



# Middlewich High School

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 111410  
**Local Authority** Cheshire  
**Inspection number** 288955  
**Inspection dates** 1–2 November 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Susan Wareing HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary	<b>School address</b>	King Edward Street
<b>School category</b>	Community		Middlewich
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16		Cheshire CW10 9BU
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01606 832013
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	677	<b>Fax number</b>	01606 738260
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Mr M Finney
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Martin Forster
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	24 February 2003		

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<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection dates</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
11–16	1–2 November 2006	288955

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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

Middlewich High School is smaller than average and draws pupils mainly from the locality and the neighbouring town of Winsford. Around 1 in 20 of the pupils takes free school meals and most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is smaller than average, although the school has specialist provision for hearing impairment and autism. Pupils' attainment on entry is in line with the national average. In 2005, Middlewich High School was designated a Specialist School for mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT) and science. It has recently celebrated its centenary.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

Middlewich High is a satisfactory and improving school with some good features. One pupil commented that the school is, 'a big part of our small town' and parents are overwhelmingly supportive of it.

After a period of significant instability of staffing, the recently appointed headteacher and restructured senior leadership team have brought a clear sense of direction to the school. They have established effective systems which have begun to improve it further. Planning for improvement is thorough, coherent and identifies appropriate priorities. The recently introduced system of departmental self-review has immediately identified and tackled underperformance in some departments. This has begun to show impact on pupils' achievement in those subjects. One of the main challenges for senior leaders is to implement this process consistently across the school. Governors are very well informed about the school's strengths and weaknesses, challenge the school very effectively and play a really active role in all aspects of its life.

Standards and achievement are good at Key Stage 3 and satisfactory and improving at Key Stage 4. Through careful analysis of its performance data, the school identified underachievement in middle ability boys in 2005. The school's specialist status enabled the funding of small teaching groups in some subjects at Key Stage 4. The school's own information shows that this had a positive impact on achievement in 2006. School monitoring systems and lesson observations also show that pupils currently in Years 10 and 11 are on track to meet their targets.

Pupils very much enjoy being at school. This is reflected in their regular attendance and good behaviour. The school's contribution to the wider community is outstanding; for example, in pupils' support for local cultural events, environmental initiatives and in the facilities that the school offers to the town's traveller community.

Teaching and learning are good and this has led to improved achievement. Lessons show good relationships and varied activities; teaching is rigorously monitored and evaluated. There is some variation in the quality and frequency of marking. The curriculum is satisfactory and meets the needs of most learners. The school has broadened the range of courses offered at Key Stage 4 and plans are in hand to take this further. Pupils participate enthusiastically in the wide variety of extra-curricular activities offered. Care and support are strengths of this inclusive school. Pupils say that there is always someone to turn to when they need help and they receive good guidance for future options.

Since the last inspection the school has improved assemblies, communication with parents and the use of assessment information. Pupils now receive very challenging targets in English, mathematics and science but other targets are not yet as sharp. The school's work with its primary school partners and other community partnerships is outstanding and has been enhanced by the specialist status. These developments are improving the satisfactory value for money which the school provides. Together with the effective deployment of the new senior leadership team, they demonstrate the school's good capacity to improve further.

## What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement at Key Stage 4.
- Improve the quality and frequency of marking.
- Ensure that pupils' targets are precise enough to inform them of exactly how to improve in all subjects.
- Implement the new departmental self-review system consistently across the school to provide a broader overview of whole school performance.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 3

Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall. The majority of the pupils enter the school in Year 7 with average standards. In 2005, standards at the end of Year 9 were above average and progress was good. In 2006, achievement improved further and the school met or exceeded its targets in English, mathematics, science and ICT.

Achievement by the end of Year 11 is satisfactory and improving. Very few pupils leave with no qualification. GCSE results in 2005 were in line with the national average but progress was below average. The school has put in place effective strategies to raise the achievement of some vulnerable pupils and, in 2006, progress was satisfactory. Evidence from the school's tracking systems and from lesson observations shows that most Key Stage 4 pupils now in the school are on course to meet their targets. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities at both key stages make similar progress to other pupils.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being are good. Pupils very much enjoy being at school and this is reflected in their good behaviour and attendance as well as their outstanding contribution to the community. They willingly support a wide range of local cultural and environmental projects. They feel very safe in school and have good opportunities to take responsibility for others as prefects and Year 7 buddies. The school listens to their views and acts upon them. For example, the school council has influenced changes to school uniform. The school promotes physical and mental health through personal, social and health education (PSHE), well attended healthy food and breakfast clubs and through smoking cessation programmes. Pupils have satisfactory opportunities for work related learning through work experience, careers days and a comprehensive careers programme. Pupils' moral and social development is good but there are missed opportunities in some lessons for pupils to reflect on spiritual matters. Pupils' cultural awareness and understanding is well developed. For example, they say that what they learn about racism has helped them to change their attitudes.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good and this is reflected in pupils' good achievement in Years 7 to 9. It is improving achievement in Years 10 and 11 but the full impact of this good practice has yet to reach all subjects consistently.

