

Thomas Middlecott Academy

Edinburgh Drive, Kirton, Boston, Lincolnshire PE20 1JS

Inspection dates

25–26 June 2019

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Although some weaknesses remain, notably in science, pupils are currently making better progress than in the recent past.
- Subject leadership is not as effective in rapidly raising standards in some subjects as it is in others.
- Leaders and governors have not ensured that the use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has had sufficient impact on the progress that these pupils make.
- Some teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving. They do not always use the information they have about pupils' prior attainment to ensure that learning is sufficiently challenging.
- Teaching is sometimes uninspiring and fails to engage pupils' interest.
- Opportunities for extended writing are not always provided across a range of subjects to enable pupils to think about their learning at a deeper level.
- Although leaders have introduced new curriculum initiatives, the implementation of the school's curriculum for personal development and well-being is not yet complete.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are not always positive. Although behaviour is improving, elements of low-level disruption remain in lessons when learning is not sufficiently stimulating or set at the right level.
- A small number of pupils do not always follow the school's expectations about behaviour and punctuality.

The school has the following strengths

- The recently appointed principal leads the school with unwavering determination. She is supported effectively by the trust. The number of pupils on roll is rising in key stage 3.
- Following a challenging period, the leadership team is ambitious and committed to securing rapid improvement at the school.
- Attendance has improved rapidly and is above average. No group of pupils is disadvantaged by poor attendance, including those with SEND.
- Opportunities for extra-curricular participation are good, particularly in sport and music. Levels of participation are rising.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and pupils' progress by ensuring that:
 - pupils are positively engaged in learning activities which enthuse and inspire them, challenging them to think more deeply about their learning
 - teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve so that all pupils are challenged and know how to make good progress
 - all teachers routinely use assessment information to plan learning activities which build on what pupils already know and can do
 - all teachers consistently follow the school's policy on providing helpful feedback so that pupils can improve their work
 - teachers become more skilled in meeting the needs of disadvantaged and the most able pupils so that they can make rapid progress
 - pupils' literacy skills are developed so that they can apply their understanding of key subject vocabulary in more frequent opportunities for extended writing.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - subject leaders are equally effective in holding teachers to account and raising standards in their curriculum areas, considering the progress made by different groups of learners, particularly in science
 - all leaders have a stronger oversight of the impact of the curriculum for pupils with SEND.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by ensuring that:
 - the school's curriculum for personal development is delivered consistently well by all tutors
 - the whole-school behaviour policy is consistently applied by staff and followed by all pupils
 - elements of low level-disruption are eradicated.

An external review of the use of the pupil premium should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The new leadership team has accurately identified the strengths and weaknesses of the school. The recently appointed principal, together with senior and trust leaders, is ambitious for the future. Leaders are realistic about the rapid improvements that are necessary and have constructed an action plan that directly prioritises previous weaknesses. However, many of the changes that leaders have introduced are at an early stage of development and it is too soon to see their full impact.
- Stability in staffing, while improving, remains a challenge for the school. Despite the support of the trust in helping leaders to secure well-qualified teachers, some curriculum areas, such as history and science, are not fully staffed by subject specialists. Leaders have acted to address this situation and expect to be in a stronger position by the start of the new school year.
- The support from the trust has gathered pace since the previous inspection, particularly in curriculum planning. However, most of these developments have been within the current school year and are at an early stage of development. It is too soon to see the impact of this support on further strengthening pupils' academic outcomes.
- The quality of subject leadership is not consistently good. Subject leaders are not equally effective in ensuring that all pupils receive good-quality teaching, particularly in science. Recently, the quality of subject leadership has been strengthened by the appointment of new leaders, for example in English and humanities, who are receiving effective support from the trust.
- The impact of additional funding to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils is not evaluated sharply enough by leaders, including governors, to determine which strategies are the most effective for improving their progress. The achievement of disadvantaged pupils, while improving, has been too low for too long.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. Leaders have made changes to the curriculum to ensure that all pupils study a range of subjects to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills, particularly at key stage 3. However, inconsistencies in the quality of teaching mean that pupils do not make the stronger progress of which they are capable.
- Opportunities for professional learning are beginning to have a positive impact on the quality of learning. Staff report that they welcome leaders' programmes to support their development. However, many of these programmes are at an early stage of development and it is too soon to see the impact on pupils' outcomes.
- Leaders provide effective support for teachers whose practice has sometimes been ineffective. Coaching programmes are leading to improvements. However, the quality of teaching is inconsistent and is not improving quickly enough.
- The leadership of pupils with SEND is strengthening. The progress of this group of pupils, while low, is improving. Levels of attendance are also improving. However, the extent to which all leaders check the progress of this group of pupils across the curriculum varies too much.

