

Ponteland Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122329
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	327701
Inspection dates	29–30 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Ann Wallis

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 (total)	604
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Ian Cooke
Headteacher	Dr Caroline Pryer
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2005
School address	Callerton Lane Ponteland Newcastle upon Tyne Tyne and Wear NE20 9EY
Telephone number	01661 824853
Fax number	01661 860020

Age group	9–13
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Ponteland is a larger than average middle school. It serves mainly Darras Hall, surrounding rural areas in Northumberland and cross boundary areas of west Newcastle. The majority of pupils come from advantaged backgrounds. A well below average proportion of pupils are entitled to free school meals. Most pupils are White British and few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The school has Sportsmark, Healthy Schools and Eco Schools awards and Investors in People status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Ponteland Middle is an outstanding school where pupils thrive. Pupils reach high standards and their achievement and personal development are excellent. Pupils and their parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and tremendously appreciative of the excellent education it provides. Parents comments included, 'the support our son has received has been fantastic' and 'I cannot praise the school highly enough, both of my children have received an extremely high standard of education and have been very happy'. Both parents and pupils are particularly appreciative of the huge range of extra curricular opportunities such as trips and visits, sporting and musical activities and residential courses which the school offers.

Standards are very high and pupils' achievement is outstanding. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school in Year 5 is high. They make outstanding progress as they move through the school and reach extremely high standards when they leave at the end of Year 8. Pupils achieve so well because teaching and learning are of such a consistently high standard. During the inspection, the team observed a far greater proportion of good and outstanding teaching and learning than normally seen. No lessons were less than satisfactory. This high quality of teaching and the outstanding curriculum pupils follow leads to quite exceptional standards of work and enables pupils of all abilities to gain confidence and develop life skills of a high order.

The school has a very welcoming, calm and friendly atmosphere in which pupils feel very secure. Pupils' health, safety, achievement and enjoyment are at the very heart of the school's work. Staff have very high expectations of their pupils and are continually challenging them to achieve their very best. Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning and respond very positively to the challenges set. They relish the wealth of opportunities they are given to contribute to the school and the wider community. Pupils' behaviour is impeccable. Their high attendance is a testament to how much they enjoy school. All pupils receive excellent personal care and support. Pupils' progress is tracked carefully and they receive good academic guidance on how to improve their work further. However, the school is aware that the assessment of pupils' work, and the setting of individual targets, although already good, can be further refined and developed.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher has a very clear vision for improving the school further and enriching the education of every child. She is supported by a very able and enthusiastic senior team whose blend of skills complement each other very well. Leaders and staff at all levels are self critical and are continually looking for ways to improve the high standards attained by pupils and to broaden their education beyond the classroom. Consequently, the school is exceptionally well placed to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop and implement consistently the already good systems for assessing pupils' work and setting individual targets for improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Standards are very high and pupils' achievement is outstanding. Pupils enter the school half way through Key Stage 2 and leave before the end of Key Stage 3. Therefore the results of national tests which are taken at the end of Year 6 have to be interpreted with care. In the 2007 tests at the end of Year 6, pupils' results were well above average overall. The higher

Level 5 was reached by over half of pupils in English, and mathematics and by three quarters of pupils in science. Results were similar in 2008. Given their starting points and capabilities, pupils' achievement was outstanding. Pupils continue to make excellent progress in Years 7 and 8 and reach extremely high standards. In 2008, Year 8 pupils left the school having reached standards in English, mathematics and science which were well above those expected of pupils one year older in Year 9. Current pupils were seen to be making at least good and often outstanding progress in lessons. The school's own data, results of practice tests and work seen in pupils' books all indicate that pupils are on track to reach extremely high standards again and meet the challenging targets set for them. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve just as well as their peers because they receive constructive individual help from teachers and teaching assistants.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development and well-being are outstanding. Assemblies make an important contribution to pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, in one assembly pupils considered what the Muslim children present were experiencing as they celebrated their beliefs during Ramadan. The assembly ended with a cross-faith prayer that gave all those present an opportunity for quiet reflection. Behaviour and attitudes to learning are outstanding and pupils of diverse backgrounds state that the school is very harmonious. Bullying is rare and racial abuse non-existent. Attendance is excellent, reflecting how much pupils enjoy school. Pupils and staff show great respect for each other and this makes a significant contribution to the school's very strong ethos.

