

# Hexham Middle School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	122364
<b>Local Authority</b>	Northumberland
<b>Inspection number</b>	359236
<b>Inspection dates</b>	5–6 May 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Brian Blake 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>	Middle deemed secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	9–13
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	466
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Adrian Woolley
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr David Watson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Wanless Lane Hexham Northumberland NE46 1BU
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Nineteen part lessons were observed, which involved a total of 16 teachers. A range of documents was scrutinised and meetings were held with members of the senior leadership team, members of the governing body, and nominated staff. Informal discussions were held with other staff and a significant number of pupils during lessons and around the school. Inspectors also read 156 questionnaires returned by parents and carers, in addition to considering the views of those pupils and staff who completed separate questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following key areas.

- The pupils' achievement at the end of Year 8, especially in mathematics.
- The attainment of boys, especially those identified as higher attaining.
- The impact of leadership and management at all levels but, in particular, the hard federation with the local high school.

## Information about the school

The school is located close to the town centre in Hexham; it serves a combination of urban and rural communities, which results in almost one-quarter of its pupils taking local authority organised transport to get to and from school each day. Almost all the pupils are of White British heritage. Overall, there is a below average proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities but an above average number with a statement of special educational needs. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The school is in a hard federation with the local high school, which means that there is one governing body responsibility for both schools. The school holds a number of local and national awards, including specialist status for the Performing Arts, Healthy School status, SportsMark, and the Department for Education Financial Management Standard in Schools accreditation.

**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: how good is the school?**

**2**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**3**

## Main findings

Hexham Middle School provides a good and improving quality of education for its pupils. Since the previous inspection, the gap in attainment between boys and girls has been closed so that by the time the pupils leave the school at the end of Year 8, attainment is above average and their overall progress has been good.

In almost all areas the pupils achieve good outcomes as a direct result of the quality of the school's care, support and guidance, the positive support from parents and carers and external partners, and because of the pupils' excellent attendance and their generally good standards of behaviour.

The curriculum is providing the pupils with many and varied learning opportunities, all of which make a positive contribution to the quality of their learning. These include important aspects of their personal development, such as their enthusiasm and good attitudes to work and their active involvement in school life, especially in the range of varied extra-curricular activities that the school provides.

Teaching is almost always satisfactory or better and is characterised by good subject knowledge and strong, trusting working relationships. Teachers' marking varies in quality and is not always focused sufficiently on how pupils' work can be improved further. Overall, teachers' collection and use of information relating to the pupils' progress across all subjects is underdeveloped. This means, therefore, that the pupils do not know clearly enough what their standards are in some subjects and neither do they know how they can improve upon them.

Currently, lesson observation by senior staff does not focus sufficiently on how pupils' assessment information is used by teachers to plan lessons that challenge all abilities. Limited training opportunities in recent times have affected the potential to develop staff expertise in this and other professional development areas. Many other aspects of school leadership and management, including the work of the governing body, are working well. The governing body is, for example, challenging the school to continually improve its provision, although the impact of the hard federation with the local high school has not yet been assessed. Overall, the success of raising standards in mathematics is counterbalanced against the underdevelopment of assessment and teachers' marking since the previous inspection. This indicates that the capacity to improve further is satisfactory.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop and implement a strategy for the regular assessment of pupils' progress equally in all curricular areas, to aid teachers' planning and to help pupils know how well they have achieved.

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- Develop more robust evaluation and monitoring strategies of teaching and the use of assessment information in order to:
  - - improve the consistency of good quality practice among all teachers in all subjects
  - - use the information from monitoring and evaluation activities as an aid to identifying further professional development for staff.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****2**

The pupils' attainment in the core subjects when they start at the school in Year 5 is broadly average, with the girls outperforming the boys. By the time the pupils leave the school at the end of Year 8, their attainment in both English and mathematics is above the expectation for their age, with a closing of the attainment gap to the extent that both gender groups, of all abilities, perform equally well. Pupils' achievement is good overall. The most up-to-date school information available confirms an improving trend of pupils' attainment as they move from year-to-year, with the pace of their learning better in Key Stage 3 than in Key Stage 2. The progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities matches well with other pupils in the school and is improving securely.

