

Hexham Middle School

Wanless Lane, Hexham, Northumberland, NE46 1BU

Inspection dates 22–23 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Pupils' achievement and progress, particularly at Key Stage 2 and in writing does not compare favourably with that found nationally. Pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to write at length in all subjects.
- Although it is beginning to close, a gap remains between the attainment of pupils supported by the pupil premium and their classmates.
- Teaching requires improvement because in some lessons teachers' expectations of what pupils can do are not high enough and work, particularly for the most able, is not always sufficiently challenging.
- Teachers' marking does not give pupils consistently good quality feedback on how to improve their work.
- Leadership and management require improvement. Middle leaders are not sufficiently involved in monitoring pupils' progress and evaluating the work in their subjects.
- Systems to more effectively track pupils' progress are new. They have not yet become a routine part of the school's work nor had their full effect on speeding up pupils' progress.
- The school is not working closely enough with its feeder schools to ensure pupils' progress can be measured against an agreed starting point when they enter Year 5.
- Leaders' new strategies to improve teaching and raise achievement have yet to have their full impact on bringing about school improvement.

The school has the following strengths

- Attendance is above average. Pupils have good attitudes to learning, behave well, feel safe and are proud of their school.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs receive good personal support and make good progress.
- There is some good teaching within the school and pupils achieve well in some lessons.
- Senior leaders and governors know what needs to be done to improve the school.
- A wide range of extra sporting, artistic and musical activities, together with local and overseas visits, help to build pupils' self confidence and promote their good spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 24 lessons and part-lessons, one of which was a joint observation with the headteacher. Inspectors observed small groups of pupils being taught English and mathematics and listened to pupils read.
- Discussions were held with parents, pupils, staff, governors and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at pupils' books, progress data, safeguarding information and other documentation.
- Twenty-one responses to the on-line questionnaire, 'Parent View', were considered as well as those from the school's own parental surveys.

Inspection team

Ann Ashdown, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
David Griffiths	Additional Inspector
Anne Smedley	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This middle-deemed-secondary school is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional government funding for children in the care of the local authority, for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those from service families, is below average.
- A below-average proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, whilst a well below proportion speaks English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs who are supported at school action is well below average whilst the proportion supported at school action plus and with a statement of special educational needs is average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set out the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.
- A very small number of pupils temporarily attend off-site provision at the Hepscott Park pupil referral unit.
- The school is part of a hard federation with the local high school. One headteacher (who is a local leader of education) and a single governing body are responsible for both schools.
- The federation has specialist status in performing arts.
- The on-site provision for childcare, 'Diandjims Nursery and School Klub' is subject to a separate inspection and its report is posted on the Ofsted website.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good or better, by:
 - ensuring all teachers have high expectations of what pupils, particularly the most able, can achieve
 - providing challenging work for all pupils to enable them to make faster progress
 - ensuring marking and feedback to pupils is of consistently good quality so they know exactly how to improve their work.
- Raise attainment and speed up pupils' progress particularly at Key Stage 2 and in writing, by:
 - intervening earlier in the learning of pupils who are falling behind
 - maintaining the current focus on narrowing the gap in attainment between pupils supported by the pupil premium and other groups
 - giving pupils more opportunities to write at length in all subject areas.
- Improve leadership and management, by:
 - checking that newly introduced systems to improve the school, including those for monitoring pupils' progress, are working well and are becoming a routine part of the school's work
 - developing the roles of middle leaders in monitoring pupils' progress and evaluating the quality of the work in their subject areas
 - working even more closely with feeder schools in assessing pupils' attainment in order that their progress can be accurately monitored as they move through the school.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Pupils' progress, particularly in Years 5 and 6, requires improvement. Test results indicate that from their starting points pupils made less progress than that found nationally. Work in pupils' books, that seen in lessons and the school's own progress data all confirm that progress, especially in writing and at Key Stage 2, requires improvement.
- Pupils enter the school in Year 5 with attainment which is above average. Test results in English and mathematics at the end of Year 6 improved in 2013 and were above average in mathematics and reading but just below average in writing. When pupils leave the school at the end of Year 8 their attainment overall is above average.
- Pupil premium funding is used wisely to provide small group tuition. Good quality teaching, including that of reading, is now helping to narrow the gap in attainment between pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and other groups. However, the school has only recently introduced sharper systems to track pupils' progress and identify those pupils who need extra help. Test results for 2013 show that a gap of approximately two terms remains in both English and mathematics between pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and their classmates.
- Year 7 catch-up funding is used well to allow the small number of targeted pupils to make good progress.
- The school is now tackling weaknesses in pupils' writing. Staff have had recent training on the teaching of writing and there is an increasing focus on promoting literacy across the curriculum. However, there are still too few opportunities for pupils to write at length in all subjects.
- Pupils make faster progress in mathematics where well-structured lessons help all pupils to understand basic mathematical concepts. However, the most able pupils do not always achieve their full potential because work is not always sufficiently challenging to enable them to reach the highest levels.
- Disabled pupils, those with special educational needs, the few pupils who are from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language make good progress in their learning and achieve well. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs receive skilled, timely and sensitive support from teachers and teaching assistants.
- The achievement of the very small number of pupils who attend off-site provision is carefully monitored and this ensures that they attend regularly, behave well, are kept safe and make good progress.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because not enough lessons are sufficiently fast-paced and work is not challenging enough to allow pupils, particularly the most able, to make consistently good progress in their learning. The school's parental survey echoed this finding. Significantly more parents thought that their child was not pushed hard enough rather than pushed too hard.
- In one history lesson pupils had little opportunity to develop their skills in analysing historical objects because of the teachers' low expectations of what they could do. In another lesson, pupils, although they listened politely to the teacher and asked interesting questions, became frustrated because they were held back from moving on to more demanding tasks.
- Pupils' work is usually marked regularly but the feedback they receive does not give them clear pointers on how to reach specific targets and improve their work.
- In some lessons teaching is good and in one lesson seen it was outstanding. In these lessons all groups of pupils make good progress and achieve well. For example, in an art lesson, pupils were inspired by stimulating teaching on how to create wax and water-resistant drawings and paintings. In another lesson Year 6 pupils were excited and enthusiastic as they investigated how light is reflected in mirrors so we can see around corners.

