

Queen Elizabeth Community High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122356
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	292381
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Peter Harris HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1368
6th form	466
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sandra Thompson
Headteacher	Mr Tony Webster
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2001
School address	Whetstone Bridge Road Hexham Northumberland NE46 3JB
Telephone number	01434 610300
Fax number	01434 610320

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Queen Elizabeth High School is an oversubscribed community school serving the town of Hexham and the surrounding rural area. The main school and sixth form are larger than average. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is very low compared to the national average. Almost all students are of White British heritage and the proportion whose first language is not English is very low. The percentage of students with a statement of special educational need and the percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are below average. The movement of students joining and leaving the school is less than is found nationally. The school has been a specialist performing arts college since September 2004 and has accreditation of ArtsMark Gold, SportsMark and Basic Skills Quality Mark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Queen Elizabeth High School is an outstanding school with many strengths; all elements of its work are good and many significant aspects are outstanding. It has a large sixth form with outstanding provision and achievement. Students joining the school have above-average attainment and the school ensures they make good progress. They are mostly taught well and reached high standards in all key stages in 2006, especially in the sixth form. However, not all teaching is consistently good because the work is not always matched to the students' prior achievement. A strength of the school is its many links with the community, and with other organisations. This benefits the students and those with whom they are linked. The personal development and well-being of students are outstanding throughout the school, as are the care, support and guidance for students. Many parts of the buildings are poor. This makes the school's job more difficult and drains its budget. But, wherever possible, resources are used well and the school has improved parts of its accommodation, which has helped it to develop its curriculum in the performing arts, science, technology and vocational subjects in particular. The school is well led, with an outstanding impact on the sixth form. The school has developed and improved since the last inspection and has a good capacity to continue in its improvement. It provides good value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form is extremely successful, promoting very good achievement and high standards amongst students. Students enter the sixth form with above-average attainment and make outstanding progress because of the good quality provision they receive, alongside their own ambitious aspirations. Their personal development is exemplary and this should enable them to succeed well in life beyond school. The sixth form is an integral and inspirational part of the school and provides students with a very good range of academic and vocational courses. Older students set excellent role models to younger students and support them regularly. Students speak very positively about how they are encouraged to assume greater personal responsibility for their learning and about the excellent range of extra-curricular activities on offer. They value the good and outstanding teaching they experience and recognise that it provides an excellent bridge between pre-16 school work and the demanding expectations of independent work in higher education or employment. The vast majority of students who enter the sixth form are very successful and complete the courses they start. Pass rates and the proportion of higher grades attained are impressive. They are extremely well supported and prepared for their transition into higher education, employment or training. Leadership and management in the sixth form are highly effective and, when necessary, improvements in provision are pursued with rigour. Links with external partners are good, well managed and effective. The sixth form provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all teaching reaches the standards of the good and better teaching in the school, by ensuring that the work students undertake is always closely matched to their ability and past achievements.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students join the school with above-average attainment. The school adds value to students' attainment; they make good progress and achieve high standards. In 2006 they made good progress between what they had achieved when they joined, and when they ended their GCSE courses in Year 11. They also made good progress between the end of Year 9 and Year 11. The progress students are making at different key stages has been improving over the last three years. Students achieved high standards in Key Stage 3 tests in 2006 including, at the highest levels, in English, mathematics and science. This attainment represented an improvement on earlier years. In GCSE and other courses in 2006 students attained high standards. By the measure of the percentage of students attaining five or more higher grades at GCSE, the school is well above the national average. The percentage of students attaining this number of grades, including English and mathematics at higher grade, is also well above the national average.

Students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported. They make good progress, and often achieve better than would be expected. The school has a well organised system for setting itself challenging targets, and for gauging what is being achieved. It has met or exceeded most of its targets. The targets in subjects associated with its performing arts status have mainly been exceeded or met. Almost all subjects and courses perform well. Where this is not the case, action is being taken to tackle weaknesses and this is having good effect in most cases.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Personal development, including students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. Students arrive at school each day keen to learn. Attendance is well above average and they enjoy school. They are particularly enthusiastic about the range of opportunities that are offered outside lessons. Students are rightly proud of the excellent contribution they make to the school and local communities. For example, through the school council visits to Hexham Town Council meetings, students now have a real voice and opportunity to influence local decision-making. Students respond very well to the excellent provision for adopting healthy lifestyles. They make well informed choices at lunchtimes and readily participate in physical activity.

