

Queen Elizabeth High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122356
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	395307
Inspection dates	19–20 April 2012
Lead inspector	David Selby

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,289
Of which number on roll in the sixth form	434
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sandra Thompson
Headteacher	Neil Morrison
Date of previous school inspection	21 March 2007
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Introduction

Inspection team

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Additional inspector
Additional inspector
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This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 46 lessons taught by 45 teachers and visited morning registration sessions and an assembly. They held meetings with senior and middle leaders, members of the governing body and groups of students. Inspectors examined documents including the school's self-evaluation and development plans, minutes of governing body meetings, records of attendance and behaviour, the bullying and racist incidents logs and the single central record of safeguarding checks. They scrutinised a broad range of students' work through sampling their books and files and in lessons. They considered completed questionnaires from 134 students, 45 members of staff and 379 parents and carers, although the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) was not used in planning the inspection because too few responses had been recorded.

Information about the school

Queen Elizabeth Community High School is a larger than average-sized secondary school with a large sixth form. It serves students from Year 9 to Year 13 from a largely rural area. The current headteacher joined the school in 2008, one and a half years after the school's previous inspection. The school is in a hard federation with a local middle school which means that one governing body is responsible for both schools. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is low. The percentage of disabled students or those with special educational needs is low. Few students are from minority ethnic backgrounds or speak English as an additional language. The school has a specialism in performing arts. It is a Fairtrade School and a Healthy School and has been awarded Artsmark Gold. The school's performance exceeds the government floor standards which sets the minimum expectation for attainment and progress.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key Findings

- This is a good school. Achievement is strong. Good leadership of teaching has led to improvement and performance management is closely linked to the school's priorities. It is not yet outstanding because teaching varies in quality and weaker teaching restricts the learning of some students.
- The sixth form is good. It offers a wide range of planned opportunities both in and out of lessons. Sixth-form students make good progress and their achievement is good and rising.
- Attainment is well-above the national average. The progress of students in many subjects, including mathematics and science is good, although this was not the case in English in 2011. Boys also performed better than girls in 2011. Current information indicates that achievement across subjects and for different groups will be more consistent this year.
- Teaching is good overall. There are examples of outstanding and satisfactory practice. No inadequate teaching was observed. Teachers do not always plan lessons to take account of the learning needs of all students and the quality of marking is inconsistent. The school is at the early stages of developing common approaches to enhancing students' literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills.
- The good behaviour of students in lessons allows learning to progress swiftly. Students say they feel safe at school and their parents and carers agree. Incidents of bullying are rare and any are dealt with quickly and effectively. The overall attendance of students is average.
- School leaders evaluate the school accurately and are active in challenging themselves and others to ensure that the pace of development continues. A dip in the progress of some students in 2011 has been responded to effectively. Planning systems are thorough but targets are not always used as well as possible by some middle leaders in subject area planning.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching and ensure that any remaining satisfactory teaching becomes at least good by:
 - all teachers planning tasks and activities and using resources to meet the needs of different groups of students
 - improving the consistency and quality of marking giving regular written feedback which provides information to students on how they can improve their work
 - developing and implementing whole-school approaches to enhancing students' wider skills in areas including literacy, numeracy and ICT.
- Ensure that middle leaders develop greater consistency and precision as they plan for improvement and set targets for development.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Most students enter the school with attainment which is above the national average, make good progress overall and gain GCSE results which are well-above average in most subjects. Learning in mathematics and science is strong, leading to high attainment. Progress in English in 2011 was lower than in the previous two years particularly for more-able students. There were unexpected staffing changes during the school year which affected classes in the last two terms. Permanent arrangements have been in place for English this year. Lesson observations, scrutiny of work and the school's tracking show that students are now making good progress. In 2011, girls' achievement overall was less than boys'. The school's records, which include early examination entry results, indicate that boys and girls are now progressing at similar rates. The school's planning and effective support for disabled students and those with special educational needs mean that they make at least as good progress as others. Achievement in the sixth form is good. Sixth form attainment has increased over the last three years and students make good progress in most subjects.

Ofsted questionnaires and discussion with students indicate that most feel they learn effectively and are helped to do as well as they can by the school. Inspection findings confirm this. Students talked positively about the individual support the school gave them. Inspectors saw slower progress when teachers had not considered the learning needs of different students in their classes. Students communicate with confidence and use ICT well when given the opportunity. Some write well but their work is often presented poorly without basic errors being identified or corrected.

The very large majority of parents or carers who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire was happy with the education provided and feel that young people make good progress.

Quality of teaching

The majority of teaching is good. Inspectors observed broadly equal, smaller proportions of outstanding and satisfactory teaching. In all lessons, teachers demonstrated good subject knowledge which was used in the best lessons to seize learning opportunities and make

students' work interesting. In these lessons students highly valued the work of their teachers and said that learning was fun. Tasks were challenging and led naturally to students assessing their own and each other's work such as in an English lesson where they identified an author's technique and then used it to create an extra final chapter for a novel. In a strong drama lesson the teacher was able to use very good knowledge of each student to make sure every young person was fully involved and progressed. In less effective lessons this was not apparent and students were all expected to complete the same task at the same rate which meant that more-able students were not always fully stretched and relatively less-able students developed weaker understanding. In a few lessons tasks were undemanding for many students which led to learning lacking pace.

Teaching assistants work skilfully and often in specialist areas to enhance the learning of disabled students or those with special educational needs, but they also support students in these classes more widely.