Most lessons are well planned with clear explanations and a good variety of motivating and engaging activities which capture pupils' interests and develop their understanding and skills at a good rate. Questioning is skilful and ensures that all pupils are involved in their learning. There are good opportunities for pupils to share ideas in pairs and groups. As a result behaviour is good, levels of enjoyment are high and in lessons seen, most pupils achieved well.

In a minority of lessons seen, some activities were not sufficiently tailored to the needs of individual pupils. There is also some variability in the quality and frequency of marking.

The school's very rigorous monitoring has identified these weaknesses and begun to tackle any underperformance robustly. Effective systems and strategies are in place to improve teaching further and to spread good practice. Staff have good opportunities for both in-house and external professional development and these measures have improved achievement in some subjects.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 3

The curriculum meets statutory requirements. The range of vocational courses offered in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory and plans are in place to expand them further. The specialist status of the school is well reflected in the curriculum: triple sciences and statistics at GCSE have been introduced recently to meet the needs of gifted and talented students. Effective partnership work, particularly with the Connexions service, has improved the flexibility and inclusiveness of the work related curriculum: careers guidance and work placements are greatly valued by students and help them to gain a good understanding of their options for further study and employment. A small number of students in Years 10 and 11 have taken up extended work experience and college placements. This has started to improve the enjoyment, attendance and behaviour at school of those pupils at risk of disaffection and exclusion. However, pupils' basic skills of literacy, numeracy, ICT and enterprise skills are not always explicitly promoted in all lessons. A wide variety of extra-curricular activities, including sport and music, is provided. Students enjoy them and participation rates are high.

## Care, guidance and support

### Grade: 2

The care and support that the school offers to its pupils is a strength and parents agree. Staff are highly committed to the care of all pupils, both within and outside school. Safeguarding and health and safety procedures are very robust. More vulnerable pupils and those at risk of exclusion are quickly identified and well supported, for example, by the regular meetings of the Students at Risk Group. Pupils say that there is always someone to talk to when they need help. Individual education plans for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very thorough and allow these pupils to achieve as well as others. However, the plans are not always consistently implemented in all lessons. All pupils are given very challenging targets in English, mathematics, and science but other targets are not yet as precise. Pupils value the individual interviews they have for Year 9 options and the good guidance the school provides in Year 11 for future study and employment. Transition to Key Stage 4 is eased by events such as the Coping with Key Stage 4 Evenings for pupils and parents.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. Since his recent appointment, the headteacher and newly expanded leadership team have established a very clear direction for the school. Development planning at senior management level is thorough, coherent and focused on appropriate priorities, and effective systems have been introduced which have begun to improve the school further. Senior leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and a regular process of departmental self-review is improving this at middle management level. This has led to better achievement in some subjects but is not yet fully embedded across the school. Since the last inspection, the school has improved the quality of its assemblies and communication with parents. The use of assessment information has also improved. The school gained its specialist status in mathematics, computing and science in 2005. This has improved ICT resources in most subjects. It has enabled extra staffing for small group provision in some subjects and this has raised the achievement of some vulnerable pupils. Work with partnerships is outstanding. Primary schools have benefited from extensive support for science teaching and an innovative online mentoring scheme for Year 11 pupils has been set up in partnership with a local sixth form college to raise pupils' aspirations. The specialist status therefore gives good value for the funding provided and contributes to the school's good capacity for improvement. Overall value for money is satisfactory. Governors are very well informed about the school's strengths and weaknesses, challenge the school very effectively and play an active role in all aspects of the life of the school.

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## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

### The quality of provision

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

<sup>1</sup> 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

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
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	2
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**

Following our visit to inspect your school we would like to thank those of you who talked to us to let us know what you think of the school. This was very helpful. We found that Middlewich High School is a satisfactory and improving school which helps you achieve well in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactorily in Years 10 and 11.

Teaching is good. In most lessons that we saw, you made good progress because relationships with your teachers were good and they planned activities which motivated you and encouraged you to take an active part in the lesson. In other lessons, the activities were not so well designed to support those of you who find the work more difficult and to stretch the more able ones amongst you. The marking of your work was also variable. Teachers are very committed to caring for you all and supporting you. It was good to hear that there is always someone you can turn to when you need help. We know how much you value the good advice you receive on options in Years 9 and 11. We were pleased to hear how much you enjoy the wide range of after school and lunchtime activities on offer and how many of you take part.

We are glad to hear that the school gives you a real chance to express your views about the matters that affect you in school, for example, through the school council. You told us also how much you enjoy taking responsibility for others, especially for younger pupils, as prefects and buddies. It is clear that you show outstanding commitment to the local community, through supporting its cultural events and helping to improve the environment.

The school has made a lot of improvements since the last inspection. For example, there are better assemblies and communication with your parents and the school has improved its use of information about your progress, to help you achieve better. We think that some of the targets you are set should be clearer, so that you know exactly how well you are doing and how to improve. Since the last inspection the school has become a specialist mathematics, computing and science college. You told us how this has improved ICT resources. We also learned that it helped to fund smaller classes in some subjects and improved your achievement. We think that the school should now make sure that:

- standards and achievement in Years 10 and 11 improve further
- your work is marked regularly and in detail in all subjects
- your targets are clear enough to show you exactly what you need to do to improve.

I would like to wish you all every success for your future at Middlewich High School.