- The programme for pupils' personal, social, health and economic development is generally well planned, although not always consistently taught by staff. Pupils benefit from a range of experiences which have a positive effect on their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development as well as their understanding of British values. These are particularly well developed in subjects such as music and art.
- The morale of staff is mostly positive. Most staff who spoke with inspectors reported that they feel well supported and share the principal's vision and values in rapidly improving the school. Since her appointment, the number of pupils attending the school has risen, particularly in Years 7 and 8.
- Leaders' use of the catch-up funding is beginning to become more effective in ensuring that those pupils in Year 7 who begin the school with low levels of literacy and numeracy are able to catch up with their peers.
- Leaders are developing the school's programme for careers education. As a result of careful guidance, all pupils reaching the end of key stage 4 have secured appropriate places in education, employment or training. However, leaders recognise that pupils' outcomes are not yet matching their aspirations.
- Pupils have access to a variety of extra-curricular activities, especially in sport and music. Leaders track levels of participation in sport very closely and the proportion of pupils involved is rising quickly.

Governance of the school

- The governance of the school is strengthening. The recently appointed chair of the local governing body (LGB) has a good overall understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school.
- Although the LGB does not currently have a full complement of governors, current members are kept very well informed about development priorities and are ambitious for rapid improvement.
- Records of the meetings of the LGB clearly document how senior leaders are challenged and held to account. However, governors do not yet have a sharp enough understanding of the school's work to improve some aspects of its provision, such as the use of additional government funding for disadvantaged pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's safeguarding arrangements meet all statutory requirements. Employment checks made on staff, volunteers and governors are robust and well recorded.
- Leaders ensure that staff, including those that are new to the school, are well trained. They receive regular briefings to ensure that their understanding is up to date. All staff have received training on extremism and radicalisation.
- The restructuring of the leadership team has ensured that those responsible for safeguarding are knowledgeable. They ensure pupils' safety in a timely and decisive manner. Leaders work effectively with external agencies to ensure that pupils and families receive the right support when needed. All records are securely stored.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved since the last inspection, although there remain inconsistencies between subjects and between key stages. Inspection evidence confirmed pupils' views that the quality of their learning was dependent upon which teacher they had, particularly in science.
- The proportion of lessons taught by temporary staff is beginning to reduce. Leaders, together with the trust, have acted to secure higher-quality teachers. However, the impact of this has not yet been experienced by all pupils. Some pupils, parents and carers continue to express frustration at the high volume of lessons taught by temporary staff.
- Although the subject knowledge of most teachers is secure, it is not always routinely used to plan learning activities which enthuse or inspire pupils to want to do their best. In several lessons visited by inspectors, pupils' attitudes to learning are typically compliant, but are not consistently positive. However, in subjects such as music and art, pupils' levels of motivation have improved since the last inspection.
- Following recent professional learning, the quality of teachers' questioning to assess what pupils know and can do has improved since the last inspection, although it remains variable. Questioning does not deepen pupils' knowledge or understanding consistently well across all subjects.
- Teachers' assessment of pupils' learning, while also improving, does not consistently help them to understand where they have been successful or how to improve their work in some subjects. As a result, pupils sometimes lack confidence in knowing how to make good progress. The recently implemented policy on providing pupils with feedback is developing, although it not consistently followed by some staff.
- Opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their understanding in writing is improving, particularly in English. However, this is not the case across all subjects. Pupils' ability to complete extended writing and use subject-specific vocabulary is less well developed in subjects such as science and humanities.
- Teachers' expectations of what pupils know and can do are higher, although not yet consistently so in all subjects, particularly for boys and the most able pupils. Sometimes, pupils work on the same learning activities and, as a result, are not sufficiently challenged to make the progress of which they are capable.
- Inspectors found that, in the most effective lessons, relationships between pupils and their teachers were positive. In these lessons, including subjects such as English, physical education, art and music, pupils were keen to engage and do their best. In one music lesson, for example, pupils were enthusiastically engaged in taiko drumming to develop their understanding of rhythm. The combination of high expectations, precise explanations of subject terminology and the sharing of criteria for successful learning enabled these pupils to make good progress.
- Together with specialist support from within the trust, subject leaders and teachers are receiving greater support and direction. The quality of teaching at the school is consequently improving, although leaders recognise that it is not yet fully consistent across the curriculum.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement. Although the curriculum for personal development has been recently strengthened, leaders do not currently ensure that all pupils receive effective teaching.
- The pastoral care provided in the school is effective. Pupils know who they can talk with if they have any worries or concerns. Leaders have recently established a new role to oversee the well-being and inclusion of all pupils, particularly those who are most vulnerable. The provision and support for pupils who speak English as an additional language are particularly effective.
- Pupils reported to inspectors that they felt safe in school. Pupils are taught to stay safe through a planned programme of activities, including online safety, personal safety and substance misuse, for example.
- Most pupils expressed their confidence in staff to deal effectively with occurrences of bullying. Inspectors' scrutiny of the school's bullying records showed that incidents of bullying are dealt with. However, some pupils are not clear about the school's anti-bullying strategy.
- Pupils are increasingly well supported by staff with regard to their mental and emotional well-being. Pupils know who they can talk to if they need additional support or advice. Leaders have recently launched the 'mobilise' project within the Boston area to further strengthen this aspect of the school's work.
- There is a good range of extra-curricular activity which further promotes pupils' personal development. Examples include an array of sporting activities and music, such as the popular taiko drumming. Leaders closely track participation levels, particularly in sport, which are rising.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Pupils recognise that general behaviour is not yet good, although they reported to inspectors that it is improving. Inspectors' observation of pupils' conduct confirmed these views.
- Pupils' levels of concentration are inconsistent. When learning is not sufficiently engaging or set at the right level, pupils lose focus and low-level disruption results. Inspectors observed this in several lessons, particularly in science.
- Levels of fixed-term exclusion, while reducing, remain above the national averages.
- Pupils' conduct around school is mostly orderly, although some pupils can be too boisterous, particularly boys. The school's behaviour policy is not consistently applied by staff or followed by pupils. Inspectors observed one incident of disrespectful behaviour. This undermines the values taught within the personal development curriculum.
- Most pupils are punctual to their lessons, although a small minority are not. This was particularly evident during lesson changeover time.

