

Lincroft Middle School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	136471
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	395533
Inspection dates	27–28 June 2012
Lead inspector	Frank Knowles

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	797
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Hugh Carr-Archer
Headteacher	Michael Lavelle (Executive Headteacher) Mark Duke (Head of School)
Date of previous school inspection	18 March 2009
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Age group	9–13
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Introduction

Inspection team

Frank Knowles Additional Inspector

John Hucker Additional Inspector

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This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 38 lessons taught by 37 teachers and a teaching assistant. They held discussions with members of the governing body, staff, parents, and a group of students in each year group. Inspectors heard students read and talked with others about the work they had done during the school year. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View survey in planning the inspection. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's internal assessment data and documents related to safeguarding, school and department planning, and a range of school policies. Inspectors took account of responses to the inspection questionnaire from 407 parents and carers, 176 of whom included written comments, and from 55 staff and a sample of 135 students.

Information about the school

Lincroft is smaller than the average-sized secondary school, but much larger than a typical middle school, and has a specialism in performing arts. It converted to academy status in February 2011. Most of its students come from White British backgrounds, with others coming from Indian and a wide range of other heritages. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is low. The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported through school action plus or a statement is broadly average. The academy exceeds the current floor standards, which set the government's minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

Lincroft is part of the Academy Federation of North Bedfordshire Schools, in partnership with Sharnbrook Upper School and two other middle schools, Harrold Priory and Margaret Beaufort. The federation has a single governing body. The middle schools share an executive head teacher and each has its own head of school. The head of school took up his post seven weeks before the inspection.

The academy has specially resourced provision for special educational needs. The 24-place unit for students aged 9 to 16 with autistic spectrum condition (ASC) has a base at Lincroft and one at Sharnbrook Upper School.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	1

Key findings

- This is an outstanding school. Highly challenging teaching means students of all abilities are stretched academically, and they respond very enthusiastically. Excellent communication skills and personal qualities gained by the end of Year 8 prepare students very well for transfer to the upper school.
- Students' progress accelerates as they move through the academy and they make exceptional progress in Years 7 and 8, especially in mathematics. As a result achievement, including in the ASC unit, is outstanding. Students develop a wide range of higher-order thinking skills and use them extensively.
- Teachers use creative approaches to inspire students and consequently their motivation is high. They engage fully in learning tasks and participate collaboratively in a wide range of stimulating activities. Teachers are highly adept at assessing learning, although marking does not always provide enough guidance on how students can improve their work.
- The academy creates a calm and purposeful learning environment and students feel very safe. They are very courteous, both around the academy and in lessons, and their attitudes to learning are excellent. Parents and carers have a positive view of students' behaviour overall, but some are concerned about off-task behaviour in lessons. However, inspectors judged behaviour in lessons to be good. Relationships between students, and with adults, are extremely positive. Bullying is rare. Students welcome the many enrichment activities offered.
- Outstanding leadership at all levels focuses strongly on improvement, and staff share a clear cross-federation vision. The management of teachers' performance is rigorous. Parents value the academy highly, although a few are unhappy about the way it responds to their approaches. The new head of school has already focused on improving consistency of practice. Analysis of assessment data is very thorough, and leaders recognise the need to use

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interim progress data more rigorously.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Achieve even higher levels of effectiveness throughout the academy by:
 - securing greater parental confidence in respect of behaviour management and improving the timeliness of responses to parents and carers
 - ensuring approaches to marking are more consistently applied in all subjects so that students are clear about what they need to do to improve their work
 - making more extensive use of interim progress data to identify areas of exceptional practice that can be shared and areas where improvement is needed.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students join the academy with above-average attainment and, by the time they leave the end of Year 8, their attainment is above that usually achieved in Year 9. Mathematics has been a consistent strength for a number of years. Results in national tests at the end of Year 6 have been consistently above average, and results in optional tests taken in Year 8 in 2012 are high. English test results are almost as positive, although national test results in Year 6 dipped in 2011. The academy's assessment data shows that outstanding progress in English has been restored in Years 7 and 8, nearly matching that in mathematics, and that progress has improved in the last year in Years 5 and 6. Students are skilled readers and have developed high-level interpretation skills by the time they reach Year 8. The academy analyses its assessment data very effectively. A clear track is kept of students' progress in each subject, with teachers and tutors using this information to check whether students are on course to achieve their targets and provide support where it is needed.

Analysis of their work and the academy's internal assessment data show that students make good progress in Years 5 and 6, and outstanding progress in Years 7 and 8. Students in the ASC unit make outstanding progress in all years. Recent improvements in the provision for disabled students and those with special educational needs mean that these students are making similar progress to their peers. Students feel they make good progress, as do their parents and carers, and this was more than borne out in the inspection evidence. Students' great enthusiasm for learning and the way they participate so effectively in a range of challenging activities mean that the pace of learning is rarely less than good. For example, in a mathematics lesson, students in Year 6 had an unusually good understanding of angles and used this to find missing angles in triangles rapidly. In a dance lesson in Year 8, students worked very effectively on an Olympic-themed opening ceremony and devised ways of assessing how much progress they were making in the lesson.