Students have an excellent understanding of the world of work and how to prepare for their future economic well-being. They have very good literacy and numeracy skills; they are thoughtful and reflective and show an excellent understanding of democracy, social and moral issues. Consequently, by the time they leave the school, they are mature, articulate and confident young people. Students feel safe in school and are very appreciative of the care they receive from adults. Bullying is rare, but students know that when it occurs it is taken seriously and will be dealt with effectively. Behaviour is good; almost all students behave in a very responsible manner in lessons and around the school. Relationships are very good and any incidences of inattentive behaviour are well managed. As a result, the need to use exclusion as a sanction has fallen.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. There is outstanding teaching. There is also some satisfactory teaching; not all teaching is consistently good or better because it is not always matched sufficiently to the ability of the students. The school has effective systems to bring about improvement where needed. Teaching and learning strategies are centred around a comprehensive programme of training and sharing of good practice, leading to rising standards throughout the school. Most students make good progress and show positive attitudes to their work, as a result of effective teaching. Students respond productively to knowledgeable, enthusiastic teaching that enables them to take a share of responsibility for their own learning. They enjoy lessons that involve them actively in the learning process, and welcome opportunities to work in pairs or groups. Well structured lessons provide pace and challenge through a variety of tasks and activities that engage students fully. However, learning is slower on the occasions when the teachers' expectations are too low, there is lack of challenge or there are limited opportunities for independent learning. Assessment is used increasingly in marking students' work, so that students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Parents are very appreciative of the strengths of the school but would value more reports on progress, especially from subject teachers earlier in Key Stage 4. The present emphasis in the development of teaching and learning focuses on 'personalised learning'. This forms the basis of an extensive database for monitoring students' progress and informing planning. Sixth form-teaching and learning are outstanding, building well on the thinking skills developed in the main school. The ambitious expectations of independent work prepare students very well for their learning beyond school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is good overall and outstanding in the sixth form. Developments of the vocational curriculum have extended the choices for students and the progression routes that follow ensure good provision for all students. The impact of the specialist school has led to more courses offered in dance, drama and music. Students also have the choice of assessment at GCSE by choosing either the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) or the GCSE option. The range of extra-curricular activities and participation rates by students overall exceed the targets set for the school's specialist status. The programme of enrichment activities provided for students is particularly strong, for example, in youth theatre, in music, dance and drama, as well as sporting activities. All of these are well attended and enjoyed. There are also opportunities for residential visits, foreign and field trips, across a range of subject areas. In the sixth form the wide range of courses meets the needs and interests of individual learners, including those who wish to follow vocational courses, meeting the needs of students in a rural area well through the virtual college and through partnerships with other schools and colleges. The range of courses offered assists students very well in gaining appropriate qualifications and skills for higher education or employment.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding throughout the school. Students speak very highly of their teachers' commitment and the support they receive. Parents, too, are appreciative of this aspect. The school safeguards its students well. There are robust procedures for child protection. These are understood by staff and are regularly reviewed. Effective procedures to ensure students' health and safety are properly underpinned by risk assessments. A strong pastoral system provides daily support and guidance through form tutors, enhanced by the learning and guidance coordinator in each year group. Learning mentors also play an important and effective role in support for students. Outstanding examples of the school's care for students are the partnerships that have been created with other schools and with external agencies. Considerable care is given to students' transition from their middle schools. New entrants to the sixth form are also helped by the system of induction. Year 9 students speak highly of their ease of transition to their new school and the thoughtfulness of their new teachers. There are very good systems for older students as well. They appreciate the care given by the school to guiding them on entry to the sixth form, or the advice they receive on courses elsewhere. The majority join the sixth form and they appreciate the guidance they receive as they leave for higher education and other destinations. Also outstanding is the strong multi-agency partnership set up to support vulnerable students or those at risk. Excellent arrangements have been made to support students in the Turning Point Centre. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified early, and these students make good progress. Significant changes have taken place in the process of assessing and monitoring students' academic achievement and progress. The school now has a rigorous system for tracking students' progress and for taking action when weaknesses are identified.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Leadership and management are good in the main school and outstanding in the sixth form, where major restructuring of what is offered has been successfully implemented. The headteacher takes an energetic lead in improving the school, assisted very well by his senior colleagues. The governors are well informed, supportive and use their skills well to help the school. Good systems of self-evaluation result in the school having a very clear understanding of its strengths and those areas that need further development. This enables leaders and governors and managers at all levels to have a shared vision, resulting in good improvement. In the sixth form the leadership team is well established. Its members make very good use of data to monitor and evaluate students' performance and take the actions needed to bring about high standards. As a result, students make very good progress. Monitoring and evaluation procedures are secure at the senior leadership team level, and have been developed since the previous inspection in the work of middle managers. As a result, managers are confident that they are fully involved in the self-evaluation process and that school systems are consistent. The rolling programme of departmental reviews and the resulting action plans have refocused middle managers and led to a more consistent approach to teaching and learning, which is becoming increasingly consistent across the whole school. There is a good capacity to improve. The issues identified

since the last inspection have been tackled well. Resources are deployed effectively. Very good facilities have been added to the school but the upkeep of ageing accommodation, which is often poor, remains a major concern. The school budget has been well managed and the school works hard to raise income. Despite its best efforts a deficit budget is predicted for the year-end balance.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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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	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
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	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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

Queen Elizabeth Community High School

Whetstone Bridge Road

Hexham

Northumberland

NE46 3JB

22 March 2007

Dear Students

I want to thank you all for the welcome you gave to me and to my colleague inspectors when we visited your school. We found that the conversations we had with you about the school were helpful.

You enjoy school, both in the lessons and in the many activities it offers you. You also said you appreciated the efforts the school makes on your behalf. We think the school does very well in providing a varied range of activities which you attend well and gain from.

We found you attend an outstanding school. We know that you arrive with high standards; the school builds on this and ensures you make good progress. By the end of school you have achieved good results, and outstanding results in the sixth form.

You take the opportunities the school gives you and make the most of them. As a result we think your personal development and well-being are outstanding, for example through your links with the community and in adopting a healthy lifestyle. We think the care the school takes of you; the support you are given and the guidance you receive are also outstanding.

The school is well led. The headteacher, the staff and the governors all work hard to make school worthwhile for you.

The school has no significant weaknesses and we are clear that your learning is good and better for most of the time. However, to help the school improve, we feel that on occasion more care should be taken to match the work to your past achievements so you are fully challenged.

Our sincere thanks and we wish you a very happy and successful time at Queen Elizabeth High School.

Yours sincerely

Peter Harris

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools