

Inspection of Ponteland High School

The Crescent, Callerton Lane, Ponteland, Northumberland NE20 9EG

Inspection dates: 23 and 24 May 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders and staff have high ambitions for what pupils can, and will, achieve at Ponteland High School. Pupils understand that they are expected to give their best every day. Pupils reflect these expectations in their positive attitudes to learning and excellent conduct. Around the school, there is a warm and friendly atmosphere. Staff and pupils share strong, respectful relationships.

High-quality pastoral and academic support are available to all. Pupils know there is someone they can speak to if something worries them. They feel safe in school and appreciate the excellent facilities available. As a result, many pupils participate widely in extra-curricular activities. These include several musical groups, sports teams of all abilities and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.

Staff communicate regularly with parents to celebrate pupils' successes. Pupils who learn to play an instrument have their talent recognised during rehearsals. Large numbers of pupils participate in educational visits and trips abroad. These opportunities broaden pupils' horizons and help them understand the wider world.

Leaders have focused on the right priorities at the right time. This has led to sustained improvements in the quality of education and behaviour at the school. There is absolute commitment from leaders at all levels to make the school the best that it can be.

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

Curriculum leaders are ambitious in the choices they make about what pupils will learn. They have carefully considered the important knowledge that will best prepare pupils for future education and employment. The expectation is that everyone can progress in the education and career of their choice. The curriculum enables pupils to develop the skills, knowledge and understanding to do this. The work of teachers is informed by an 'Action Research' project, opportunities to share resources and high-quality professional development.

Staff are knowledgeable about their subjects. They ask questions that help pupils to understand each topic in depth. Pupils excel because staff have high expectations of them. Pupils' verbal and written responses are detailed and demonstrate the pride they have in their work. However, at times, opportunities for pupils to debate and discuss challenging topics in more depth are missed. Students in the sixth form are equally well supported in the classroom because staff clearly understand the demands of post-16 education. A wide variety of courses meet students' needs well.

Staff assess what pupils know and can do on a regular basis. This helps them to identify where pupils might need further support or guidance. Pupils respond well to the tasks set and demonstrate a strong knowledge of the curriculum. Students in the sixth form produce detailed answers to the complex tasks they are set.

Staff highlight important vocabulary, read regularly with pupils and share challenging texts with students in the sixth form. Leaders' work to support pupils who are at an early stage of learning to read is new. Strategies to improve pupils' fluency and comprehension have been prioritised. However, approaches to improving pupils' phonic knowledge are less well developed.

Leaders have ensured that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are fully included in classrooms. Staff understand how to support pupils with a range of needs. Plans to support pupils with SEND are precise. They include the specific strategies that will benefit each pupil the most. In some lessons, further adjustments are required to ensure all pupils with SEND learn as well as their peers.

Pupils' wider development is a priority for leaders. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum has been well considered. Topics about staying safe online, the protected characteristics, diverse cultures and fundamental British values are included. However, there is too much variability in staff's subject knowledge and approaches to teaching these lessons. Pupils' understanding of the important messages this curriculum contains is variable. A small number of pupils report bullying connected to some of the topics this curriculum covers.

Those who attend the school, including students in the sixth form, have access to independent careers advice and guidance. They are ambitious in their future education and career choices. However, opportunities to learn about careers across the curriculum are more limited. Important messages about finance and living independently are included in sixth-form enrichment opportunities. However, many students do not participate in this offer. This limits how well prepared they are for life after education.

Staff are unanimously proud to work at the school. They are well supported by leaders who understand the impact of workload on staff well-being. Those responsible for governance, as well as leaders in the trust, know the schools' strengths well. They have the knowledge and skills to hold leaders to account when needed.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders, staff and governors understand that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. They know that young people need to be educated about risks they might encounter online or in person. If staff have a concern, however small, they share this with leaders responsible for safeguarding. There is a culture of safeguarding and an understanding that 'it could happen here'.

Records show that actions are taken quickly to safeguard young people at the school. Leaders work with external agencies, families and the community to protect pupils from harm. Ongoing training for staff on local risks requires some refinement, for example to include stronger messages about the risk of county lines exploitation.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Support for a small number of pupils who are at an early stage of learning to read is underdeveloped. Leaders have adopted strategies to improve pupils' fluency and comprehension. However, pupils whose phonic knowledge is not secure do not receive enough support to catch up. Leaders should make sure they develop strategies to identify and support pupils whose phonic knowledge is weak and provide appropriate staff training.
- The implementation of the PSHE curriculum is inconsistent. The subject and teaching knowledge of staff are variable. As a result, some pupils' understanding of diversity, inclusion and British values are weak. A minority of pupils do not demonstrate British values as well as they might. Leaders should evaluate how well the PSHE curriculum is implemented by staff. They should ensure pupils understand the main messages it conveys, planning development opportunities for staff in response to their findings.

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

Unique reference number	145783
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10268160
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,581
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	283
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Gerry Miller
Headteacher	Stefan McElwee
Website	www.ponthigh.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Ponteland High School became part of the Pele Trust in 2019.
- From September 2019, the school admitted pupils in Years 7 and 8 for the first time. The school now educates pupils between the ages of 11 and 18.
- The school makes use of one provider of off-site alternative education. This provider is registered and subject to inspection by Ofsted.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the principal, senior leaders and representatives of the trust. Inspectors spoke to teaching and non-teaching staff, in addition to representatives of the local governing body. The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer.
- To evaluate the quality of education, deep dives were carried out in English, mathematics, geography, religious education and modern foreign languages. Inspectors spoke with curriculum leaders, visited lessons, looked at books and spoke to both pupils and staff. Inspectors also met with curriculum leaders for science and history.
- Inspectors met with leaders responsible for careers education at the school.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils about their experience in lessons, enrichment opportunities and what it is like to attend the school.
- Inspectors met with early career teachers and those who mentor them.
- Inspectors examined the schools' behaviour records, spoke to pupils who had been suspended from school and spoke with providers of alternative education.
- Inspectors met with the special educational needs coordinator. They looked at a range of documentation, including education, health and care plans and individual learning plans. Inspectors also checked how pupils with SEND are supported in lessons. One inspector visited the nurture classroom within the school.
- Inspectors checked the school's safeguarding policies and procedures, including checks made on all adults who come onto the school site. Inspectors spoke with pupils and staff to ensure their understanding of safeguarding procedures. An inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead to check on their work to keep pupils safe in school.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's parent, pupil and staff surveys, including free-text responses.

Inspection team

John Linkins, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
David Bailey	Ofsted Inspector
Karen Gammack	Ofsted Inspector
Jill Bowe	Ofsted Inspector

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