

Hexham Priory School

Corbridge Road, Hexham, Northumberland, NE46 1UY

Inspection dates

5–6 December 2012

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|--------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|----------|
| Overall effectiveness | Previous inspection: | Outstanding | 1 |
| | This inspection: | Outstanding | 1 |
| Achievement of pupils | | Outstanding | 1 |
| Quality of teaching | | Outstanding | 1 |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils | | Outstanding | 1 |
| Leadership and management | | Outstanding | 1 |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Upon arrival, pupils have levels of attainment very much below the national averages. Despite this, almost all make huge gains in their learning and personal development.
- Pupils overcome their difficulties with the superb support of staff, who provide them with memorable and exciting learning experiences.
- As a result of outstanding teaching, pupils make excellent academic progress. Many learn to read, write and use numbers. Older pupils gain the skills needed for moving on in life. All gain qualifications.
- The highest quality of care enables pupils to feel very safe and comfortable. Consequently, they attend regularly and greatly enjoy school. Their behaviour is outstanding.
- Each pupil's journey through school usually begins with the excellent pre-school education. Here they gain confidence and contribute readily.
- By the time they leave, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.
- Parents report enthusiastically about the great changes in their children. Parents say that, because of the work of the school, their children learn to relate to others better and take more part in family affairs.
- The sixth form is outstanding because students gain so many skills for independence, such as travelling on buses and doing the shopping.
- The headteacher has not relaxed the efforts of the senior team since the last inspection. The outstanding work of leaders and managers continuously improves teaching and learning.
- Many lessons are outstanding because teachers skilfully use information about pupils' previous learning. Nevertheless, teachers sometimes miss the chance to record exactly what it is that pupils have learnt in lessons and occasionally forget to say what the next steps of learning should be.
- The governing body is highly effective. Its members do all they can to ensure that pupils receive the best possible education.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 12 lessons taught by seven teachers and two teaching assistants throughout almost five hours. They undertook further short visits to each of the classrooms, observed pupils arriving at school, and saw them at breaktimes and when eating their lunch.
- Pupils' work and their records were examined; inspectors listened to pupils read and watched them undertake activities designed to prepare them for the early stages of reading.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils informally, for example during lessons and at the sixth form Christmas dinner.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other school managers and the school improvement partner who represented the local authority. The school nurse, two governors and the Chair of the Governing Body were interviewed.
- The views of parents were considered through meeting with three, scrutinising the school's own surveys and by viewing the 11 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View).
- The views of staff were taken into account through talking with them and by studying their questionnaires.
- An inspector spoke with the headteacher of a local school that undertakes a shared (dual) registration with Hexham Priory to explore her views of the school.
- The work of the school was observed and documents concerning planning, finance, self-evaluation, safeguarding, attendance and pupils' progress were scrutinised.

Inspection team

Terry McKenzie, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Jan Stephenson

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school admits pupils of any age from three to 19 but the majority join in the early stages of their school career and continue beyond the statutory leaving age.
- Most experience severe learning difficulties. For many, their needs are complex and include profound and multiple difficulties, physical difficulties and autistic spectrum conditions.
- Almost all come from a White British background. Around one quarter of the pupils are known to be eligible for the pupil premium; this is high compared to most other schools nationally. About one third of all pupils are girls.
- The catchment of the school is huge and many travel a considerable distance to attend. For some their journeys can take up to an hour.
- A small number of pupils share their school registration with other mainstream schools so that they attend part time. Occasionally, Hexham Priory arranges for staff to work in these mainstream schools in an advisory capacity. However, there are no formal partnerships with other education providers and there is no alternative provision organised for pupils.
- Since the last inspection there have been some changes to the way that management works in the school within the senior and middle management teams.
- Hexham Priory has recently gained recognition as a National College Leadership Development School and it has renewed its Healthy School status.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- In order to understand even more thoroughly how much progress pupils make in lessons teachers should, when recording pupils' learning:
 - carefully note what individuals have learnt, as well as what they have done, in a lesson
 - identify what the next steps of learning should be.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- From very low starting points the great majority make progress well in excess of expectations. This is shown by the learning that takes place in lessons. The school's own records indicate that pupils make much more progress than in most other similar schools.
- Sensible targets for learning are set so that in lessons pupils are challenged by just the right amount.
- From every small success they make, pupils gain self-confidence. A great feature of the school is the infectious enthusiasm with which pupils undertake their work and play. This was apparent when one told an inspector, 'I love school because we learn all the time!'
- Superb gains are made in literacy, partly as a result of the wise spending of the pupil premium funding on staff and resources to support those for whom it is intended. In almost all lessons pupils develop and use methods of communication such as signing, using pictures and machines, and learning to speak and listen. This allows them to successfully take part in other areas of learning such as science and history.
- Pupils of all ages make outstanding progress, including boys and girls, and those with different learning difficulties and disabilities. Pupils who attend part time also do very well and this was confirmed by an inspector's discussion with a headteacher from one of the shared registration schools.
- In the sixth form their progress is outstanding and this culminates in all older pupils gaining qualifications that show they have gained skills and learnt to do things independently in preparation for moving on to the next stages of their lives.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Teaching is rarely less than outstanding because teachers, including those in the sixth form, plan in great detail to provide memorable experiences for pupils.
- Teachers show great character and personality in their classrooms and these qualities help keep pupils thoroughly involved. Teachers and teaching assistants make excellent use of resources such as the equipment for information and communication technology (ICT). Furthermore, all skilfully use aids to help pupils move about the school and be included in lessons through communicating effectively. This ensures that none are left out.
- Teachers ensure that lessons are exciting. They capture the imagination of pupils. For example, in a literacy lesson the teacher provided a large range of materials for them to touch, smell and see, in addition to using imaginative ICT. The purpose was for pupils to listen to a story but, as a result of the teacher's great efforts, all were enthralled and made great progress in their listening and in recounting of the story.
- Pupils are very active in lessons rather than just passively listening to teachers. A secondary science lesson about floating and sinking was very successful because pupils were given every chance to experiment with forces using play dough and water before confirming their learning through group discussion and the use of ICT.
- Teachers direct teaching assistants and use their classroom resources with great skill so that pupils get just what they need to succeed. Great attention is given to the organisation of classrooms so there are different learning 'zones' for different purposes. For example, for those pupils with autistic spectrum conditions, quiet individual spaces are provided so that they are not distracted by their classmates, and there are always the more comfortable areas for sharing ideas as a whole class or listening to a story.
- The adults take seriously the school motto 'never underestimate a child's ability' so pupils are challenged to the limit in lessons. Consequently, they enjoy learning and do exceptionally well.

