

Hexham Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122364
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	314278
Inspection dates	14–15 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Sheridan

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	470
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Adrian Woolley
Headteacher	Mr David Watson
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Wanless Lane Hexham Northumberland NE46 1BU
Telephone number	01434 602533
Fax number	01434 608755

Age group	9–13
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Hexham Middle School is situated in the market town of Hexham where the majority of its pupils live. Pupils start at the school in Year 5 and leave at the end of Year 8. The school has recently entered into a governance federation with a local high school. The number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. Most pupils speak English as their first language. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is in line with the average although the number of pupils with a statement of special educational need is slightly above the national average. The school has been awarded a Leading Aspect award and a Sports Mark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Hexham Middle School is a good school. Pupils make good progress in an environment where they grow into mature and reflective learners. The personal development of pupils at the school is outstanding.

Pupils say that they enjoy school and they appreciate the wide range of opportunities available to them through the good curriculum. The majority of parents support this view. One parent's comment that was typical of many said that, 'This is a great school, providing education for the children in its widest sense – both academic and also with a wide variety of fun extra-curricular activities.'

The pastoral care and support that the school provides is outstanding. Pupils are very well cared for in an environment where they flourish and mature into independent, self-motivated young people. A minority of parents expressed concern over the behaviour of some pupils in the school. Inspection evidence, including discussions with pupils, shows that behaviour overall is good and many pupils demonstrate exemplary behaviour around school. The school's systems for monitoring and managing behaviour are robust. Pupils say they feel safe, free from ridicule and confident that problems are dealt with quickly and decisively.

Overall, teaching is good and pupils make good progress as they move through the school. Pupils enter the school with average standards. When pupils leave the school at the end of Year 8 they have reached standards in English, mathematics and science that are above average. However, progress in mathematics is slower than it is for English and science in Years 5 and 6.

Some teachers provide good academic guidance to help pupils understand what they can do to improve their work. However, the quality of marking, feedback and the use of targets varies across the school.

The good curriculum means that pupils enjoy their education. The school offers an excellent mix of sporting and artistic experiences that enrich the curriculum further.

Opportunities for pupils to learn about other cultures and communities in the wider world are well developed. These include whole school projects that engage with issues and events around the world. There are also opportunities for residential trips in Europe. Opportunities for pupils to engage with cultures and communities other than their own in this country are limited.

Leadership is good. The senior leadership is committed to a shared vision of excellence in classroom practice and curricular opportunities. Middle leaders share this vision and together they have created a climate where there is a commitment to raise standards in a supportive and inclusive environment through a broad and exciting curriculum.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency of marking, assessment and feedback across the school by sharing good practice.
- Continue to raise standards in mathematics in Key Stage 2.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Attainment is average in Year 5 when pupils enter the school. All groups of pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress. By the time pupils

reach the end of Year 8 they have reached above average standards overall. In Year 8 pupils are meeting and exceeding challenging targets.

In Years 5 and 6 progress is slower in mathematics than it is for English and science. The school is aware of this and current school improvement is focused on raising standards in the subject for these year groups. This is beginning to have an impact. Rates of progress increase in mathematics in Years 7 and 8 so that by the time pupils leave attainment is in line with English and science.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The calm, mature and purposeful atmosphere that permeates the school is indicative of the outstanding personal development and well-being of its pupils. Pupils develop outstanding spiritual, moral and social understanding. Pupils consider and talk about deep and intangible issues with sensitivity and maturity. They have a good understanding of other cultures and there are frequent opportunities for them to reflect on issues and events around the world. Pupils are able to talk about the diverse and multicultural nature of our nation with sensitivity and maturity, largely because of their outstanding spiritual and moral development. However, the range of pupils' experiences of our wider national community is limited. They make a significant contribution to their own community through charity work, concerts and through the arts.

Most pupils demonstrate exemplary behaviour. They conduct themselves in a mature, sensitive and responsible manner around school. They care for each other and demonstrate empathy, tolerance and understanding for views other than their own. There is some inappropriate behaviour within school. The school has robust procedures that manage this well. Pupils say they feel safe in school and have confidence in their teachers and the systems in place for challenging inappropriate behaviour.

Pupils have a very good understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. They make healthy choices in their food and partake in a wide range of sporting and active activities.

