are taking effective action to bring about the necessary improvements. Since his appointment in October 2016, the principal has brought much-needed stability and strong leadership. He has high aspirations for pupils' success. From a considerably low starting point, leaders have ensured that pupils' behaviour has improved. Leaders have also driven improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. However, the extent to which improvements have been necessary has meant that there is not yet a significant impact on pupils' outcomes.
- There has been considerable instability in staffing. Currently, too few staff are specialists in their subject area. As a result, teaching has been weak. The trust has not been effective in supporting leaders to recruit high-quality permanent staff.
- Leaders have not developed a strategic approach to improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. They have used the pupil premium funding for a range of support and interventions, but the impact of these is not measured precisely across the school.
- Leaders have ensured that plans are in place to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders track these pupils' progress, but there is a lack of strategic oversight of provision across the school. Leaders do not evaluate the impact of additional funding on pupils' outcomes.
- Pupils and staff are confident in the principal's abilities to lead the school and are supportive of his aims and vision.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their understanding of fundamental British values are promoted through the curriculum and ethos of the school. The religious education curriculum, followed by all pupils, is particularly beneficial to pupils' understanding. Further provision, such as assemblies, contributes to this aspect of the school's work. Leaders recognise the need for a more systematic approach to enable further improvement.
- The leadership of teaching, learning and assessment has been strengthened since the arrival of the new headteacher. Leaders have a detailed and accurate understanding of practice throughout the school and are taking effective action to support and challenge staff to improve. However, the improvements in teaching are not yet consistent across the school and much teaching remains poor.
- Leaders have worked with other schools within the trust to improve the accuracy of assessment. For example, leaders of English and mathematics have undertaken moderation with other schools. As a result, the accuracy of teachers' predictions has improved considerably. Leaders are beginning to use this information to intervene where necessary. Leaders are aware of the urgent need to improve this aspect of the school's work in science, where practice remains very weak.
- Many middle leaders are knowledgeable and are now beginning to take greater responsibility for the quality of provision in their subject areas. They are well supported by senior leaders to do so. A number of vacancies in key middle-leadership posts

remain. Leaders are rightly keen to recruit staff to these vital roles.

- Pastoral leadership is effective. Leaders have created a team of teaching and non-teaching staff, who ensure that pupils are well supported in all aspects of school life. Leaders are knowledgeable about pupils' needs and are, therefore, able to intervene effectively.
- Leaders have amended the curriculum to ensure it is broad and balanced across all key stages. Leaders are creative in ensuring that it meets pupils' needs.
- There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils benefit from a variety of enrichment activities, facilitated by the trust. For example, they participate in music competitions and sports fixtures. Leaders have also ensured that pupils enjoy a range of experiences within the school, such as participation in the samba band.
- Leaders have ensured that the Year 7 catch-up funding is used effectively. Clear strategies are in place, leading to pupils making good progress to catch up with their peers.
- The trust has not provided effective support for the school. While representatives of the trust have undertaken individual pieces of work with staff at the school, there has not been a cohesive, strategic approach. As leaders acknowledge, support has been too slow and lacked focus. Since September 2017, there have been some improvements, but these have not yet had time to impact on the two key priorities of recruiting permanent, high-quality staff and to improving teaching in order to raise standards. It is vital that all teaching posts are quickly and appropriately staffed in order to improve the quality of education in the school.

Governance of the school

- Governance is provided by the trust and an academy improvement board. The chair of the academy improvement board is also the school's improvement lead. This has led to a lack of clarity between the roles of challenge and support.
- The chair of the academy improvement board has a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, but his dual role restricts the effectiveness with which he is able to hold leaders to account.
- The chair of the academy improvement board maintains a high presence in the school. He visits regularly and closely monitors the school's work. In his role as academy improvement lead, he provides regular and frequent support to leaders.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The designated safeguarding lead is well supported by a team of knowledgeable and trained staff.
- The designated safeguarding lead took up post in September 2017. She quickly identified the need to rectify ineffective record-keeping and to clarify lines of accountability. She has worked effectively with the principal to bring about the necessary improvements.
- The trust conducted a safeguarding audit in the summer term of 2017. Errors in the single central record were not identified. These were corrected during the course of the

inspection and this record is now fit for purpose.

