



Highfield Middle School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 122340
Local Authority Northumberland
Inspection number 292376
Inspection dates 1–2 February 2007
Reporting inspector Moira Fitzpatrick

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary	School address	Highfield Lane
School category	Community		Prudhoe, Northumberland
Age range of pupils	9–13		NE42 6EY
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01661 833922
Number on roll (school)	420	Fax number	01661 830768
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Yvonne Davies
		Headteacher	Mr Alan Sample
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2001		

Age group 9–13	Inspection dates 1–2 February 2007	Inspection number 292376
--------------------------	--	------------------------------------

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Highfield School is a large middle school. Pupils are mainly of White British heritage and no pupils are at an early stage of learning English. There are fewer pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities than in most schools, but the proportion with a statement of special educational need is broadly average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The school roll has increased this year, following the closure of a neighbouring school, and this has prompted considerable organisational changes and a building programme to extend facilities. The consequence of the increased roll is that a number of specialist rooms are being used as general classrooms.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. The personal development of pupils is excellent. Pupils are happy because the exceptional care they receive makes them feel safe and secure and they love learning. As a result, their attendance is well above average. They have many opportunities to contribute to the school community and grow in confidence and independence. Their behaviour is excellent, as is their respect for each other and adults. The well-planned curriculum teaches them how to lead healthy lifestyles. They are very well prepared for the next stage of education by their excellent academic and personal skills. They are caring, mature and take on responsibility as a matter of course.

Pupils' achievement is excellent overall and outstanding in mathematics and science. In Key Stage 2, pupils make good overall progress but lower attaining pupils only make satisfactory progress in writing because they are not fully challenged in all lessons. In Year 6, pupils reach above average overall standards although fewer pupils reach the higher levels in the national tests in English than in mathematics and science. In Key Stage 3, pupils build on these standards and in Year 8 standards are exceptionally high in mathematics and science. Standards are above average in English but lower than in the other two main subjects. National tests in Year 9, taken at the neighbouring high school, confirm these very high standards. This good achievement is the product of consistently good teaching, which is sometimes outstanding, combined with the pupils' enthusiasm for learning and their very hard work. Teachers have high expectations and ensure that pupils are challenged to do their very best.

The headteacher's relentless pursuit of high standards in all of the school's work is both inspirational and challenging for staff. They wholeheartedly support his ambitions for pupils by following his lead, developing their skills and setting high standards for their own work. Together, senior managers and the headteacher provide excellent leadership and management for the school. Staff new to the school are integrated well and receive good support to help them rise to new challenges. Governors give excellent support to the work of the school. Their knowledge of the school and their ability to challenge and support it are outstanding. Together with the headteacher they have secured high-quality classroom provision through the new building project. The school's integration of staff and pupils from a school that closed has been excellent. These pupils are so settled it is impossible to distinguish them from others who have always attended the school. They are achieving just as well as other pupils and say they feel very much a part of Highfield School now and this shows how well the school has managed the amalgamation.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing of the lower attaining pupils in Key Stage 2.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils' overall achievement is outstanding and standards are exceptionally and consistently high at the end of Year 8.

The school's assessment and test data show that when pupils join the school in Year 5 their attainment is broadly average. By the end of Year 6, they reach above average standards in English, mathematics and science. Since the last inspection, results in national tests at the end of Year 6 have been above average and sometimes well above average. In the 2006 national tests, pupils' performance was above average overall. Inspection evidence shows that pupils are continuing to make good progress in mathematics and science and that pupils are making better progress in English, especially the more able pupils. The school has set challenging targets for test performance in the coming year and the school expects that pupils will meet them. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make the same progress as others in mathematics and science in Years 5 and 6, but their progress is only satisfactory in English. Boys and girls achieve equally well.

In Year 8, standards in mathematics and science are exceptionally high for children of this age. Standards in English have risen and more pupils are reaching the higher levels of the National Curriculum as a result of effective action by the subject leader to improve teaching. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make the same excellent overall progress as other pupils. The school's monitoring of the pupils' progress shows that the very high standards in Year 8 are maintained in national tests of Year 9 after the pupils have joined the neighbouring high school and that their results are very high in mathematics and science.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding because its promotion is at the heart of all the school provides. Pupils' love of school and learning is reflected in their well above average attendance. They seize the many exciting opportunities for learning, both in and out of school and relish the challenges that are set for them. They develop high levels of confidence and self-esteem because they have good opportunities to take responsibility and contribute to the life of the school through their work as buddies, mentors or prefects, or by serving on the school council. They support the wider community well and raise considerable sums for their chosen charity each year. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary; ensuring that there are no interruptions to learning and that they all feel safe and secure in school. Pupils understand the importance of healthy lifestyles; they eat healthily in school and take advantage of the many physical activities on offer after school. Many pupils regularly walk to school. By the time they leave in Year 8, pupils are very well prepared for their future with a wide range of personal and academic skills.

The recent integration of older pupils from a neighbouring school has been highly successful. In discussion, these pupils commented on how well they had been helped by staff and other pupils and had 'quickly fitted in and feel as if we belonged to Highfield.'

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are very good and improving because of the school's successful initiative to promote teachers' skills through coaching. During the inspection a good proportion of outstanding lessons were seen. Teachers plan lessons with clear learning objectives and success criteria. They share these with pupils at the start of the lesson then assess with pupils whether they have been met at the end of the lesson. This gives pupils a clear understanding of what they are expected to learn as well as the motivation to work at a good pace to please their teachers. Work is usually planned well to match pupils' needs and abilities. In mathematics, science and some English lessons, this produces a level of challenge that allows pupils to make excellent progress. Occasionally in English lessons, a lack of subject knowledge hampers teachers' ability to plan work that is suited to the needs of lower ability pupils. In these lessons, younger pupils make satisfactory but slower progress than other pupils in the school.

