

# Inspection of an outstanding school: Hexham Priory School

Corbridge Road, Hexham, Northumberland NE46 1UY

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Inspection dates:

2 and 3 February 2023

## **Outcome**

Hexham Priory School continues to be an outstanding school.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Leaders have created a warm and welcoming place. Pupils enjoy attending school. They care about each other and form positive relationships with their peers and adults. There is a sense of calm all around school. Pupils feel safe and happy and make the most of the opportunities they are given. Pupils thrive in this environment.

Pupils understand what bullying is; they know that there can be cyber-, emotional and physical bullying. However, it is not something that happens at school. Pupils talk fondly about the staff and say that staff are always there to help them out if there is a problem. If pupils have a worry or a concern, they are happy to chat to staff and feel that they get good support. A pupil commented, 'Teachers make you feel welcome, they push you hard, but not too hard; they care about their students.' This typified pupils' views.

Pupils have a say in what happens in school and their own education. Many pupils know what targets they have on their plans, and if they do not, they know that they can access and read them at any time. The school council is run by pupils who have been voted in from each class. Pupils enjoy being part of decision-making in school, for example in contributing to summer festival ideas and sharing events with other schools.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

Leaders make considered choices about what will work best for pupils. The three pathways of pre-formal, semi-formal and formal enable staff to teach a curriculum that is tailored to pupils' needs. In each pathway, expectations are high, with pupils experiencing a curriculum that slowly builds knowledge and skills as they move through the school.

Communication and interaction lie at the heart of the curriculum. Leaders have implemented communication bands. Pupils are placed into a 'band' that is determined by their individual communication ability and comprehension of language. These bands span the three pathways. As a result, staff support small groups of pupils with content and strategies to meet pupils' needs. This includes using eye-gaze technology for pupils in

pre-formal bands, picture exchange communication systems and a symbols and sign programme, together with phonics for pupils accessing the formal pathway.

Leaders, teachers, teaching assistants and other professionals work seamlessly together across the school. The input from health professionals, including in speech and language therapy, physiotherapy and occupational therapy, ensures that experts contribute, on a weekly basis, to pupils' next steps. All staff contribute to 'pupil passports'. Systems for checking on the progress of pupils are exemplary, and as a result, pupils achieve well.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are wonderful. In lessons, they are engaged and enthusiastic and love to give their opinions. Although classes are small, staff still skilfully adapt the curriculum to personalise learning. For example, key stage 4 literacy lessons include the use of two texts with different levels of language complexity for identified pupils to study.

When pupils do become dysregulated and find behaviour more of a challenge, there is always adult help available. The use of individualised behaviour management plans helps staff to know exactly what to do in a moment of crisis or anxiety. Staff are calm and patient and use bespoke strategies sensitively to get pupils quickly back on track.

Staff support pupils' personal development from the moment they are collected from school transport in the morning. They model positive relationships and expect pupils to show appropriate independence. Leaders are aspirational for pupils. The curriculum in early years introduces children to people who help us, and includes trips to the fire service station and a farm. As pupils then move through the school, they access daily community visits to develop life skills, such as shopping, using money and social interaction. Pupils have jobs in school. Students in the sixth form design their own enterprise projects, such as baking goods to sell, washing staff cars or designing prints for school T-shirts and hoodies.

Leaders have dramatically improved post-16 destination opportunities for students. They have a relentless pursuit and determination for students to achieve their potential. As a result, more students now access work-related opportunities, college, internships and further training.

Staff enjoy working at the school. They appreciate the actions that leaders have taken to reduce their workload and for the well-being support they receive. Useful networks across the multi-academy trust's schools enable staff to discuss specific special educational needs issues. School leaders, trustees and members of the local advisory board all share the same aspirations and vision for pupils. Effective information-gathering and subsequent quality assurance mean that leaders know where to prioritise their efforts and resources.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are particularly aware of the additional vulnerabilities the pupils at this school face. Leaders ensure that all staff receive ongoing training so they are equipped to spot any

signs of concern. When a pupil has been identified as being at risk, staff are notified so that they can monitor behaviour and be aware of any changes. Record-keeping on the school's online recording system is thorough. As a result, the designated safeguarding leads are able to track and quickly follow up on any pupils where there are concerns. Leaders have designed a curriculum to help pupils to manage risk and understand how to keep themselves safe. The regular use of community visits is particularly important to teach pupils about appropriate, safe interaction with strangers.

## Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in March 2018.

## How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

## Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

## School details

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| <b>Unique reference number</b>                    | 146121   |
| <b>Local authority</b>                            | Northumberland   |
| <b>Inspection number</b>                          | 10255787   |
| <b>Type of school</b>                             | Special  |
| <b>School category</b>                            | Academy special converter  |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                        | 2 to 19  |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                           | Mixed  |
| <b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>   | Mixed  |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>        | 117  |
| <b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b> | 22   |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>                      | Board of trustees  |
| <b>Chair of trust</b>                             | Barry Nolan  |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                                | Louise Burns   |
| <b>Website</b>                                    | <a href="http://www.hexhamprioryschool.co.uk">www.hexhamprioryschool.co.uk</a> |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b>                | Not previously inspected   |

## Information about this school

- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school joined Eden Academy Trust, a multi-academy trust, in September 2018.
- The school provides education for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This includes pupils with autism spectrum disorder, multi-sensory impairment, severe learning difficulties, and profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- The school does not currently have any provision for two-year-old children.

## Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- The inspectors did deep dives in early reading, communication and interaction, and 'myself and my body'. The inspectors spoke to leaders about the curriculum and met with teachers from the lessons they visited. The inspectors looked at pupils' work and spoke to pupils.
- The inspectors listened to a range of pupils from different year groups reading aloud.
- The lead inspector met members of the local advisory board, members of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer.
- The inspectors looked at the single central record and spoke to leaders, teachers, governors and pupils about safeguarding.
- The inspectors considered the responses made by parents and carers to Ofsted Parent View, including any free-text comments. Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire and responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.
- Inspectors observed pupils at breaktime and lunchtime and met with pupils from the school council.

### **Inspection team**

David Milligan, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Moira Banks

Ofsted Inspector

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