

Highfield Middle School

Highfield Lane, Prudhoe, Northumberland NE42 6EY

Inspection dates

10–11 July 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The vision of school leaders is to knit together ‘academic excellence, personal development and well-being’ for the benefit of the pupils in their care. They are successful in doing so. ‘Highfielders’ make good progress at school, feel safe and leave Year 8 with a wide range of skills that prepare them well for the next stage in their education.
- The headteacher, ably supported by his senior team, has responded to the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection with vigour. As a result of their work, the quality of mathematics teaching is now good and the standards that pupils reach in reading are improving.
- Leaders have ensured that teaching across the school is consistently good. Some is highly effective in igniting pupils’ curiosity and in pushing them to make rapid gains in their learning. Consequently, pupils make good progress from their starting points across the curriculum.
- Leaders are ambitious for their school and want the quality of teaching to be the very best. They accept that sometimes the most able pupils need to be pushed further in their learning. Sometimes, lessons do not fully engage all pupils in the class.
- There is a strong focus on sports and the arts, both within the formal curriculum and in the wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer. The annual show is of particular note. Inspectors enjoyed watching scenes from ‘Aladdin’ during their visit.
- Systems that are in place to support pupils at transition points are highly effective. A variety of activities help pupils to feel welcome when they arrive in Year 5, and similarly pupils are well supported as they move on from Year 8.
- Pupils are courteous, polite and behave well in lessons. They understand and celebrate difference and they show respect for one another and to adults. They are happy at school, and consequently their attendance is good. Pupils behave well.
- School leaders know the strengths of their school well and also know what needs to improve. They are aware that some aspects of the systems used to track pupils’ progress could be used more effectively. They also know that these could be developed in subjects other than English and mathematics.
- One parent told inspectors, ‘This is a great school that takes a holistic approach to teaching by encouraging social and artistic development as well as academic achievement.’ Such positive comments are typical from parents and carers and reflect inspection findings well.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the effectiveness of teaching and learning in order to further improve pupils' achievement by ensuring that:
 - the challenge given to most-able pupils is more consistent in lessons
 - recent improvements in the teaching of mathematics are fully embedded and any legacy of underachievement is eradicated
 - teachers respond swiftly to pupils' learning in lessons and reshape their planning 'in real time' when necessary
 - lessons spark the interest of pupils more often, so that all pupils fully engage in their learning.
- Further improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - the systems used to check and analyse pupils' progress are refined, so that any additional support that is given accurately matches individuals' needs
 - leaders improve the systems used to check how well pupils are learning, and the standards that they are reaching, in subjects other than English and mathematics.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since the school was inspected in January 2018, school leaders have been working tirelessly to improve the quality of education for the benefit of the pupils in their care. They have been focusing on addressing the relative weaknesses as identified at the last inspection and have been successful in doing so. Unvalidated results from external tests for Year 6 in 2018 are much stronger than those in the previous year. The progress that pupils are making in reading is improving and the quality of teaching in mathematics is much stronger.
- The headteacher is focused on school improvement, shows a level of empathy to those around him and is bold when difficult decisions need to be made. He carries the support of his staff. The headteacher, together with his deputy headteacher and senior team, has high expectations and models these effectively.
- Leaders with responsibility for English and mathematics are effective at improving the quality of teaching and increasing the rates at which pupils make progress in these subjects. They now have a track record in doing so.
- The headteacher has a good understanding of what constitutes effective teaching. He has ensured that systems and procedures to identify strong teaching, to implement effective professional development and to challenge any underperformance in the workplace are fit for purpose. Consequently, all leaders know the relative strengths of teaching and are focusing on the correct areas that need development.
- School leaders collect information on how well pupils progress and what standards they are reaching. Leaders agree that further refinement of these systems would help to ensure that any additional support provided matches individuals' needs more precisely. The systems that leaders use to check the standards that pupils reach in subjects other than English and mathematics are less strong.
- The curriculum fosters pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Teachers think carefully about any links that can be made between subject content and the wider development of pupils and incorporate these in lesson plans. Special events are also organised to develop pupils' understanding of enterprise. For example, a visit took place to look at the bridges at the quayside in Newcastle. This led to an enjoyable competition to make similar structures out of pasta.
- Extra-curricular opportunities are strikingly strong at Highfield. Opportunities for pupils to be involved in sports, drama, music and the arts are common. Very many pupils take part in these.
- Leaders use any additional funding received wisely to improve provision. One example of this is the use of additional monies to develop pupils' engagement in sport. Leaders have ensured that a greater proportion of pupils are active, for example by walking to school. They have also increased pupils' participation in sport. Of note is pupils' engagement in American football. Leaders have also used sport as a catalyst to focus on the improvement in boys' writing through linking contexts for written tasks to specific sporting events. This has been successful.