Teachers give clear explanations and very good demonstrations when they introduce new topics. Questions probe pupils' understanding effectively and allow teachers to assess how well pupils are learning. Pupils respond very well to this and enjoy the challenge and opportunities for discussion with learning partners or the whole class. Pupils are involved in evaluating how well they are doing in lessons and know what to do to improve their work. While there are still a few inconsistencies in the use of information about pupils' learning to plan appropriate tasks, the majority of staff are accurate in their assessments and make good use of these to move pupils forward at a very good rate. Pupils rise to the teachers' very high expectations of effort and of their concentration in all classes so that lessons proceed at a brisk pace and pupils are fully engaged. When they plan with the class teacher, teaching assistants support pupils' learning effectively, though more effective use could be made of their time and expertise in some lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and is enriched by an excellent range of after-school activities. It is well planned to serve the needs of all pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities. Planning for basic skills in English and mathematics is good; provision for information and communication technology is satisfactory and improving as a result of recent staff training. Regular review of the curriculum ensures that the school responds promptly to new demands. The well-established teaching of French

in Key Stage 2 is a good example of how carefully the school responds in its provision to local and national trends. The school's very good personal, social and health education programme provides very good opportunities for pupils to explore their own and others' feelings and learn about staying safe and healthy. The school council provides good opportunities for pupils to learn about the responsibilities of citizenship at first hand. Provision for enrichment of the curriculum is excellent. A wide range of after-school activities, visits to places of interest locally and further afield, and many visitors to the school each year all extend pupils' interests and allow them to develop their special talents. Out of school clubs are very well supported by pupils of all ages.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are excellent. The school's care for pupils is outstanding because the headteacher's vision of focusing first and foremost on the needs of the individual is fully supported by all staff. The well-being of pupils is paramount to the school and this is recognised by parents who are overwhelmingly supportive. They are delighted with the care given to their children and are full of praise for 'the dedication of the staff'. Child protection measures and safeguarding procedures are in place and used appropriately by all adults working in the school. Rigorous health and safety checks are carried out on a regular basis, and always when out of school visits are planned.

Support and guidance for learning are very good. Recent improvements for monitoring pupils' progress allow senior managers to spot underachievement or slowing of progress. Prompt action involving senior staff and class teachers ensures that interventions are swiftly put in place to support pupils whose learning appears to be slipping. Good links with external agencies ensure that pupils who experience problems are well supported and have their individual needs met.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher has ensured that the school's very high standards and quality of provision have been maintained since the last inspection. This is despite protracted involvement in the closure of a neighbouring school and the management of a large building development on site. The headteacher has been very well supported by his expert and hardworking senior leadership team who have brought about significant improvements; for example, in the monitoring of pupils' progress and in improving the attendance of some pupils whose attendance was not good enough. The school's self-evaluation is excellent: it is thorough, accurate and identifies the correct priorities. For example, weaknesses in pupils' writing have been tackled with sustained professional development for staff. Monitoring shows standards are improving but has also identified the need to review provision for lower attaining pupils in the junior classes, both of which outcomes demonstrate the school's considerable capacity to analyse and improve its performance. Given the effectiveness

of self-evaluation by subject leaders in English, mathematics and science, and the quality of the senior leadership team, the school has an excellent capacity for further improvement.

Governance is excellent. The governors give excellent support to the school. They are knowledgeable and committed and provide an exceptional level of challenge to ensure a very high quality of the provision and care for pupils. Parents are pleased to be consulted about their views of the school's developments and they are overwhelmingly supportive of the school because of what it does for their children. The school has made a very good improvement since the last inspection. In particular, the considerable challenges it has faced in the last two years have been managed with such skill that the high standards for which it is renowned in the community have been maintained.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	-----------------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Highfield Middle School

Highfield Lane

Prudhoe

Northumberland

NE42 6EY

04 February 2007

Dear Pupils

Thank you for the wholehearted welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. You really made our work a pleasure!

Your school is in the top category for schools, which is another way of saying it is excellent. This is because you and your teachers work so hard together that you make very good progress in your learning and often reach higher standards than other pupils of your age. You all seem to love learning and there were never any interruptions in lessons. You all help each other through your excellent behaviour. Feeling safe and comfortable in class are crucial to your learning - no one learns well if they are anxious. We were very impressed by how well you took on responsibility for all kinds of things, starting with being buddies to younger children, right up to being reading partners, mathematics and games coaches and now helping Year 5 pupils with their French! You fit so much into the day; it's amazing. Well done all of you.

You told us how well you are cared for and how much you trust your teachers to look after you and help you solve problems. It is lovely that your parents think so too and that we inspectors also agree. Your headteacher has your welfare, success and happiness at the heart of all his plans for the school and your teachers all support him very well in those aims. You do too, from the way you look after and support each other in lessons and the playground. We have suggested that more emphasis on writing would help some of you to achieve even higher standards and keep your school right up there with the best. You know the part you could play in that because you all know how to work hard.

Your school is helping you to develop very many qualities that will serve you well in the future and you told us how proud you are to be part of 'Highfield Middle'. One of your greatest achievements this year has been the way pupils have been welcomed from the school that was closed. You are now all part of your new classes and your school, and have given each other the most important gift you can - friendship.

We wish all of you Highfielders the very best for your future.

Yours sincerely

Moira Fitzpatrick, John Deller, Clive Petts. (Inspectors)