The quality of marking is inconsistent. In a small proportion of books and other written work seen by inspectors, there was regular and thorough marking with comments that challenged students to think about what they had written. Much work was marked less systematically, often with no more feedback than a brief acknowledgement that tasks had been done (or not done) and sometimes with no comment at all. In these books, poor standards of presentation and basic spelling and grammar errors were not challenged. The school has identified that it should plan to develop students' wider literacy, numeracy and ICT skills, but this work is at an early stage and its impact is not common or coherent.

While most of the parents and carers who completed the Ofsted questionnaires felt that teaching was effective, a few indicated that they had concerns over its quality and some identified particular issues and inconsistency in additional comments. These were sometimes linked to teaching when regular teachers are absent. Inspectors found that teaching in the school is good overall. A number of longer-term staff absences has been resolved and the school works hard to ensure that learning continues if permanent teachers are not available.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The quality of the relationship between students and teachers is strength of the school. Students are typically courteous, polite and sensible. They show good respect for their adults and each other. They move around the school calmly and purposefully and are aware of others even in some constricted corridors. Behaviour in lessons is good. Inspectors saw no instances of disruptive behaviour which slowed the pace of learning. The school's records of behaviour show a reduction in the number of recorded incidents over the last three years. The rate of fixed-term exclusion is well below the national average and permanent exclusions are very rare. Students are taught good safety awareness in lessons in subjects including science and technology and put this into practice well. Instances of bullying are rare and if they occur are followed up quickly. Students are aware of different types of bullying and how to stay safe when using ICT both in and out of school. They know who to talk to if they have concerns. Students talk positively about the support that the learning mentor system gives and one parent noted typically that 'The school has a truly wonderful support system'.

Attendance is average overall and is above this for the year groups represented in the school. The school tracks individual attendance carefully and intervenes with families if problems arise. In 2011, there was lower attendance of both girls compared to boys and

students known to be eligible for free school meals compared to others, but patterns and trends in the attendance of groups of students are not identified in routine monitoring by the school. This means that issues affecting those groups could be missed. Punctuality to school for a significant number of young people can be affected by the difficulty of travel by school bus; the school is aware of this and works with all involved to reduce this risk. Punctuality to lessons is good.

The majority of students and parents and carers feel that behaviour is good, although a very small minority of parents and carers raised concerns through their questionnaires. Inspectors took particular note of these when scrutinising behavioural records, observing lessons and speaking with students and staff. They observed good behaviour during the inspection and found that behaviour had improved over the last three years.

Leadership and management

The headteacher and senior leaders share a clear vision for the work of the school. They are well supported by the governing body which provides increasing challenge. The wide variety of governor experience brings specialist skills including direct assistance with ICT development. There is planned review and development of leadership in order to maintain the rate of improvement in the school. This is based on an honest and accurate self-evaluation of all areas of the school's work which informs detailed development planning. In some areas this lacks precision, with targets that could be better defined to allow easier tracking of progress. This leads to inconsistency in the effectiveness of middle leaders' plans. The accuracy of school evaluation was illustrated by the very close correspondence in the judgements on observed teaching between an inspector and senior staff.

Performance management and professional development are built into the school's systems and many staff identify how these have helped them to meet the school's increasing expectations. School priorities are woven into development areas for individuals and this has supported the school's recent improvement in the quality of teaching. The school also responded effectively to the dip in achievement in some areas in 2011 to maintain the overall longer-term rate of progress. These indicate the school's good capacity to improve further.

The main school curriculum is broad and provides a good range of appropriate opportunities during and outside the school day. These contribute to the very low proportion of students who leave school without moving to further education, employment or training. In the sixth form the curriculum is even wider, offering enrichment activities which range from supporting the school's Fairtrade commitment to internships with the local Member of Parliament. A very high proportion of sixth form students chooses to be involved in these. They add to the school's well-developed and strong approaches to enhancing students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding and skills.

The school's policies and procedures promote equality of opportunity and ensure that discrimination in any form is not tolerated. Careful and well-targeted support is provided to enable disabled students and those with special educational needs to engage in all the school has to offer and ensure that they achieve well.

The arrangements for safeguarding students are rigorous and include good and thorough practice in appointing and checking staff. They meet national requirements.

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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	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.



23 April 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Queen Elizabeth High School, Hexham NE46 3JB

Thank you for the help you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school recently. Particular thanks go to those of you who gave up their time to speak to inspectors and to those of you who completed the questionnaires (especially if you had to do this twice). Your views helped us build our picture of your school.

The inspectors judge Queen Elizabeth High School to be a good school. We were pleased to see the way you approach your work, are involved in the wider activities the school offers and the positive relationships you have with your teachers and visitors. Standards of attainment in the school are high and almost all of you make good progress. We agree with the very large majority of you who told us you are helped to do as well as you can by the school and learn a lot in lessons.

The headteacher, governors, senior leaders and other teachers are determined to make the school even better and have plans to help them do this. Sometimes these plans do not set targets precisely enough and so we have recommended that this should happen. We saw that, although teaching is good overall, it does vary in quality and so we have asked the school to make sure that more is outstanding. We have asked your teachers to plan lessons which will challenge each of you and support this by marking your work more regularly and with information on how you can improve. Your learning could also be increased by the school developing the ways it helps you build and use your wider skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT; we have asked for this to be done.

You have an important part to play by continuing to do your best, presenting your work well and following your teachers' advice. We are sure that you will try hard to do these.

On behalf of the inspectors, I wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

David Selby
Lead inspector

