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Graeme Atkins
Executive Headteacher
Queen Elizabeth High School
Whetstone Bridge Road
Hexham
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Dear Mr Atkins

Short inspection of Queen Elizabeth High School

Following my visit with Michael Reeves, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 3 November 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in April 2012.

This school continues to be good.

You and the leadership team have moved the school forward since the previous inspection. This is because you have high expectations and work effectively so that, as a consequence, there has been a three-year improving trend in attainment and progress. You and the team rigorously monitor the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning. As a result, pupils' outcomes are strong. The school prepares pupils very effectively for life in modern Britain; they are confident, polite and well aware of the needs of others.

The previous inspection report identified the need for the school to develop the roles of middle leaders so that they play a more consistent and precise role in improving teaching in the subjects they lead. The school has moved effectively to address this. Supported by senior leaders, middle leaders are increasingly playing a key role in supporting, monitoring and assessing the impact of teaching in their areas of the school.

The governing body is ambitious for the school and knows it well. Governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and the areas that could be improved even further. This is because they hold leaders to account robustly. They gain clear insights into the school's effectiveness through their regular visits and direct links to a range of subjects and aspects of the school's work. Governors are keen to improve their skills further and attend regular training to ensure that they are up to date and that their work reflects the best available practice.

The school is a calm and purposeful place. Pupils work well together and relationships are strong. Pupils report that they enjoy school and appreciate the care and challenge that teachers show. A significant number of the pupils I spoke with commented on how staff readily make themselves available and 'go the extra mile' to help them with their work.

They are carefully and effectively prepared for the next stages of their life and learning. They are confident, aware and tolerant. This is because the school works hard to ensure that pupils' experiences and what they learn take account of, and develop, their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding.

Parents who responded to the online survey, Parent View, are overwhelmingly supportive of the work of the school and the way it is led. They are confident that their children are happy, safe and well taught. The school sees communication with parents and their involvement as key aspects of its work as it seeks to improve even further. Because of this, school leaders regularly review communication systems and are always open to comment from parents.

Safeguarding is effective.

Firmly established and very robust systems ensure that pupils are safe. You and the governing body attach the highest priority to this vital aspect of the school's work. Safeguarding systems and routines are regularly reviewed to ensure that they are of the highest quality. There is regular and thorough training of all staff in matters associated with keeping pupils safe. Pupils report that they feel safe and that the training and guidance they receive is relevant, interesting and helpful. Pupils say that, should they feel uncertain or unhappy, they would readily tell staff and be confident that the matter would be dealt with thoroughly.

Inspection findings

- The school is well and imaginatively led. The executive headteacher has high expectations and these are clearly communicated to and shared by staff and pupils. Governors also share these high standards. Governors constantly seek to improve the ways in which they robustly monitor the school's progress and hold leaders to account for their work.
- Leaders monitor the work of the school rigorously. The systems that have been put in place to check on the quality and impact of teaching are effective. This is because the information that leaders, including middle leaders, gather and evaluate is carefully and creatively linked to staff training so that expertise is further strengthened and developed. This continuing development of teachers' expertise is helping to raise standards even higher.

- The work of middle leaders is a growing strength of the school. Senior leaders are developing the skills of middle leaders so they support, monitor and evaluate the work of their teams effectively. Senior leaders work closely with middle leaders and regularly check their work. This approach is having a positive impact on pupils' outcomes across the school.
- The school's sixth form is very effective. Pupils respond positively to teachers' high expectations and perform well so that they are very well prepared for their next steps in education, training or employment. Staff carefully monitor sixth form pupils' progress. Pupils report that they value the subject expertise of teachers and the many ways in which support and encouragement help them to do well. Most of the pupils who enter the sixth form without C grades in English and mathematics attain good grades by the time they leave, particularly in English.
- The way in which the school advises and guides its pupils and helps them with their choices for the next steps in their education, training or employment is a strength of the school. Pupils are guided and supported well so that they make measured decisions from a very well-informed perspective.
- The school's own monitoring has identified that disadvantaged pupils' attendance is not as good as that of other pupils at the school. Outcomes for this group of pupils are improving and leaders see that they would do even better if their attendance improved. Leaders, working with the governing body, have put in place a range of measures to improve the attendance of this group of pupils. This has included the recent appointment in the summer of 2015 of a member of staff to oversee attendance. Early signs are that this and other initiatives are having a positive impact on disadvantaged pupils' attendance.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- all staff focus relentlessly and specifically on each disadvantaged pupil's needs and remove barriers to learning so that the gap between the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils and those of their peers continues to narrow
- the good practice and skills of the most successful middle leaders are extended so that all middle leaders are precise and detailed in the monitoring and support of their teams.

I am copying this letter to the co-Chairs of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Northumberland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Evans

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this short, one-day inspection I met with you, members of the senior team, staff, the co-Chairs of the Governing Body and other governors. I also spoke with an officer of the local authority on the telephone. Inspectors visited a range of classrooms with members of your senior team and they spoke with staff and pupils about their work and their experience of the school. Inspectors also scrutinised a range of pupils' books. My colleague met with a group of pupils in Key Stage 4 while I spoke with a group of sixth form pupils at lunchtime. I reviewed information on Parent View. I reviewed a range of documents including the school's most recent evaluations of its performance and records and logs of behaviour. I took into account responses to a questionnaire by 43 staff.