



Hexham Priory School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 122386
Local Authority Northumberland
Inspection number 292387
Inspection dates 16–17 October 2006
Reporting inspector Andrew Margerison

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Dene Park
School category	Community special		Hexham, Northumberland
Age range of pupils	3–19		NE46 1HN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01434 605021
Number on roll (school)	55	Fax number	01434 609022
Number on roll (6th form)	10		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Helen Milner
		Headteacher	Mr Michael Thompson
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2001		

Age group 3–19	Inspection dates 16–17 October 2006	Inspection number 292387
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector

Description of the school

Hexham Priory School caters for pupils with severe learning difficulties. However, a significant proportion of pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). Many pupils have additional medical, physical and sensory disabilities. A few pupils have been diagnosed as having autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). All pupils have a statement of special educational need. The school draws its pupils from a vast area. All pupils are brought to school and some travel a long way each day. Most pupils join the school in Foundation Stage, but a number join the school later having begun their education in mainstream schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with several outstanding features. Underpinning all of its work is the outstanding care, guidance and support provided for pupils that reflects the school's ethos of valuing each pupil as an individual and celebrating their achievements. The school places a very high priority on ensuring that all its pupils are provided with the education that best suits their needs and that they have the opportunities they need in order to flourish academically and personally. As a result, all pupils, irrespective of their learning difficulties and disabilities achieve well. The outstanding partnerships the school has established with local first, middle and high schools, external support agencies and specialist services such as the Speech and Language Therapy Service are key factors in this. As a result, many pupils spend some time each week in their local mainstream schools and they all have access to a broad range of additional support networks and learning opportunities that enhance their learning well.

Provision and standards in the Foundation Stage are outstanding. Stimulating and exciting experiences excite and enthuse pupils to find out for themselves. This creates the basis for the outstanding progress pupils make in their personal development and motivates them so they want to learn more. Pupils of all ages love being at school and take part in anything that is offered to them with great enthusiasm. They learn how to take care of themselves and the importance of having plenty of exercise and eating a balanced diet. Pupils make a very constructive contribution to the school. The curriculum is good with an appropriately strong emphasis on developing their basic communication, literacy and numeracy skills. The oldest pupils are able to gain external accreditation for their work, but currently the range of different qualifications on offer is very limited. Pupils are encouraged to make choices about their future when they leave school and to experience different options. As a result, they are really well prepared for moving on to the next phase of their lives. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have a very good understanding of what each pupil needs to learn next. Support staff make a very important contribution in lessons which enables teachers to provide a good range of different activities in each lesson to interest the diverse needs of the pupils in classes. As a result, pupils make good and sometimes excellent progress in lessons.

The school is very well led by the governors, headteacher and senior staff. They have established good systems to evaluate the quality of its work and overall, the school knows its own strengths and weaknesses well. The inspector agrees with most of the school's judgements about itself, but feels that in a few respects it has been too modest. The role of subject leaders in driving forward improvements in their areas has gathered pace in recent years; this has led to good improvements in the coherence and progression in the curriculum. They are involved in monitoring the consistency of the curriculum across the school, but with the exception of English and mathematics, are not sufficiently focused on evaluating the effect on pupils' achievement. However, they have a clear understanding of the next steps required to support learning, some of which are highly innovative. Due to this high degree of teamwork between all staff