- A similarly strategic approach has been taken to pupil premium funding and additional funding for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. A positive impact is also in evidence for these pupils.

Governance of the school

- Governors are passionate and ambitious for a high quality of education on offer at school. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas that need to improve. They have correctly identified problems in the teaching of mathematics and they both challenged and supported senior leaders to improve teaching.
- Members of the governing body bring a range of skills to their roles. They reflect on their own abilities, and when there are any vacancies, they seek members with skills and experiences that will further strengthen governance. Members seek out, and attend, training in order to develop their skills.
- Members of the governing body support the headteacher well in ensuring that any financial investment is closely linked to educational priorities. For example, the refurbishment of the library has had a positive impact on pupils' perception of reading. An additional classroom has been built, with equipment and resources to support specialist science teaching at key stage 2, as this had been identified as a priority.
- Governors ensure that additional finances to support disadvantaged pupils are used effectively. Under their guidance, the headteacher appointed a member of staff as 'pupil premium champion' to build on the effective strategies already in place.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Systems and procedures that ensure that pupils are protected are effective. Safeguarding training for members of staff is up to date and policies are comprehensive and meet legal requirements. School leaders ensure that behaviour systems are implemented consistently and that the curriculum is effective in ensuring that pupils know how to keep themselves safe.
- Communication between heads of year, the special educational needs coordinators and members of the leadership team is effective. As a result, any pupils that may need additional pastoral support are flagged up early. The headteacher is tenacious in ensuring that pupils get any additional support that they may need.
- The governing body ensures that it discharges its responsibility for safeguarding well. One member has a specific responsibility for safeguarding, but records of meetings show that all members take a keen interest in ensuring that pupils are kept safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is consistently good. It is underpinned by warm and caring relationships between pupils and staff. As a result, the majority of pupils are keen to learn and enjoy lessons. The vast majority of teachers have high expectations of their pupils.

- Teachers question pupils well to gauge how much they understand, and plan the next lessons accordingly. Teachers are reflective about their own skills and are keen to develop their craft.
- The improvement of reading is a high priority across the school. Teachers ensure that there are ample opportunities for pupils to develop skills such as inference and deduction, in addition to comprehension. Leaders have revamped the library, which is now a relaxing and focused environment. The books available are linked to a reading programme, which helps pupils to develop their reading skills systematically. Leaders also provide additional lesson time during the week to develop reading skills. These strategies are having a positive impact on the progress that pupils make.
- Teachers provide pupils with a range of opportunities to write at length in English lessons and in other curriculum areas. Pupils are provided with effective feedback, in line with the school's assessment policy, which helps them to improve their skills.
- Mathematics is now taught effectively. Teachers' planning focuses on practising mathematical functions, in addition to giving pupils opportunities to solve problems and explain their thinking. School leaders know that recent improvements need to be embedded in order to have an even greater impact on pupils' mathematical development. Some pupils also need to catch up in some areas of mathematics, as this subject has been less well taught in the past.
- School leaders have made sure that there is a strong focus on subjects other than English and mathematics across the school, including at key stage 2. Teachers' subject knowledge is good, and this helps them to prepare interesting lessons that encourage pupils to reach the highest levels of attainment. For example, Year 5 pupils were observed in a music lesson. Here, pupils answered technical questions about a piece of music which made it clear that their musical knowledge was developing at a pace. The teacher showed a deep understanding of how to teach specific skills and the whole class rose to the challenge of playing a relatively complex piece, in unison, on trumpets.
- Not all classroom practice is quite this strong. Sometimes, for example, most-able pupils need to be challenged more in lessons. In addition, although teachers generally plan lessons well to meet the needs of different pupils, some are less 'nimble-footed' in lessons and could alter what they are doing more quickly in response to how much pupils understand. Occasionally, lessons do not spark the interest of pupils enough, and their concentration wanes.
- Nonetheless, school leaders and teachers are committed to improving the quality of teaching and their efforts are paying off. The profile of teaching at school is increasingly strong.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Many pupils responded to Ofsted's survey. They reported that the school is committed to their personal development and that adults ensure that their welfare has a high priority. They were particularly positive about the fact that they would be able to talk

to an adult at school if something was worrying them. They also said that if there was ever any bullying, this would be dealt with swiftly by adults in school. The groups of pupils that spoke with inspectors agreed with these perspectives.

