

Inspection of a good school: Hexham Middle School

Whetstone Bridge Road, Hexham, Northumberland NE46 3JB

Inspection dates:

17 to 18 April 2024

Outcome

Hexham Middle School continues to be a good school.

The executive headteacher of this school is Graeme Atkins. This school is part of Hadrian Learning Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Graeme Atkins, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Veryan Johnston.

What is it like to attend this school?

Hexham Middle School is a warm, friendly, caring and enjoyable place to learn. Pupils feel safe and well looked after. Pupils are happy to be in school. They make every effort to get the best out of their lessons and the many other opportunities the school offers them. The school has very high expectations of all pupils. Pupils respond very well to these expectations.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. In lessons, pupils work together to help each other with their learning. Around the school, they are respectful of each other, of staff and other adults, including visitors. Pupils say that bullying is rare and that when it does occur, the school deals with it.

Leaders know their school very well. They do their best to make sure pupils get the best possible experiences. They support pupils to help them to reach their learning goals. Pupils produce high-quality work because of this. They can explain their learning and remember important knowledge.

The school provides lots of activities, which pupils enjoy. They ask pupils about which activities they would like. Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), take full advantage of these opportunities.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The curriculum is ambitious for all pupils. It has been carefully planned and sequenced in partnership with other local middle schools and the trust high school. High-quality

teaching helps them to remember important knowledge. Teachers check pupils' understanding regularly. They use different methods to do this. For example, pupils are asked to complete 'Taking Learning Forward' tasks to recall and develop their learning. Pupils appreciate the help teachers give them. Pupils can recall their recent, and not so recent, learning without much prompting at all.

The school is ambitious for pupils with SEND. They get the support they need to access the full curriculum. In science, for example, this is a very strong feature. Pupils are given frameworks to help them learn independently. Pupils with SEND typically reach their intended learning goals and achieve well. However, the school knows there is a need to further develop practice across the school so that pupils with SEND have more opportunities to work independently.

The school makes sure those who have fallen behind with their reading are identified early. Barriers to reading are identified for each individual pupil. Interventions determined by these barriers help pupils improve their reading. Reading is a high priority in the school. Pupils are exposed to high-quality texts in English too. They are becoming confident and fluent readers because of this.

Pupils attend this school regularly because they enjoy being a part of the school community. The school emphasises to pupils, parents and carers the importance of attending well.

Pupils' behaviour is exceptionally good. They know how to behave well. Pupils are encouraged to report any inappropriate behaviour or comments from others. Pupils say this kind of behaviour is very rare. The school takes swift and effective action if such incidents occur. Pupils say low-level disruption to their learning from a very small minority does occur now and then, but it is not commonplace.

A notable strength of the school is the way in which pupils' wider development is prioritised. There are 55 clubs and activities during breaktimes, lunchtimes and after school. Most pupils take advantage of these. Along with the taught curriculum, these opportunities ensure that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is high quality. The school has put in place a programme of careers advice and guidance for all pupils. This goes above and beyond the offer expected of schools.

Trust and school leaders are considerate of the workload and well-being of staff. Staff speak positively of the support senior and middle leaders offer them. Leaders make sure all staff receive necessary training and professional development. Leaders listen to the needs of staff. They do their best to provide the individual development needed. Trustees hold school leaders to account effectively. They have a strong understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the school.

Staff and pupils know who to talk to when they have a concern. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, including when online. The school makes sure pupils, including those who are the most vulnerable, have the care and support they need. There is a sense of safety and belonging in this school community.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, sometimes, the support for pupils with SEND does not provide frameworks for learning that encourages independence. Consequently, some pupils are not given the opportunity to fully succeed in tackling the challenge of reaching learning goals on their own. The school should continue to develop this aspect of SEND support so that all pupils with SEND, in all subjects, are provided with frameworks for learning that encourage independence.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in April 2019.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with SEND; pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school

meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

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| Unique reference number | 143292 |
| Local authority | Northumberland |
| Inspection number | 10323086 |
| Type of school | Middle deemed secondary |
| School category | Academy converter |
| Age range of pupils | 9 to 13 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 604 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair of trust | Veryan Johnston |
| Headteacher | Graeme Atkins (executive headteacher) |
| Website | www.hexhammiddle.co.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 24 April 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- The school is part of Hadrian Learning Trust.
- A small number of pupils attend alternative provision. The school uses local authority provision, one registered provision and two unregistered provisions.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, senior leaders, curriculum leaders and other members of staff. The lead inspector met with representatives of the board of trustees, including the chair of the trust.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science and history. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also visited lessons in some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Ofsted Parent View, along with responses submitted as free text. Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil questionnaires.

Inspection team

Barry Found, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Gabrielle Reddington

Ofsted Inspector

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