and the shared vision for the future, the school is well placed to continue to improve further.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The provision for learners in the sixth form is good. There is a strong emphasis on encouraging learners to use their basic literacy and numeracy skills in different situations. All learners leave school with an external qualification, but the range is limited. There is a good emphasis on work-related activities and learners are fully involved in making choices about what they will do when they leave school. As a result, they are well prepared for moving on the next phase of their education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the breadth of the external qualifications available for students in Years 10, 11 and the sixth form.
- Involve subject leaders more extensively in evaluating the effect of their work on pupils' achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Children's attainment on entry to school is generally well below that expected, but there is a wide variation from child to child. Due to consistently good teaching, all children, irrespective of their learning difficulties and disabilities, achieve well. In the Foundation Stage, children get an excellent start to their education and make good progress in learning to communicate with adults and each other. More able children begin to recognise numbers and letters. Quite rightly, the school's main emphasis is on developing the pupils' basic skills of speaking and listening, literacy and numeracy. As a result, pupils make consistently good and in some cases excellent progress in these areas of their learning. They make good progress in other subjects, but the school has identified that there is scope to improve the progress of pupils in some subjects such as science. Pupils who attend mainstream schools as part of their programme, build on their learning well because the school and the mainstream schools work very closely together and use a similar learning plan as the basis for planning pupils' work. As a result, students in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, have the skills to work toward an external qualification. In 2006, all students left the school with Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) accredited certificates.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. Pupils really love being at school and join in with anything offered to them with great enthusiasm and gusto. Parents universally agree that their children enjoy school. This is reflected in pupils' good attendance. With the exception of a few pupils who miss a lot school due to significant medical problems, they all want to be there and miss very little. They learn how important it is to live a healthy lifestyle, to take plenty of exercise and to eat a balanced diet. They also learn how to look after themselves safely in different situations. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the school community. This is not only through the school council, but their outstanding attitudes and behaviour are major factors that create the distinctive 'community' atmosphere in the school. Older students find out about different work places and the options they have when they leave school. Together with their good basic skills, they are able to make informed choices about their future and are well prepared for moving on when they leave the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Inspection evidence confirms the school's view that there is no whole school area for improvement in teaching, but there are aspects that individual teachers could work on to improve their practice even further. Across the school, teachers have a very good knowledge of the pupils and very clearly know what pupils need to learn next. They use assessment information very well to plan pupils' individual education plans (IEPs). Activities in lessons, particularly in English and mathematics reflect these plans closely. Support staff are an integral part of the success of lessons and the good progress pupils make. They are closely involved in planning lessons, are very clear about their role and which pupils they are working with. As a result, teachers can plan a good range of activities that match the diverse learning needs of the pupils in each class. Together with the excellent management of pupils with difficult behaviour this ensures that pupils are well challenged. In the Foundation stage, teaching is vibrant and stimulating. It is based on providing pupils with a combination of real experiences that involve and motivates pupils, irrespective of their difficulties and disabilities by stimulating their different senses. However, there are a few occasions when elsewhere in the school this approach is not always used as well as it might which reduces the full impact of specific activities for a few pupils, particularly those with PMLD. The school recently gave a member of staff responsibility to ensure that the teaching of pupils with the most profound needs consistently reflects the best practice.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good. The key strengths are the excellent provision for pupils' personal, social and health education and the very broad range of activities provided to enrich and enhance the curriculum. These include visits to many different places in the local area and much further afield including three different residential visits, one in conjunction with a local first school. This is just one example of how the outstanding partnerships the school has forged with other schools have a really positive effect on pupils' learning and their personal development. These links enable the school to provide for all pupils an inclusive and individualised learning programme. These partnerships also enable the school to make sure that, if pupils have the skills, they can work for some of the time in their own local mainstream school. It is a notable achievement that about half the pupils are involved. This not only has a positive effect on their learning, but helps them be part of their own local community, to develop friendships with local children and improve their personal skills. The curriculum becomes more work-related for pupils as they move through the school and provides some opportunities for them to gain external accreditation. However, the range of these qualifications is limited. At present, it does not provide enough breadth to ensure that all pupils, particularly those moving through the school, some of whom are relatively academically able, have access to more challenging programmes of study in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school judged this aspect of its work as good, but inspection evidence shows that it was too modest in its evaluation. Parents are fully confident in the care provided for their children, many of whom have very specific personal care needs. Great attention is paid to health and safety of pupils. All requirements regarding child protection and ensuring that pupils are safeguarded meet requirements thoroughly. Pupils have access to a full range of additional support such as speech and language therapy and physiotherapy from the staff based with the school. The support pupils get in lessons is highly effective and the school has good systems in place to assess the progress pupils are making. Where possible pupils are involved in reviewing their own learning and contribute to their individual plans.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school is well led and managed. The headteacher and the senior management team are the main driving force behind the good progress the school has made since the last inspection. They are well supported by an informed and knowledgeable governing body who play an important part in overseeing the work of the school. Subject leaders have begun to take an increasingly important role in recent years in developing their subjects and identifying areas for development. They monitor their quality of the provision in their subjects well, but, with the exception of English and mathematics, do not evaluate the effect of their work on pupils' achievement. Some of the projects that various subject leaders are involved in are highly innovative and exploring new ways of working with pupils with significant learning difficulties. Senior managers have successfully created a whole school vision based on close teamwork and mutual respect between staff, pupils and parents. Together with the willingness of staff to take on new challenges, this is at the core of the highly inclusive ethos of the school and ensures that the school is well placed to improve further.

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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?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	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	1
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The attendance of learners	2	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
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.

Leadership and management

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

Hexham Priory School

Dene Park

Hexham

Northumberland

NE46 1HN

16 October 2006

Dear Pupils

Thank you for welcoming me to your school this week. I really enjoyed joining in with your lessons, looking at your work and talking to you about your school. I am pleased to report that I think you go to a good school.

I am particularly impressed with the way that your school gives so many of you the chance to work in mainstream schools. This is the result of the outstanding links your school has forged with other schools. You are taught well; you get a really good start in the Foundation Stage and benefit from an excellent personal, social and health education programme. The standard of care and support provided for you is first class. As a result, you love coming to school, really enjoy getting involved and behave excellently. Importantly, you also achieve well in your studies.

To make your school even better I have asked the governors and staff to provide a wider range of external qualifications for you to work towards in Years 10, 11 and the sixth form. Your school is very keen to improve things and the staff have done a lot of work to improve the curriculum. To help them make it even better, I have also asked them to check the effect that the new things they provide for you have on how well you learn.

Thank you again for your help and I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Andy Margerison

(Lead inspector)