

Hexham Middle School

Wanless Lane, Hexham, Northumberland NE46 1BU

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| Inspection dates | 14–15 June 2016 |
| Overall effectiveness | Good |
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Good |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Good |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Outstanding |
| Outcomes for pupils | Good |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Requires improvement |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The school website states that 'this is a friendly, welcoming school, built on foundations of mutual respect and care for others'. Inspectors confirm that this is indeed the case.
- There has been a marked improvement in the quality of teaching and standards reached by pupils since the last inspection.
- Currently, from their different starting points, pupils make good progress in most subjects, including English and mathematics.
- The executive headteacher, ably supported by the head of school, senior team and governing body, is determined to make the school the very best it can be. The school continues to improve at a pace.
- Systems and processes to check the quality of provision and the rate of progress that pupils make are excellent. Leaders at all levels use this information wisely to intervene when needed.
- Leaders have an excellent understanding of the strengths of the school and where they need to focus next in order to improve outcomes for pupils further. Development planning is strong.
- Pupils are typically courteous, polite, and show a deep level of respect for one another. Their behaviour is outstanding. Their love of learning is clearly evident.
- Arrangements to keep pupils safe are highly effective. Pupils are kept safe and feel safe.
- Teaching is good. Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They make good use of assessment to plan challenging and interesting work for pupils of different abilities.
- Extra-curricular opportunities are effective in promoting learning. These are given a high priority, as leaders say that 'arts, sport and other opportunities help shape pupils as individuals and as citizens of the wider world'.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is still some variation in the quality of teaching across the school, and in developing pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum.
- Some disadvantaged pupils do not make the same strong rates of progress as other pupils in the school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the progress made by pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, by:
 - developing pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum, including a focus on spelling, punctuation and grammar
 - ensuring that the best teaching practice in school is more widely shared and that the quality of teaching continues to improve.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The executive headteacher, together with the head of school and other members of the senior team, has transformed the school. The striking feature of leadership is the way in which it has embedded systems and processes so that nothing is left to chance. Information about how well pupils are progressing, how often they attend school, and the quality of teaching is collected, trends are tracked and then leaders ensure that any issues are addressed. They do this with precision, and make any refinements quickly and decisively. As a result, the quality of provision at school is increasing rapidly.
- School self-evaluation and development planning are first-rate due to the detailed and careful analysis of information and data across the school.
- Leaders talk of the 'marginal gains' that they are seeking – tweaks that can be made to ensure that every individual teacher and pupil performs to the best of their ability. Staff morale is high. Pupils know that adults at school want them to succeed and be happy.
- The leadership of teaching and learning is a particular strength. School leaders work well with staff to improve the quality of teaching. Pay progression is linked to improved teaching, leadership and achievement. Professional development for teaching staff is linked to their own performance in the classroom and is highly individualised. Teachers appreciate this support and respond to the good quality of advice given. As a result, the quality of teaching is good and improving. Leaders know that the next step is to ensure that the best teaching practice in school is shared more widely so that the quality of teaching continues to improve.
- When needed, the appraisal system challenges teachers to improve robustly. As a result, teachers meet the teaching standards comfortably.
- Middle leaders are well supported by the senior team. They understand their areas of responsibility well, and are improving the quality of provision at a pace.
- Pupils benefit from a stimulating curriculum, with a wide variety of exciting topics and trips which spark in them a love of learning. Extra-curricular opportunities are impressive, and the 'engagement tracker' ensures that any pupils not engaging in a certain area of school life, for example sport or culture, are encouraged to do so. Origami club, construction club, rock band, debating society and mixed hockey are examples of clubs. There is even demand for a times tables club.
- International week, World Book Day, fund-raising, topics considering life in Afghanistan, opera and theatre visits pepper the academic year and the curriculum. As a result, the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is strong. Values of tolerance, acceptance, fairness and justice are central to life at school, as seen in lessons and assemblies. The school prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders check the progress of disadvantaged pupils to see what impact their spending of pupil premium funds has had. They identify those requiring help with their literacy or numeracy skills and provide extra support. In addition they identify those that need emotional or behavioural help and ensure that this is in place.
- School leaders use the physical education and sports funding effectively. Teachers have honed their skills through additional training, and pupil participation in the summer and winter games at school has increased. Pupils have achieved some notable successes in local competitions.
- Careers education is well organised and plays an important role through the curriculum. Displays around school highlight the importance of different subject areas in different careers.
- Leaders work hard to ensure that all pupils achieve well, no matter what their background. Their personalised approach ensures that pupils are treated as individuals. As a result, the performance of all groups of pupils continues to improve.
- The local authority provided a good level of support when the school needed it most. Once advisers identified that improvements were well underway, they provided high-quality advice and less intense support. The local high school in the hard federation has provided excellent practical support and advice since the last inspection.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governance of the school is very strong. Governors have a full understanding of the school and its strengths and areas for development. They make an excellent contribution to school self-evaluation and development planning. They make sure that the school gets full value from the additional funding it receives to support pupils who are disadvantaged and those who need to catch up, and from the physical education and sport premium at key stage 2.