- The coordination of pupils who receive their education away from the school site is effective. Leaders have ensured that pupils are following appropriate courses and make regular checks to ensure that pupils are attending and behaving well. Alternative providers reported to inspectors that these pupils are making appropriate progress.
- Attendance has improved year on year. Leaders have taken decisive action to ensure good attendance. Rates of absence are below the national averages and no groups are disadvantaged by low attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- There are notable improvements in progress and attainment this year. However, some weaknesses and inconsistencies remain.
- Scrutiny of work in pupils' books indicates that pupils currently in Years 7 to 10 are making better progress than has been the case in the past. There are positive indications that current Year 11 pupils are on track to make better progress, building on the improvements made last year.
- There have been improvements in attainment over the last year. The proportion of pupils gaining a standard pass and the proportion gaining a strong pass at GCSE English and mathematics improved last year but remained below the national averages. Leaders have implemented a rigorous programme of additional teaching to support pupils reaching the end of key stage 4 in summer 2019, in order to increase the momentum of improvement. However, neither progress or attainment in science is improving rapidly enough.
- Although all groups of pupils are currently making better progress, some groups have not improved as much as others over the past two years. For example, boys and the most able pupils made less progress than other pupils nationally. The standards achieved by disadvantaged pupils have been low. However, they have improved since 2017.
- Pupils with SEND are beginning to make better progress than has been the case in the past.
- New strategies have been implemented for pupils in Year 7 who require additional support to catch up in their development of literacy and numeracy skills. These approaches are beginning to have a positive impact, although it is too soon to see the full effect of leaders' new programmes of support.
- A small number of pupils attend alternative provision away from the school site. These pupils are attending well. Their progress is tracked, and they are making the progress leaders expect of them.
- The proportion of pupils securing appropriate places for their next steps in education, employment or training has increased. In the current year, all pupils are expected to be in some form of education, employment or training. This reflects the guidance pupils receive about the options open to them.

School details

Unique reference number	141391
Local authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	10087394

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	511
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Chris Blanchard
Principal	Joanne Myhill-Johnson
Telephone number	01205 722336
Website	www.thomasmiddlecott.co.uk
Email address	enquiries@thomasmiddlecott.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	26–27 September 2017

Information about this school

- Thomas Middlecott Academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The recently appointed principal joined the school in September 2018. The vice-principal was appointed to the post full time from December 2018.
- The school is part of the David Ross Education Trust, which it joined in March 2015. Directors of the trust are the appropriate authority, with some responsibilities delegated to the local governing body. The chief executive officer, who is also a member of the board of directors, oversees the thirty-four schools which make up the trust.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is above average. The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan is average.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well above the

national average.

- A very small number of pupils are taught at alternative off-site provision on a full-time basis. Arrangements are in place for them to attend Build a Future and Bridge House independent schools.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 26 lessons; most visits were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. During these visits to lessons, inspectors spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also looked at a large sample of pupils' work across a wide range of subjects.
- Inspectors met with a range of school leaders, including the headteacher, other senior leaders and middle leaders.
- A meeting was held with the chief executive officer and deputy chief executive officer of the David Ross Education Trust. Subsequent meetings were also held with subject specialist advisers from the trust.
- Inspectors spoke with six groups of pupils more formally and met with pupils informally during lunchtime and breaktime.
- Pupils' behaviour was observed during lessons, and at breaktime and lunchtime. Inspectors also observed pupils' conduct during the changeover between lessons.
- A range of documentation was examined, including the school's self-evaluation; pupils' performance information; the minutes of the local governing body; behaviour and attendance records; bullying records; curriculum plans and school policies.

Inspection team

Chris Stevens, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Matthew Sammy	Ofsted Inspector
Vanessa Stanley	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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