- Teachers keep a close watch on how well pupils are doing in their learning and this is a great improvement since the last inspection. On a daily basis pupils' achievements are captured and recorded so pupils always feel that their efforts are valued. However, yet more could be done to record how pupils have moved on in their learning rather than just what activities they have done. This would help teachers to plan even better for the next steps of learning and keep tasks even more closely matched to what pupils can achieve.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Parents and staff say that pupils feel very safe in school. This is also shown by pupils' smiles and laughter while learning and playing.
- Pupils' safety is supported by the work of other professionals in the school, such as nurses who provide the personal help and guidance of an adult nature to those in the sixth form. Therapists train staff to move pupils safely and to help them speak clearly so they are not left out.
- Pupils attend regularly. Several parents reported that their children 'can't wait to get ready for school in the morning!'
- Those who are capable say the school is very safe. There is no bullying because of the constant high adult presence. Any conflicts or difficulties are speedily settled.
- Pupils' behaviour is almost always outstanding. They are so busy that there are few opportunities for anything except exemplary behaviour; this carries over to the public areas of the school and can be seen during lunch and breaktimes.
- The school's records indicate that pupils greatly improve their behaviour and personal development. Much is done to encourage pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through, for example, ensuring all join in with learning and that they learn to work together. Consequently, pupils build strong relationships with each other and with staff.
- The curriculum provides excellent cultural and spiritual experiences. Art work adds breadth to what pupils learn, as do additional experiences such as a recent 'drumming day'. Pupils find out about others and different communities by having 'international days'. Many attend residential holidays and all undertake trips and visits away from the school site.
- In the sixth form they gain skills that stand them in good stead when moving on. They learn to travel, undertake work experience and handle money when shopping. One inspector was invited to the sixth form Christmas dinner they had prepared. Their polite conversations and table manners were impeccable, showing that they certainly know how to conduct themselves in company.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Managers have rigorously improved the outstanding quality of teaching to the extent that it is even better than it was at the last inspection. The evidence for this is the effect that teaching has on the great successes of pupils.
- Leaders at all levels share a very clear vision of what is best for pupils. They are committed to ensuring that they receive the best possible education and care. For example, the curriculum is designed to provide an exciting range of experiences while ensuring that pupils have every chance to develop their skills in communication, reading and writing. Parents very much value the work of the school. Several commented on the commitment of the staff and how well staff keep in touch.
- Through gathering information about how pupils learn the headteacher ensures all have opportunities to make progress, are included in learning and that none are discriminated against. Leaders can see from these records if any pupils are not meeting expectations. They then quickly make adjustments to put things right.

- Since the last inspection more staff have taken on responsibilities in the school, which has added even more to the quality of leadership and management. Morale among staff is very high.
- The headteacher maintains high standards for staff and assures the quality of their work through regular checks. Staff are supportive of each other and thoughtful about their work. They want the best for pupils and are managed extremely well by the senior team. Regular and skilful monitoring of lessons by managers takes place; teachers are then provided with helpful targets to make things even better. Staff have been well trained to help pupils develop their literacy skills. Consequently, there is a uniform approach to supporting reading and communication through attention to the sounds that letters make (phonics).
- The local authority values the work of the school and supports it through the school advisor. The school purchases a range of services from the local authority and has recently appreciated the work of the human resources department.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Members of the governing body know the work of the school very well and are passionate about their roles and responsibilities. They demonstrate this through attending regular 'away days' together so that they can get to know each other better and attune to the work of the school. Several visit regularly to see the school in action and listen to any concerns raised by staff. Governors fulfil their responsibilities rigorously, including checking regularly that all requirements for safeguarding and recruitment are met, that the pupil premium and other funds are correctly allocated and that performance management is undertaken with the headteacher and all other staff.

What inspection judgements mean

| School | | |
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| Grade | Judgement | Description |
| Grade 1 | Outstanding | An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment. |
| Grade 2 | Good | A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment. |
| Grade 3 | Requires improvement | A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection. |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate | <p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> |

School details

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| Unique reference number | 122386 |
| Local authority | Northumberland |
| Inspection number | 403799 |

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

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| Type of school | Special |
| School category | Community special |
| Age range of pupils | 3–19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in the sixth form | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 61 |
| Of which, number on roll in sixth form | 15 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Helen Milner |
| Headteacher | Michael Thompson |
| Date of previous school inspection | 9 December 2009 |
| Telephone number | 01434 605021 |
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