- Governors ensure that health and safety regulations are fully met and that pupils are safe in school. The financial management of the school is good. The governors bring an excellent range of skills and experience to support and challenge the leadership of the school. They are highly ambitious for the school, and their high expectations have helped it to improve.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are highly effective. Leaders have ensured that the site is safe, and that a robust system of training is in place for staff in all areas of safeguarding, including e-safety, and issues linked to radicalisation. Staff are appropriately trained to deal with any issues raised by pupils themselves that might have implications for their well-being. Any referrals to outside agencies are well organised.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The quality of teaching across the school has improved significantly since the last inspection. Teaching is now consistently good. Parents and carers and staff agree that the quality of teaching has improved.
- There is a high level of consistency in teaching. Leaders have ensured that policies and procedures are followed so that all pupils receive a good standard of teaching. For example, marking is of a good quality across the school, and the AIMSS system (A – what pupils have achieved, I – what they need to improve, M – how to move on, S – what spellings to focus on, and S – student response) is used by all teachers. Similarly, the assessment system is also well structured and understood by parents and pupils. For each subject pupils are assessed against age-related expectations and judged to be at one of four levels (entering, developing, secure, and mastery), and these are fine-graded further into three categories.
- Teachers are good at observing the pace of learning and shape lessons and planning accordingly. They are skilled at identifying when pupils are beginning to fall behind, or do not grasp a concept. They use this assessment to plan additional support, or modify next steps in planning. Pupils show a high level of resilience, and try hard in lessons. Teachers have high expectations of pupils. They question pupils well, and challenge their thinking.
- Teachers use a variety of activities and topics to engage pupils. In a Year 5 English lesson, for example, the class worked collaboratively to write an extended text reviewing the year, and pupils responded with interest. In a Year 7 science lesson there was a real buzz when pupils were investigating natural indicators using different foodstuffs and making hypotheses. In Year 8 science, pupils were challenged to write at length about the journey of a sperm and its struggle to reach an egg. Pupils say that they enjoy creative and challenging activities.
- The school knows its pupils as individuals, and programmes to help those with special educational needs or disability are strong. Their specific needs are well addressed and, as a result, they make good progress. Similarly, teachers are aware of disadvantaged pupils and support them to make good progress.
- The most able pupils are challenged well through deep questioning that pushes their thinking. Extended tasks help them develop their answers and written feedback helps them focus on improving their understanding even further. As a result they make good progress across the curriculum.
- Homework is used well to practise skills and to extend learning.
- English and mathematics are well taught at school. Leaders are aware of the strengths of teaching. They have identified that sometimes opportunities to develop literacy across the curriculum (specifically spelling, punctuation and grammar) are missed, and are working hard to plug these gaps. Developments such as a focus on key words or 'buzzwords' and a focus on minimum expectations or 'non-negotiables' in writing are beginning to bear fruit.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils are committed to their learning. They have very positive attitudes in lessons and show a high level of focus. The vast majority are resilient and give of their best. They grapple with new concepts and make a concerted effort to understand. Their positive attitudes to learning are central to the progress they make.
- Pupils' books are neatly presented and well cared for, indicating the pride they take in their work. Their pride and self-discipline are also evident in pupils' smart appearance, and their readiness to learn.
- Pupils take opportunities to lead within the school very seriously. The school council ensures that the

perspectives of the pupils are heard. A prefect system is in place, where pupils apply and go through an interview process in order to be offered these roles. There is a strong house system which promotes school cohesion by helping pupils of different ages to compete together. Pupils trained as sports, English and mathematics leaders help teaching staff across the school in Years 5, 6 and 7, and with transition arrangements.

- Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to keep safe. Of note is their understanding of how to stay safe online, which is promoted across the curriculum, on the website, and through advice given to pupils and parents. They know that they should eat a balanced diet and exercise regularly. An increasing number are involved in extra-curricular sporting activities. Pupils understand that although the school is housed within different buildings and the site is large, relevant procedures are in place to ensure that visiting adults are appropriately checked.
- 'The base' is used by pupils who need any additional pastoral support or help in maintaining positive relationships with peers or adults. This nurturing environment helps pupils gain confidence and prepare themselves for learning at school.
- On transition into school, Year 5 pupils are mainly based in the Orchard block. This helps the youngest pupils orientate themselves and to feel safe in a school much larger than many of their first schools. This is appreciated by parents.
- Pupils and parents say that the school is a safe place to be. Pupils are confident they would be supported if they needed to disclose any concerns to an adult. They say that all types of bullying are rare and teachers act quickly if bullying is reported.
- The school supports pupils to develop into rounded citizens. They are ready for high school when they leave Year 8. They understand, at an age-appropriate level, what it is to live in Britain and what helps make a tolerant and welcoming society.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils are courteous, polite, and show a deep level of respect for one another. They move around the site calmly, sensibly and considerately. They are very well behaved in the dining areas and open spaces. In practical lessons and science, pupils behave safely.
- Behaviour in lessons is excellent. Pupils listen to each other respectfully, and respond quickly to any directions from members of staff. Instances of low-level disruption are rare. As a result of this, there have been no fixed-term exclusions for over two years.
- Pupils are very proud of their school and treat it with respect. The school is well ordered and tidy. There are many displays of pupils' work relating to topics that are being studied.
- Leaders' work to improve attendance has been highly effective for all groups of pupils. Attendance has increased significantly and is currently above the national average. Persistent absence has also declined for all groups of pupils. This is another example of robust systems in school having a very positive impact on outcomes for pupils.
- A majority of the parents who responded to Parent View believe that the school ensures that its pupils are well behaved, and a similarly large majority of those parents who responded would recommend this school to others.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Achievement has risen sharply since the last inspection. Pupils now make good progress from their starting points in reading, writing and mathematics. Some pupils make outstanding progress. The rate of progress that pupils make continues to accelerate. The information that teachers and middle leaders have about the standards that individual pupils are reaching is very well used to challenge them to make even better progress at school.
- Pupils join the school in Year 5 from a variety of local first schools. Their attainment when they arrive is above national expectations. They make good progress in Years 5 and 6. In 2015 from their key stage 1 starting points the proportion of pupils making expected progress was well above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. Many pupils made more than expected progress also.
- Pupils continue to make good progress in Years 7 and 8. The attainment they reach is well above what is expected for their age, and they are well prepared for the academic rigours of Year 9. The progress they make in art, design and technology, and science is particularly strong. The progress pupils make in history and geography has been slower in the past, but is improving.
- One of the striking features in the standards the pupils reach at school is their ability to express

