

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



8 December 2010

Mr M Thompson
Headteacher
Hexham Priory School
Collbridge Road
Hexham
NE46 1UY

Dear Mr Thompson

Ofsted 2010–11 best practice survey: school governance

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 15 November to look at school governance.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our publication about best practice in school governance. The publication will include case studies about individual schools. If Hexham Priory School is included as a case study, you will have an opportunity to comment prior to publication. Individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the identification of features of best practice included: meetings with you, the governors, the clerk to the governing body and the office manager; a tour of the school; and the scrutiny of relevant documents.

Features of best practice

- Governors take great care to recruit new members with the skills, experience and personal qualities needed to take the school forward. They provide excellent support for new governors that enables them to make a full contribution to meetings. The culture and ethos of the governing body support that of the school, which is: 'Never underestimate a child's ability.' All governors feel that their contributions are valued and they are able to monitor robustly the performance of the school.
- Governors have excellent arrangements for strategic planning and for reviewing the effectiveness of the governing body through an annual 'away day' for members. This day is also highly effective in building a team ethos among governors.

- Governors support the school in innovation. They have supported the development of a curriculum model which allows pupils to attend a mainstream school on a part-time basis, combined with specialist provision at Hexham Priory School. Governors have also supported the school in working with Durham University to develop data reports on pupils' progress.
- The business of governance is organised very well by you, the Chair, and the Clerk. Governors receive very good advice from the local authority which helps to ensure that they fulfil their statutory duties. Governors are strongly focused on improving the quality of the provision for pupils and their families.
- Governors have embedded arrangements for the self-review and effectiveness of governance. They constantly ask themselves how their actions impact on the experience for pupils. Consequently, meetings have a clear purpose and time is used efficiently.
- Governors give their time freely to support the school and are determined and proactive in supporting its development. They have effective arrangements for consulting with staff, parents and families.
- Governors have a very good understanding of the school's strengths. They receive a comprehensive range of reports that allows them to monitor the school's performance robustly. Their trust and confidence in you is soundly based upon the school's track record of improvement and success.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop governance further.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Vivien Shipley
Her Majesty's Inspector