- Leaders ensure that appropriate action is taken when concerns arise. They involve external agencies as appropriate and are tenacious in following up concerns.
- Staff are well trained and understand their roles and responsibilities in ensuring the safety of all pupils in the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- There are significant variations in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment throughout the school. Teaching has not enabled pupils to make adequate progress by the time they leave Year 11.
- Teachers do not routinely plan activities which excite or inspire pupils. This sometimes leads to off-task behaviour and low-level disruption, particularly for the least able pupils, because they are not motivated to focus on their work.
- Teachers do not move pupils on to the next stages of their learning quickly enough. Tasks are completed without stretching or challenging pupils. Too often, pupils are expected to wait for others before progressing to more challenging work. This wastes learning time and limits pupils' progress, particularly that of the most able pupils.
- Teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils are able to achieve. The use of target-setting is inconsistent and pupils are not clear about their goals in all subjects. Some pupils do not have high enough aspirations as a result.
- Teachers do not use information about what pupils are able to achieve to plan activities which meet their needs. Too often, all pupils work on the same tasks, regardless of their abilities. This means that the most able pupils are not effectively challenged and the least able are not sufficiently supported to make good progress.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in science is particularly weak. Leaders are beginning to take action to challenge and drive improvements in this area.
- Leaders have simplified the approach to assessment and feedback. There is now greater consistency in teachers' application of the school's marking and feedback policy. Pupils say this is helping them to improve their work.
- Leaders have introduced a whole-school approach to planning, which provides structure and clarity of expectations. Pupils say this is used consistently and it helps them to learn.
- Relationships between pupils and teachers are positive. Teachers have the interests of pupils at heart and pupils are keen to do well. Leaders are aware of the need to continue to raise teachers' expectations of pupils' behaviour, effort and achievement.
- Teaching assistants work well with individuals and small groups of pupils. They are well trained and knowledgeable. Inspectors noted several examples of teaching assistants supporting pupils to develop their skills and to make progress.
- There are pockets of stronger practice across the school. For example, teaching in religious education is particularly strong and all pupils benefit from effective teaching in this area. Pupils are excited and motivated by engaging activities, so they work hard and make very good progress.

- Leaders are taking action to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, for example through regular training and sharing the stronger practice in school. Teaching has improved considerably since the principal took up post in 2016. Leaders recognise that much needs to be done to improve it further.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are improving as a result of raised expectations of behaviour. Pupils conduct themselves well in lessons but weaker teaching does not provide them with opportunities to develop their independence and resilience. Low expectations of what pupils are able to achieve mean that pupils are not routinely encouraged to develop as successful, independent learners.
- Pupils take greater pride in their work than in the past. However, there is variability within subjects and across year groups. Teachers do not consistently ensure that all pupils meet the school's expectations of the presentation of their work.
- Leaders have ensured that pupils are provided with opportunities to assume positions of responsibility, such as prefects and head boy and head girl. Older pupils support their younger peers through an extensive 'peer-mentoring' programme. Pupils also undertake projects to develop links with the local community. For example, a group of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have visited local care homes and renovated a greenhouse. Pupils appreciate these opportunities.
- Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe. The curriculum provides opportunities to learn about risks, such as those posed by the internet. Pupils say that bullying is rare and are confident it would be dealt with, swiftly and effectively, should it occur. Pupils feel safe in school.
- The school is inclusive and pupils recognise diversity. Pupils are respectful of other cultures. They are understanding and welcoming of those who are different from themselves.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. As a result of raised expectations of pupils' behaviour, there was a temporary increase in the number of fixed-term exclusions in 2016/17. This is now reducing as pupils respond positively to leaders' and staff's high expectations. However, incidents of removals from lessons, for specific groups of pupils, remain too high. This is particularly for pupils who speak English as an additional language, disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Behaviour in lessons has improved considerably since the principal took up post in 2016. Staff and pupils report that behaviour is conducive to learning in most lessons, and instances of low-level disruption have been significantly reduced. The rare

instances of low-level disruption are as a result of weaker teaching.