Pupils' attendance is good. Most pupils know and understand the importance of regular attendance and enjoy the education they are afforded. The school works closely with other agencies in managing a few pupils with poor attendance.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall. The majority of teaching in school is good and pupils make good progress. In typical lessons pupils are engaged by the interesting and relevant subject matter. Teachers extend pupils' thinking effectively. Pupils ask challenging and pertinent questions which demonstrates a desire to learn and an engagement with the lesson. Good progress is made because work is well matched to pupils' starting points and they are motivated to do well. A minority of lessons are satisfactory because there is more emphasis on the teacher talking with fewer opportunities for pupils to contribute to discussions or ask questions to extend their knowledge. While work in these lessons is usually appropriate for pupils' ability, some of the activities are less engaging and require less thought from pupils.

In those lessons where teaching is outstanding the pace of learning and interaction is remarkable. Strong relationships exist where a bond of trust is developed between pupil and teacher leading to a learning environment where pupils freely take risks and, as a result, their progress accelerates. A key feature in the best teaching is the excellent use of assessment by the teacher and pupils to understand where individuals are in their learning and the next steps they need to take.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It is broad and balanced and fulfils National Curriculum requirements. It is inclusive and meets the needs of different groups of pupils equally well. It is responsive to local circumstances and supports pupils to make a positive contribution to their community through events such as concerts and participation in competitions. The school provides visiting speakers and one off events such as challenge days and enterprise events that stimulate pupils' imagination and enjoyment. Activities and events develop interpersonal skills that will support their transition to the next stage of their education and their future economic well being.

The curriculum is structured to support independent, paired and group learning very successfully. Pupils are effectively encouraged to develop their spoken language and reasoning skills, for example when justifying their emerging ideas. Provision for information and communication technology is good and pupils confidently use technology across the curriculum to support and enhance their learning. The curriculum is also enriched through an extensive range of popular extra-curricular sporting and music activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The systems, procedures and practice in place to provide pastoral care and support are outstanding. These lead to the outstanding personal attitudes and well-being of pupils. This is largely due to the strength of relationship and trust between many teachers and pupils.

Pupils say they have confidence in the school's systems to keep them safe and that adults in school are approachable and they feel secure in sharing issues and problems with them. Pupils understand that their concerns will be taken seriously and, where appropriate, action will be taken. Procedures for ensuring pupils' health and safety, including procedures for safeguarding, are robust.

The school, through its extended school partnership with the high school, provides extensive support for pupils. The school is swift to engage other agencies, including a parent support advisor, to support and advise pupils and their families.

Transition arrangements between partner schools are good. The school has recently entered into a federation with a local secondary school to promote and develop further shared working and smooth transition.

While there is some good practice found in school relating to academic guidance that helps pupils move forward in their learning, the quality varies. The school is aware of the need to make this consistently good and useful by providing clear guidance about the next steps in learning for pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The quality of leadership and management is good. The headteacher and senior leaders have firmly established a clear and ambitious vision and direction for the school. The headteacher has actively promoted responsibility amongst subject leaders and heads of year. This has successfully led to a collective commitment and ability to raising all pupils' achievement within a caring, supportive school. Governors monitor and evaluate the work of the school critically and well. They provide the school's leadership with an astute blend of challenge and support. The school is accurate in its self-evaluation. The school's capacity to make further improvements is good.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
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
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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?	2

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
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

16 May 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Hexham Middle School, Northumberland, NE46 1BU

You will no doubt remember that I recently visited your school along with my colleagues John Farrow and Margaret Hilley.

The purpose of our visit was to inspect your school. This letter is to let you know our findings.

Your school is a good school. You make good progress in your learning. We found that most of you enjoy school and that you are keen to do well. You told us that you enjoyed the range of activities on offer at your school. We agree that they are impressive and they help to create a broad and exciting curriculum.

You told us that you feel safe and well cared for. We found that your school has thought carefully about how it ensures you remain safe and its systems are doing this well.

We are particularly impressed with your personal development. Most of you join in activities and lessons with enthusiasm. Your questions and observations in lessons were impressive. We found that you and your teachers create an environment where you feel able to take risks and try out ideas in class without feeling uncomfortable or worried about other pupils' response. You should be proud of this. We believe that it is this environment that contributes to you becoming confident, expressive young people.

We have asked your school to improve a couple of areas.

While you make good progress in your learning, we found that some pupils make slower progress in mathematics in Year 5 and 6. We have asked your school to improve the rate of progress you make in these year groups.

We know that in some lessons the comments, marking and advice that teachers give you is better than in others. We have asked your school to identify the best ways of helping you understand how to move forward in your learning and develop these so all teacher use similar techniques.

Thank you for your hospitality during our visit.

Michael Sheridan

Lead inspector