themselves orally. Pupils speak confidently in class, and are able to articulate complex ideas with some ease. They are able to explain their thinking and give well-thought-out reasons and explanations.

- The quality of pupils' reading and writing, displayed in English lessons and in exercise books, is good because of teachers' high expectations. Most pupils enjoy reading and are competent readers. The library provision is excellent, and pupils are involved in a variety of reading events and competitions.
- The progress pupils make in mathematics has stepped up a gear since the development of a more demanding curriculum which emphasises mathematical reasoning and problem solving.
- School leaders know that the progress of some disadvantaged pupils needs to accelerate. In 2015 fewer of these pupils made more than expected progress than other pupils at the school. Systems to check the progress that pupils are making are very refined and focus on individual pupils. Because of this, personalised targets and support are helping those that need to make more rapid progress.
- There is a good level of challenge for the most able pupils in lessons. As a result, their knowledge and understanding improves and they make good progress from their starting points. Teachers know who needs that 'extra push' and look for ways of challenging them.
- Senior leaders carefully monitor the progress of pupils who have special educational needs or disability through the year and ensure that they receive timely support. They make good progress due to the support they receive. Their attainment is rising towards that of other pupils.
- The school ensures that no time is wasted between key stage 2 and key stage 3 as they know the pupils' strengths and weaknesses and can build on what they already know straight away. Strong partnership work with local first schools also helps the school know the pupils when they arrive in Year 5.
- The school offers effective support to those pupils who are at risk of falling behind. It uses Year 7 'catch-up' funding to provide additional support for these pupils. The school's information on the impact of this extra help indicates that pupils are making gains in their reading, writing and numeracy as a result.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 122364 |
| Local authority | Northumberland |
| Inspection number | 10012003 |

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

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| Type of school | Middle deemed secondary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 9–13 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 445 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Simon Kitchman and Sandra Thompson (co-chairs) |
| Headteacher | Graeme Atkins (executive headteacher) |
| Telephone number | 01434 602 533 |
| Website | www.hexhammiddleschool.co.uk |
| Email address | admin@hexhammiddle.northumberland.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 22–23 January 2014 |

Information about this school

- This middle-deemed secondary school is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils eligible for support through pupil premium funding is below average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils who have support for special educational needs or disability is average.
- The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is below the national average.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school uses no alternative provision.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The school is part of a hard federation with the local high school. An executive headteacher and a single governing body are responsible for both schools.
- The school has received high-quality support from the local high school in the hard federation, Queen Elizabeth High School, and from Whitley Bay High School.
- Since the last inspection, a new executive headteacher, head of school, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher have been appointed, and the governing body has been reconstituted.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in lessons and groups of pupils working. Joint observations of teaching were conducted with the assistant headteacher and findings discussed.
- Inspectors observed pupils at breaktime and when moving around the school.
- They talked to pupils in lessons about their experience at school and looked at work in their books. They talked to two specific groups of pupils about the school, the behaviour of pupils and the quality of teaching.
- Inspectors held meetings with members of the governing body and the teaching staff, including middle and senior leaders. An inspector spoke to a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 99 responses to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire, Parent View, the 43 responses to the online pupil questionnaire and the 19 responses to the online staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised a range of documentation including: the school's view of its own performance; monitoring records; information about pupils' progress; improvement planning; minutes of the meetings of the governors; and records of behaviour and attendance. They looked closely at records relating to safeguarding and child protection, and at policies, including those published on the school's website.
- A range of other evidence, including displays, the school website and evidence representing the school's wider achievements beyond the classroom, was also considered.

Inspection team

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|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| Dr Michael Wardle, lead inspector | Ofsted Inspector |
| Catherine Garrett | Ofsted Inspector |
| Mark Nugent | Ofsted Inspector |

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