

Inspection of a good school: Highfield Middle School

Highfield Lane, Prudhoe, Northumberland NE42 6EY

Inspection dates:

5 and 6 March 2024

Outcome

Highfield Middle School continues to be a good school.

The head of this school is Richard Oades. The school is part of the Cheviot Learning Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the co-chief executive officers, Simon Taylor and Alice Witherow, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Paul Carvin.

What is it like to attend this school?

Highfield Middle School is a place where pupils' achievement, effort and contribution to the school community are regularly celebrated. Pupils take part in a wide range of enrichment activities. This encourages them to explore new talents and interests. Pupils are positive and confident. They feel safe and well supported by staff who know them well. Leaders have high expectations of what pupils can accomplish personally and academically.

Bullying almost never happens at the school. If it does, pupils know an adult will help them to sort things out. Highfield pupils understand the importance of including everyone. Staff encourage pupils to support one another through becoming Equality Stars, 'Sports Leaders', or peer mentors. They enjoy encouraging each other in sporting competitions. Leaders have formed strong links with local schools. Pupils experience of transition is a positive one.

Strong relationships between staff and pupils create a calm and respectful atmosphere. Sometimes pupils push the boundaries of the school's behaviour expectations. This is rare. The school helps pupils develop into resilient and ambitious young adults. Annual residential trips and a varied careers programme develops pupils' understanding of the wider world. It raises their aspirations for their future. Learning is enriched by the outdoor classroom.

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

The school have designed their curriculum to meet the needs of both key stage 2 and key stage 3 pupils well. The curriculum takes account of what pupils already know and what

they will need to know in future. This ensures pupils have the skills and knowledge they need to be well prepared for high school. The school has identified the most important vocabulary required in each unit of work. This is helping pupils to communicate clearly and explain their ideas with greater confidence.

Staff are knowledgeable about the subjects they teach. In most lessons, staff explain new ideas clearly so that pupils understand each topic. For example, in English and mathematics, there are regular opportunities for pupils to re-visit their prior learning so that it is not forgotten over time. Staff quickly identify what pupils do and do not remember. They use this information to plan new learning. However, this is not the case in all subjects. In some foundation subjects, processes for checking pupils' understanding are under-developed or used inconsistently. This means staff cannot accurately identify gaps in knowledge and ensure pupils know how to improve their work in future. Where this is the case, pupils learn the curriculum less effectively.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are included in all aspects of school life. Adults working with SEND pupils know them well. The school's curriculum can be adapted to take account of pupils different SEND needs. The school provide ongoing training for staff to increase their knowledge and expertise in this regard. This ensures pupils get the right support at the right time. Leaders develop strong partnerships with parents of SEND pupils.

The school are exploring new ways to develop a love of reading amongst pupils. This includes daily reading sessions, competitions, rewards and 'recommended reads'. Pupils who are still not confident readers get specialist support. The schools' reading programme is having a strong impact on how widely and how often pupils read.

Most pupils have high attendance at school. Leaders have successfully encouraged previously poor attenders to come to school more often. The school knows they have more to do to improve the attendance of some vulnerable groups of pupils. This work has begun. Specialist staff provide dedicated support for wellbeing in the 'Arc' and the 'Bungalow'. This provision is helping pupils develop confidence and resilience, supporting them to attend school more regularly.

The schools' wider offer for pupils is excellent. The personal, social and health education pupils receive helps them understand how to live healthy and happy lives. Pupils learn about those that are different from themselves. As a result, the school is an inclusive and tolerant place where everyone is welcome.

Staff feel valued and are proud to work at the school. They appreciate the many opportunities they have for professional development. Governors support and challenge school leaders to ensure the school continues to thrive. They understand their roles and responsibilities well.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The way in which teachers check what pupils know and remember in some foundation subjects, lacks precision. As a result, gaps in pupils' knowledge are not identified and addressed consistently. Pupils do not learn the intended curriculum as well as they might. The school should ensure that pupils' understanding is systematically checked to identify misconceptions accurately and provide clear, direct feedback so that pupils learn the intended curriculum well.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. 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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Highfield Middle School, to be good in July 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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	146871
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10297457
Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	9 to 13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	402
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Paul Carvin
Headteacher	Richard Oades
Website	www.hms.cheviotlt.co.uk
Date(s) of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- In September 2023, the school joined the Cheviot Learning Trust.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this ungraded inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders. The lead inspector also spoke with a chief executive officer and trustees as well as members of the local governing body.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: English, mathematics and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with some pupils and teachers and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in a range of situations, including in corridors, at breaktimes, at lunchtimes and in lessons. They also spoke to pupils about behaviour and bullying. Inspectors spoke with leaders, teachers and pupils about the school's programme of personal development and careers provision.
- Inspectors considered the responses from parents to Ofsted Parent View. This included the comments submitted via the free-text facility. Inspectors also considered responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey and staff survey.

Inspection team

John Linkins, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Karen Gammack

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
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