Pupils have a heightened awareness of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle through the very good dietary choices available in the dining hall. Pupils also get three hours of physical activities each week and there is a vast range of opportunities for extra-curricular physical activities. Pupils are very proud of the school and the contribution it makes to the community. For example, the older pupils help run the local first schools' sports tournaments and pupils are regularly commended for their fundraising activities. Pupils prepare particularly well for their future lives through, for example, opportunities provided by the local Education and Business Partnership which develops their financial and enterprise capability very well.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are excellent. This is because the school's managers relentlessly seek to promote high quality lessons through a cycle of observation that constantly informs staff training. Typically, there is an exceptionally good learning atmosphere in class because teachers interest and fully engage their pupils with a good variety of activities and challenging work. They plan their lessons extremely well and deliver them confidently with a brisk pace. Very good class management is a key feature, particularly when pupils use apparatus and move around to work in pairs and groups. Lesson time is used to the full, restlessness is extremely rare and pupils usually conduct themselves impeccably because they have a high regard for the staff. They enjoy their classroom activities and are keen to make good progress. Teachers mark pupils' work thoroughly and share assessment data with them so that they have a good grasp of the actual amount of progress they are making.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The outstanding curriculum reflects the strong inclusive ethos of the school which successfully develops the whole individual. It provides pupils of all abilities with very challenging routes for the progression of their learning, especially in English, mathematics and science. Exceptional partnership arrangements with the local schools and external agencies add greatly to the very wide range of enrichment activities and experiences. For example, a summer school organised with the involvement of local universities, a local television company and businesses has covered such varied topics as nano-technology inventions, eco-sustainability, bio-cultures and a wide range of sports. Pupils really enjoy the curriculum that the school provides for them and their experiences are enriched with very many visitors, trips and an extensive use of information technology. A very positive flexible approach allows the school to suspend the timetable to enhance learning and personal development through further experience of enterprise and fundraising activities. The needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are met well through early identification and good support both in class and through individual learning programmes.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding and contributes significantly to pupils' outstanding personal development and well-being. A strong and caring ethos extends throughout the school. Pupils' welfare is consistently at the forefront of staff's actions and pupils feel that all adults are very supportive of their needs. A key feature of the school's commitment to pastoral care and academic guidance is the tutoring and mentoring system that effectively cements pupils' outstanding personal development with their exceptional achievement. Comprehensive systems are in place for risk assessments to monitor health and safety at school, and for outside trips and visits. National requirements for child protection are fully met and staff receive regular training to update their skills in these matters. Very strong partnerships exist with outside agencies that help to provide sensitive and effective care for pupils, especially those who are most vulnerable. Pupils with special talents in sport, music and art are provided with opportunities to extend their skills and interests further.

The extensive links with partner schools ensure secure induction into Year 5 and transfer to Year 9. Parents are very pleased with the regular contact the school establishes by telephone and the informative reports about pupils' progress.

Good academic guidance is provided through a robust tracking system that gathers information about all pupils' progress at regular intervals. Teachers, teaching assistants and learning mentors carefully monitor the progress of those who cause concern or need extra support. The school recognises the need to refine and develop its assessment and target setting systems further to ensure all pupils have even better academic guidance.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher and senior leadership team have an excellent blend of complementary skills which together ensure lessons are of high

quality and pupils' achievement and personal development are outstanding. They set very challenging targets in order to raise standards further. The appointment of new staff has further strengthened the quality of teaching and learning and added to the school's capacity to improve pupils' standards and achievement.

The work of the school is monitored rigorously and consequently it knows itself very well. Leaders and managers have identified appropriate priorities for improvement and planning for the future is excellent. Governors provide a high level of support and challenge to the school and are closely involved in school self-evaluation and future planning. Finances and school administration are very well managed and the school provides outstanding value for money.

This very inclusive school has excellent links with its Friends Association, the local community and has a very thorough understanding of its needs. Leaders and managers have ensured that pupils have a very good understanding of the wider UK and global communities through, for example, an Africa day and a close link developed with a school in Kenya.

Issues from the previous inspection have been addressed very successfully. For example, standards in mathematics have risen markedly and liaison with other schools is now a strength. The school has outstanding capacity for further improvement.

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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?	1
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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

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/or disabilities make progress	1

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	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 learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

1 October 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ponteland Middle School, Northumberland, NE20 9EY

Thank you so much for the warm and friendly welcome you gave to me and my fellow inspectors when we visited your school last week. We are really grateful to those of you who took time to speak with us and tell us about the outstanding things your school provides for you. Please also thank your parents for returning our questionnaires and letting us know their views about your school.

These are some of the things we have included in our report about your school.

- Your behaviour and attitudes to learning are exemplary.
- Yours is an outstanding school where you reach high standards.
- Your achievement is excellent.
- Your personal development and the care, guidance and support your school gives you are outstanding.
- The leadership and management of your school are outstanding.
- Teaching and learning and the curriculum you study are outstanding.

What we have asked your school to do now.

- Improve further the already good systems for assessing your work and setting you targets for improvement.

You can help your school to improve even further by working with your teachers to achieve the very best you can. Best wishes for the future.

Ann Wallis

Lead inspector