Pupils acquire and develop new knowledge and understanding of key literacy, numeracy and computer skills, which build in level of difficulty as they move from year group to year group across the school. The overwhelming majority of pupils are keen learners, showing that they can listen to teacher instructions in lessons and respond appropriately, whether it is in answering questions in whole-class discussions or when working with a partner or in a larger group. Although there is a very small minority who say that they do not enjoy school, the overwhelming majority do, and this was confirmed when inspectors spoke with significant numbers of pupils in lessons and around the school. Pupils say that they feel safe, which was confirmed by the 96% positive response in the inspection questionnaire for pupils.

The pupils are attentive in lessons, generally showing high levels of interest and active and enthusiastic participation in different learning activities. However, parents, staff and pupils recognise that there is a very small minority whose standard of behaviour falls below that of the overwhelming majority. The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles is good overall. There is satisfactory provision for the pupils to engage in regular exercise in physical education lessons and through a varied range of out-of-lesson sporting activities. The school actively promotes healthy eating among the pupils, which is recognised through its achievement of Healthy School status. Many different subjects contribute to the pupils' growing awareness of their 'healthy being', but the work lacks overall coordination at whole-school level.

The contribution that pupils make to the school and wider community is good. The student council is well established and makes a significant contribution to school life and the local community. For example, there are strong, well-established links with a residential home, local churches and theatre, and the local town council. The focus on learning and acquiring a range of key skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology is helping to ensure that the pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education at the high school.

The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils know the difference between right and wrong, and they are successfully developing a sense of

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personal value about their contribution and successes within the school. There is also an effective range of learning opportunities for the pupils to appreciate and develop a greater understanding of different international cultures and world faiths.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	1
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

**How effective is the provision?**

Teachers have good subject knowledge, which contributes to the pupils' enthusiasm for their work. Almost all teaching is characterised by effective and well established work routines and strong relationships, which ensure that the pupils are ready to learn and are actively engaged in different learning activities. Where low-level disruptive behaviour occurs, teachers intervene effectively to ensure that the lesson progresses smoothly and that any effects on learning are minimised. Where teaching is at its best, questioning effectively targets specific learning outcomes that help to develop pupils' own thinking skills as an aid to better and more appropriate pace in their learning. However, not all teachers consistently make best use of a range of different questioning techniques, and a significant proportion of the teaching seen during the inspection was overly directed, with too few opportunities for the pupils to take greater responsibility for important aspects of their own learning. Lesson planning is satisfactory but assessment procedures are too inconsistent across the curriculum, with too few teachers regularly using assessment to inform their planning. However, there is some good practice, but this is almost exclusively confined to the core subjects of English and mathematics, where the pupils are regularly

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informed about the level they are working at and what they need to do to improve. In almost all other subjects, the pupils are not confident about the levels they are working at, and what they need to do to improve further. Marking across the school is also inconsistent. Teachers most often highlight technical inaccuracies and offer supportive comments to reward pupils for their effort but the marking does not always provide them with the information they need to make improvements. These are two areas where the school has made limited progress since the previous inspection report.

The curriculum is good and is well organised to provide the best of whole-class teaching with additional specialist provision that offers a wide variety of activities. This includes out-of-school visits and visitors to the school, both of which contribute positively to the pupils' growing understanding and appreciation of learning outside of formal lessons. With the vigorous commitment of staff, the school provides a wealth of extra-curricular experiences that are very popular and much enjoyed. Displays throughout the school attest to a plethora of wide-ranging and stimulating events and successes in recent years.

The effectiveness of care, guidance and support is good. The extensive links with partner schools ensure effective induction into Year 5 and transfer at the end of Year 8. The school has enhanced the quality of its care to provide very effective pastoral and emotional support to all pupils. This is particularly evident in the 'Fresh Start' initiative, where pupils with learning difficulties are well supported to develop literacy skills, build their self-esteem and improve their personal confidence. Pupils are appreciative of the care they receive and they say that their concerns are taken seriously and that staff work hard to resolve them. Good partnerships with external agencies help the staff to develop the knowledge and skills needed to ensure that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

## **How effective are leadership and management?**

The effectiveness of leadership and management is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are monitored regularly, which enables the school to identify the strengths of its teaching provision reasonably accurately. However, there is insufficient use of broader review and monitoring systems to identify and develop teachers' skills in collecting and using assessment information to inform lesson planning, and to monitor pupils' progress across the whole curriculum. Training opportunities to develop staff expertise in this and other professional development areas have been limited.