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Quality of teaching

Outstanding teaching challenges students to think deeply and communicate ideas orally and in writing. Teachers have very high expectations of what students can achieve, for example encouraging them to reach the highest levels in the national curriculum a year earlier than expected. Teachers' expert subject knowledge and excellent grasp of a wide range of effective teaching methods mean that activities match students' needs well. They create many opportunities for students to work purposefully in groups, often re-grouping them to disseminate their ideas to the class. In a history lesson, for example, students in Year 6 took on the roles of lords, freemen and serfs to understand the causes of the Peasant's Revolt. Teachers' questioning demands extended and reasoned responses, and their carefully structured lessons mean that learning takes place at a rapid pace. For example, students in Year 6 heard a presentation by six students about how other characters in the play influenced Macbeth and Lady Macbeth and then wrote their own critique, all within half an hour. Students' work books show clear progression during the school year and demonstrate how effectively teachers interpret the curriculum to match students' ability levels. In a few cases, however, temporary staff do not always provide the same high levels of challenge that are otherwise consistently found across the school. This point was noted in questionnaire responses by some parents, carers and students, who were otherwise very satisfied with the quality of teaching at the academy.

The performing arts specialism has benefited the academy through widening the range of approaches to learning. Teachers make very effective use of visual or kinaesthetic styles, for example. The teaching of students in the ASC unit is outstanding, with flexible approaches to learning and students working individually allowing them to reach high levels of achievement. Disabled students and those with special educational needs also receive appropriately challenging work, with a class in Year 6 taking a problem-solving approach to identifying mathematical language. Reading is taught well. The focused help the school provides to improve the comprehension skills of weaker readers supports their progress across the curriculum well.

Students frequently evaluate their work using the relevant assessment criteria. Nearly all the ends of lessons observed included a succinct review of what had been achieved, making use of the clear learning objectives. Teachers are highly adept at gauging how learning is going. Marking generally gives students clear indications of what they need to do to improve their work. This is most effective in science, English and mathematics, but practice varies in other subjects.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Staff, students and their parents and carers have very high expectations of behaviour and, both around the academy and in class, students generally behave very well and many have exceptionally positive attitudes to learning. They are courteous to adults

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and each other, collaborate enthusiastically and many contribute very successfully to school activities and take up valued roles as prefects, peer and eco counsellors, and librarians.

The very large majority of parents responding to the inspection questionnaire have a very positive view of students' behaviour overall, but some are concerned about how learning is affected by off-task behaviour in lessons. Students and observations during the inspection indicated this was rare, although both indicated a clear link with temporary and cover staff. The academy's records from the beginning of the school year are thorough and indicate low levels of behavioural referrals and the number of exclusions is low. The academy has had particular success with students in the ASC unit and they receive excellent support in developing confidence in their learning, both in the unit and when they are with other students.

Attendance is above average, and students enjoy coming to the academy. Students feel very safe and the site is secure. They have a very good understanding of the different types of bullying and know who to turn to, both adults and student counsellors, if they have a concern. The school's cross-federation anti-bullying policy has recently been revised and provides clear guidance, and students were confident that any incidents were resolved quickly and successfully, particularly if their parents were involved. Some parents and carers were less confident, however, that this was always the case, or that they were kept well informed.

Leadership and management

The executive headteacher, other senior leaders and the governing body have a very clear vision for the future of the federation and for Lincroft within it. Students get off to a flying start at the upper school as a result of common approaches across the federation. There is a strong focus on professional development across the federation and it provides very good opportunities for staff to share and develop their expertise. The governing body holds Lincroft to account for its performance very effectively through detailed debates in the curriculum committee.

Since the last inspection, the academy has increased the number of lessons taught by subject specialists, and this has had a positive impact on students' engagement and achievement. The leadership of the provision for special educational needs has been improved. Subject leaders are now fully involved in self-evaluation processes in their areas, working effectively with senior leaders and the creating clear plans to raise achievement. The records of whole-school self-evaluation are less evaluative than those from departments but the academy has nevertheless identified clear priorities for action. For example, the academy has increased staffing in English, with a much greater focus on writing and, in a short time, students' progress in writing has increased. These recent improvements show that there is a great deal of capacity in the academy to identify areas for improvement and implement change.

The governing body has ensured that all statutory requirements for safeguarding, including training of staff and governors, have been met. The curriculum is broad

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and balanced and its perceptive interpretation by teachers means that all students have equal opportunities to achieve their potential. Staff tackle discrimination with exceptional rigour, particularly through the cross-federation racial harmony group. Students' spiritual, moral social and cultural development is very well represented in assemblies and lessons.

Senior leaders, and increasingly subject leaders, are playing a significant role in maintaining the academy's outstanding teaching. Regular observations provide detailed feedback and, where teaching falls below good, support is provided to ensure improvement. Senior staff make very good use of the analysis of assessment data, but recognise that this could be extended to provide more information on the progress made by different groups of students during the year. Professional development focuses effectively on whole-school issues while recognising individual development needs. The academy has been particularly successful in building leadership capacity within the school.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



29 June 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Lincroft Middle School, Bedford MK43 7RE

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your academy. We enjoyed our discussions with you, and the information we gained was very valuable in helping us reach our conclusions. We decided that yours is an outstanding school, mainly because you make such rapid progress, especially in mathematics, and reach levels at the end of Year 8 that are well above average. You receive outstanding teaching, although marking sometimes needs to show you more clearly how to improve your work.

The academy is very well led, and we were pleased to hear that you feel belonging to the federation will help you transfer to your upper school for Year 9. We thought your behaviour around the academy and in lessons was good and sometimes outstanding. We noted how courteous and thoughtful you are to each other and adults. Some of your parents and carers, however, felt that contact with the academy over behaviour and other issues was not as strong as it could be.

We have asked staff to take the academy even further on its journey of improvement through:

- working with parents and carers to make sure they are all confident that the school responds well when they make contact
- making sure marking helps you to improve your work
- using progress data more extensively during the year to identify strengths to celebrate and areas to improve.

We hope you will continue to be such enthusiastic learners and that you do well in everything you do. We wish you all well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Frank Knowles
Lead inspector

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