

Inspection of a good school: Hexham First School

Beaufront Avenue, Hexham, Northumberland NE46 1JD

Inspection date: 28 April 2022

Outcome

Hexham First School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils like coming to this school. They are happy in lessons and enjoy learning. Playtimes and lunchtimes are friendly and sociable. Pupils can choose from a wide range of active or quiet activities. Pupils feel safe because they know that the staff care about their welfare.

The school has high expectations for every pupil. Improvements in the teaching of reading and phonics mean that children make a good start in these areas. Staff work hard to help any pupil who has fallen behind. This helps pupils achieve well. Leaders are constantly developing the curriculum to make it more relevant and interesting for pupils. This widens pupils' horizons and experiences.

Leaders have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. The school has a clear behaviour approach. Most pupils respond well to this. The headteacher and staff provide extra support and guidance where pupils do not meet the school's expectations for behaviour. Incidents of bullying are rare. If they do occur, the school takes these very seriously.

Pupils take an active role in the community. They have many opportunities to contribute as young citizens. The school is particularly proud of their recent success in creating designs for improvements to Hexham High Street.

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

Leaders have established an effective curriculum for all subjects. However, they are not complacent. They have started to revise the curriculum to make subjects more specific to pupils' needs. This is evident in geography, where pupils learn key knowledge and vocabulary linked to their locality. Learning about the local woods in Reception or the River Tyne in Year 4 are examples of how teachers bring geography to life and make it relevant. Leaders are now working methodically to improve other subjects in a similar fashion. Leaders have established a well-designed and well-sequenced curriculum in mathematics. This helps pupils to build their mathematical knowledge from Nursery through to Year 4 effectively.

Teachers explain new ideas clearly. They show pupils how new learning builds on their prior knowledge. Teachers use a range of approaches to check that pupils have remembered what they are being taught. Leaders are refining their approaches to assessment to make these more consistent across the school. Recent revisions to the marking and feedback policy make assessment more effective and take account of staff's workload. Assessments enable teachers to check what pupils know and remember.

Leaders have established a consistent approach to the teaching of phonics and early reading. The impact of this is clear in Reception, where most children have secure phonics knowledge for their age. In other year groups, staff use a range of effective approaches to help pupils who have fallen behind to catch up quickly. Staff have accessed appropriate training to develop their expertise. Leaders have planned further training to embed this expertise and to train staff who have recently joined the school. Older pupils take part in regular reading lessons to continue to improve their reading knowledge. They talk with interest about the books they are reading. The high profile of reading is evident around the school. This is notable in the attractive school library, in classroom displays and at playtimes, where books are available for pupils to read.

Leaders have established clear school values, known as 'The Hexham Way'. Pupils in the main respond very well to these expectations. Leaders and staff have put strategies in place to guide any pupils who do not meet the school's behaviour expectations. This includes seeking guidance from external agencies.

The school provides a wide range of sporting and cultural activities to widen pupils' horizons. Opportunities for community involvement develop pupils' sense of citizenship. Pupils have important roles and responsibilities in school. Examples of these roles include reading ninjas and sports leaders. Pupils contribute to the leadership of the school by participating in the school council and the eco council.

Staff plan carefully to meet the academic and personal development needs of all pupils. This is an inclusive school where there is high ambition for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, these pupils achieve well.

Leaders have successfully steered the school through the challenges of lockdown restrictions. At the same time, senior leaders have worked with subject leaders to improve the curriculum and to clarify their leadership roles. Staff appreciate leaders' consideration for their well-being and workload.

Some subject leaders are relatively new to their roles. They are quickly gaining an understanding of the strengths of and priorities for further improving their subjects. Leaders, including governors, know that there is more to do to provide professional development for these leaders.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff promptly identify pupils who may need early help or who are vulnerable to safeguarding risks. The school works well with a range of agencies to secure help for pupils and families where required. Secure procedures are in place to manage safe recruitment. The headteacher knows how to manage allegations or safeguarding concerns about staff, should these occur. Staff have received suitable training in relation to sexual harassment, online sexual abuse and sexual violence. The school has recently revised its personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum. This helps pupils know how to stay safe.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not completed the intended updates to the curriculum in some foundation subjects. As a result, the way leaders have identified and sequenced the knowledge that they want pupils to learn is not as strong in these subjects as it is in subjects where leaders have completed a review of the curriculum. Leaders should implement revisions to the curriculum intent in the remaining curriculum areas.
- Several subject leaders are new to their roles. At present, they have not fully developed the leadership skills to monitor their subjects. Leaders should ensure that new subject leaders receive appropriate developmental opportunities and that leaders, including governors, review the impact of this support.

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 a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in February 2012.

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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

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

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	122203
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10228083
Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	118
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Fiona Armstrong
Headteacher	Justine Overton
Website	www.hexhamfirst.northumberland.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	3 May 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher assumed the post in September 2019.
- There have been several changes to staff since the previous inspection.
- The school does not use alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The lead inspector met with the headteacher. He met with two governors, including the vice-chair of the governing body. He held a telephone discussion with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- The lead inspector met with the leader for PSHE and the headteacher to discuss pupils' personal development.
- The lead inspector met with the headteacher to discuss the school's approach to behaviour management.
- Inspectors discussed the school's safeguarding procedures with a range of staff. They reviewed the school's documentation regarding safeguarding. They discussed how safe pupils feel safe in school and how staff teach them to stay safe, including online.
- The lead inspector analysed the responses to the pupil, staff, and parents' surveys.

Inspection team

Michael Reeves, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Deborah Ashcroft

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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