- Teachers and teaching assistants give particularly skilled help in lessons for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs so they make good progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils have good attitudes to learning. They arrive punctually for lessons, despite sometimes having a long distance to walk between buildings, bring the right equipment and wear the correct school uniform.
- Most have enquiring minds and are very keen to learn. In lessons they answer questions readily and usually want to know more. They complete homework on time and to a good standard.
- Attendance is above average and pupils are punctual to school. Exclusions are low.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils say how safe they feel in school and parents support this view.
- Pupils are well informed about different types of bullying, including cyber-bullying. They feel that there is little bullying in school and if it occurs, it is effectively dealt with. Records show few incidents of challenging behaviour and those that there are have been quickly addressed.
- Pupils are proud of their school and keen to contribute to it. They relish opportunities to act as house captains and members of the school council and are keen to represent the school at, for example, sporting and musical events.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well in lessons, assemblies and through a wide range of exciting trips and visits. Pupils speak enthusiastically of visits to France and Holland and of taking part in challenging outdoor activities.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leadership and management requires improvement because although governors and senior leaders know what needs doing to improve the school, their initiatives to achieve this are recent and have not had time to have their full impact on outcomes for pupils.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and the management of teachers' performance is robust. Under the skilled leadership of the headteacher, well supported by governors, a culture in which good teaching can flourish is being created.
- Weaknesses are now being tackled and the rate of improvement is gaining pace. Better systems to track pupils' progress, closer monitoring of teaching and further training for staff are all helping to bring about improvement but they have yet to become a routine part of the school's work.
- Middle leaders and managers are not fully involved in checking pupils' progress, analysing assessment data for all groups of pupils and monitoring the quality of work in their areas of responsibility.
- There are close and productive links through a hard federation with the high school which enables teachers' expertise to be shared. Links with first schools ensure pupils are given good personal support and settle well into the middle school. However, these links are not sufficiently close to enable pupils' progress to be measured against an agreed starting point when they enter Year 5.
- Pupils are given mostly good equal opportunities to succeed. Discrimination of any kind is not tolerated. Although there is a gap between the attainment of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and other groups, this is now closing as governors, leaders and managers use extra funding wisely and make a determined effort to ensure it narrows even more.
- The curriculum is balanced and has strengths in the way in which it promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their good behaviour. However, it has weaknesses in ensuring all pupils make good progress in developing basic skills particularly in writing. A strength of the school is the wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer, many of which reflect the school's specialism in the performing arts, which add greatly to pupils' enjoyment of

school.

- Safeguarding arrangements are fully in place and meet requirements. Staff are suitably trained and there are good procedures for child protection and risk assessment.
- The local authority provides good support for the school. An advisor visits the school each term and gives advice on, for example, improving the quality of teaching and monitoring pupils' progress.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is good. The governing body of the federated schools has considerable expertise and is well informed about the quality of teaching, the way in which staff performance is managed and how teachers are rewarded. They are knowledgeable about how the school performance data compares to that of other schools and ask perceptive and challenging questions. Finances are well managed and the spending of extra funds, such as the pupil premium, are closely monitored. Following concerns about the progress of pupils eligible for support from pupil premium funding, governors recently produced a long report which analysed the spending of this funding, detailed its impact on pupils and made suitable recommendations for further improvement.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	122364
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	440456

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	477
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sandra Thompson
Headteacher	Neil Morrison
Date of previous school inspection	5 May 2011
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