The governing body plays an active role in the life of the school and is aware of the changes that need to be initiated if the school is to make further progress and tackle areas

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of identified weakness. This is ensuring that there is a shared vision for future improvements. The hard federation established with the neighbouring high school is resulting in a joint approach to policies and common issues, although these have yet to be assessed fully for their impact on improving outcomes for pupils in both schools. All safeguarding procedures are in place and meet requirements, with the school recognising that some aspects of its provision need updating. The school has successfully identified and remedied differences in the performance of different groups of pupils reflecting their good promotion of equality of opportunity and tackling of discrimination. For example, the gap between the attainment and achievement of boys and girls has narrowed considerably by the time the pupils reach the end of Year 8.

Parents' and carers' views are taken seriously, which results in open and effective dialogue, with the overwhelming majority appreciating the school's efforts to make their children's education rewarding as well as enjoyable. There are many successful partnership activities, such as the local extended school services, which contribute successfully to pupils' personal development and well-being. The school actively promotes community cohesion and is reaching out to other communities. For example, through connections with schools locally and beyond, which have different characteristics to those seen in Hexham Middle. However, the school has yet to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of this work on improving the pupils' awareness and appreciation of life outside of school and the area where they live.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

**Views of parents and carers**

Approximately a third of parents and carers responded to the inspection questionnaire with the overwhelming majority positive about the school's provision for their children. A small number took the opportunity to write some additional comments. Although there



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was no particular pattern to these, there was praise for the staff in supporting the children in school. However, a small number of parents and carers raised concerns about the quality of home/school communication and the effectiveness of how the school deals with bullying; both were felt to need improvement. Some further concerns were raised about the behaviour of a small minority of pupils, the consistency and quality of homework and the school's toilet facilities for girls in the main building. All of these findings were shared with senior leaders and managers, and inspectors checked the condition of the girls' toilets, which were found to be in good condition.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Hexham Middle School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 156 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 466 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	77	49	65	42	8	5	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	83	53	69	44	2	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	70	45	79	51	4	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	71	46	70	45	10	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	67	43	81	52	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	58	37	82	53	11	7	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	50	32	91	58	9	6	1	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	67	43	79	51	5	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	64	41	75	48	10	6	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	58	37	77	49	11	7	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	64	41	70	45	5	3	2	1
The school is led and managed effectively	91	58	59	38	2	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	92	59	55	35	5	3	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## 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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.

**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.**



10 May 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of Hexham Middle School, Hexham, NE46 1BU**

On behalf of the inspection team, please accept our thanks for the warm welcome that you gave to us when we recently visited your school. I hope you enjoy reading the rest of this letter with your parents, which highlights some important things that we found out about your school.

- Hexham Middle School provides you with a good and improving standard of education.
- Standards in English and mathematics are average when you start at the school in Year 5, but are above average by the time you leave at the end of Year 8.
- Almost all of you make good overall progress in your learning, although it is faster at Key Stage 3 than at Key Stage 2.
- Your regular attendance at school is excellent.
- Almost all teaching is satisfactory or better.
- The quality of teachers' marking varies, and while some is good, too often it concentrates on the technical accuracy of your writing rather than on the overall quality of work that you produce and how you can improve upon it further.
- Good use is made of the information collected about your attainment and progress in English and mathematics, but is underdeveloped in other subjects. This means that you do not know clearly enough what your standards are in these other subjects, and neither do you know how you can improve upon them. We are, therefore, asking the school to tackle this issue.
- Many aspects of the senior leadership and management of the school, including the work of the governing body, are working well. However, the evaluation and monitoring of the quality of teaching, which includes your teachers use of information about your ongoing progress in all subjects is underdeveloped across the school. We are also asking that the school addresses this issue.

You have an important part to play in helping the school to get better; not least by continuing to work hard, attending regularly and working cooperatively with other pupils.

I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Brian Blake

Her Majesty's Inspector

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