- Leaders have ensured that pupils' attendance is more closely monitored than in the past. The school has employed an attendance officer and a multilingual outreach worker, who are effective in working with families to identify barriers to regular attendance. They provide support and challenge, which has resulted in increased attendance rates for all groups of pupils. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school has reduced and is now similar to the national average. Pupils who attend off-site alternative provision have high levels of attendance.
- There is a harmonious atmosphere in the school. Pupils from different groups and backgrounds get on well together at social times and cooperate in lessons. Most pupils conduct themselves around the school well. They are confident, courteous and polite. For example, pupils hold doors open for others and chat comfortably with visitors.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Poor teaching over time has led to pupils making slow progress in most subjects. In 2017 and 2016, pupils' overall progress was considerably lower than that of other pupils nationally.
- Disadvantaged pupils' overall progress was in the lowest 1% of all schools nationally. Leaders have not ensured that additional funding to support these pupils has been used effectively. Some strategies, such as a project to raise pupils' esteem and work to improve attendance, have had a positive impact on these aspects of the school's work, but pupils' outcomes remain too low.
- The most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, make less progress than other pupils in the school. In 2016, the most able pupils' progress overall, and in English and mathematics, was in the lowest 1% of all schools nationally.
- The proportion of pupils who achieve a standard pass in GCSE English and mathematics combined is considerably lower than the national average.
- Weak leadership and poor teaching in science have led to very poor progress in this subject. Leaders are taking effective action to improve the quality of leadership and teaching in this area. However, strategies such as reviewing and amending the curriculum have not yet had time to have a positive impact on pupils' outcomes.
- Strong leadership and effective teaching in religious education mean that pupils make very good progress in this subject. In 2016, pupils' outcomes were in the highest 10% of all schools nationally. In 2017, pupils, including those who speak English as an additional language, also made very good progress in this subject. In religious education, the progress of disadvantaged pupils, and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, was lower than that of other pupils nationally, but greater than in other subjects in the school.
- Many pupils enter the school with reading and mathematics skills that are well below the national averages. Leaders have ensured that the Year 7 catch-up funding is used effectively. In 2017, the vast majority of pupils who had entered the school with literacy and numeracy levels below those expected for their age made very good progress to catch up with their peers.
- Pupils who attend off-site alternative provision are well supported. They follow an

appropriate curriculum and make greater progress than they would otherwise.

- Younger pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, those who speak English as an additional language and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are beginning to make faster progress in most subjects. This is as a result of higher expectations of their behaviour, increased attendance and improved teaching.

School details

Unique reference number	141391
Local authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	10037175

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy special sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	479
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	David Ross
Principal	Jonathan Harris
Telephone number	01205 722336
Website	www.thomasmiddlecott.co.uk
Email address	enquiries@thomasmiddlecott.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school converted to academy status in March 2015. It is part of the David Ross Education Trust.
- From 2015 to 2016, there were five principals in post at different times. In September 2016, the executive principal left the school. The current principal, who joined the school in September 2016 as associate principal, took up post as substantive principal in October 2016. One vice principal left the school in December 2016.
- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is considerably higher than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is lower than average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is slightly higher than the national average.

- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' achievement and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.
- A very small number of pupils attend off-site provision at Bridge House and First Steps. A small number of pupils in Year 10 attend Barnes Wallis Academy for childcare lessons.
- The academy improvement board replaced the governing body in March 2017.
- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about Year 7 catch-up funding on its website.
- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish about Year 7 catch-up funding.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 34 lessons, some jointly with senior leaders.
- Discussions were held with senior and middle leaders, other staff and representatives of the David Ross Education Trust.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work in lessons and a sample of pupils' books.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during lessons, around school and at lunchtime.
- Inspectors observed pupils' learning and behaviour in an assembly and during registration.
- Inspectors heard pupils read and spoke with pupils in discussion groups and informally around the school.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, its improvement plans, minutes of meetings of the academy improvement board, information about the attainment and progress of all pupils, records relating to behaviour and safeguarding, and information on the school's website.
- Inspectors considered the 15 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, the three free-text responses from parents and email communications from parents. The lead inspector also met with a parent on site.

Inspection team

Deborah Mosley, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Lynn Cox	Ofsted Inspector
John Edwards	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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