- 'E-stars' (equality stars) is a pupil-led initiative which seeks to ensure that there is no discrimination at school and that all pupils feel included. It is highly effective. Pupils understand and celebrate difference. 'E-star' displays include campaigns to educate other pupils about racism, homophobia, transphobia and disability discrimination, among other issues.
- School leaders provide a variety of opportunities for pupils to develop leadership skills. Pupils can be part of the school council, act as playground leaders or peer mentors, or apply to become prefects. Many pupils are active members of the school community.
- Staff know their pupils very well, and pupils benefit from effective pastoral care and guidance. The vast majority of parents are very happy with the care on offer to their children.
- Pupils understand how to stay safe and appreciate the importance of adopting healthy lifestyles. They understand the risks of using the internet, and a high proportion of pupils are involved in sports at school, for example. School leaders have ensured that physical education lessons have a high priority in the curriculum.
- Pupils' welfare is at the heart of school life. Leaders work successfully with outside agencies to offer additional support to pupils or families that may be in need.
- Most pupils show positive attitudes to learning in lessons. On occasion, a small minority do not take enough responsibility for their learning and do not fully engage in lessons. This is usually when tasks do not spark their particular interests.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are very proud of their school. During the inspection, they were brimming with excitement, keen to show inspectors their work and to tell of how much they enjoy coming to school.
- Parents, staff and pupils say that behaviour is good. Pupils told inspectors that sometimes members of the class are a little lively and need some encouragement to stay on task. However, overall behaviour is good. Inspectors agree with this assessment. Inspectors found pupils to be polite, courteous, well behaved and generally focused in lessons. They respect the school environment, care for each other and enjoy their time at school.
- Pupils understand the system of gaining 'smiles' for doing something special or going the extra mile. A given number of 'smiles' then leads to merits within the house system. Pupils are motivated by this, and the system helps to cement pupils' desire to behave well and support their own school community, as well as helping their house team.
- Leaders have clear procedures to check pupils' attendance. Absences are followed up swiftly and the school works with a range of agencies where there are concerns. As a result of these processes, together with pupils' enjoyment of school, rates of attendance are strong and only a very small proportion of pupils are persistently absent.

- The family support worker is having a positive impact on helping some families engage with school and on the behaviour or attendance of individual pupils. The funding of this post at school underlines the commitment of leaders and governors to helping and supporting all members of the school community.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Leaders and governors recognised that outcomes for pupils were not good enough at the end of key stage 2 in 2017. They were rightly concerned about the rates of progress in mathematics and reading, and the standards that pupils reached in these subjects. These issues were also highlighted in the previous inspection in January 2018. Leaders immediately set about putting strategies into place to improve provision, and these have been effective.
- Unvalidated results from external tests for Year 6 in 2018 are much stronger than in 2017. For example, initial indications are of a 20%-point increase in the proportion of pupils reaching the standard expected in reading at the end of key stage 2. There have also been substantial increases in attainment in mathematics.
- Inspection evidence validates school tracking and supports leaders' view that pupils make good progress across the curriculum. Pupils' progress from their starting points, as seen in exercise books, is strong.
- Pupils arrive in Year 5 with average levels of attainment in English and below-average levels of attainment in mathematics. Effective teaching, together with timely intervention where necessary, ensures that they make strong progress during their time at school. Their progress accelerates in Year 8 due to a heightened desire on the part of teachers to prepare pupils for high school.
- Teachers have high expectations in subjects across the curriculum. Expert teaching is leading to particularly strong progress in French, art, music and science.
- The 'ARC' is a base that supports pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, in addition to others who may need to catch up on different aspects of their learning. This provision, in addition to effective classroom teaching, ensures that these pupils do well at school.
- Most-able pupils make good progress in lessons and almost all teachers have high expectations of what they can achieve. Sometimes these pupils could be challenged to make even more rapid progress, however.
- Disadvantaged pupils make good progress because they are fully engaged in school life and because teachers spot when they need extra support and ensure that this is given. The standards that these pupils reached in Year 6 in 2018, for example, were strong.
- The progress that pupils make in writing is good. This has been the case for several years. Pupils write at length and with an increasing degree of accuracy as they move through school.
- Pupils say that they enjoy reading. Parents and staff told inspectors that there has been a step-change in pupils' enjoyment of reading and that reading plays a more central role in school now. Inspection evidence confirms that the rate of progress that pupils are making in reading is increasing.

School details

Unique reference number	122340
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10047799

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 to 13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	434
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pam Bell
Headteacher	Richard Oades
Telephone number	01661 833922
Website	www.highfield.northumberland.sch.uk
Email address	admin@highfield.northumberland.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	9 January 2018

Information about this school

- Highfield Middle School teaches pupils from Year 5 to Year 8. It is deemed to be a secondary school and is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is similar to the national average. The proportion of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is above the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is similar to the national average.
- In 2017, the school met the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited lessons across the school to observe teaching and learning. A number of these visits were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- Pupils' work in different subjects was scrutinised. In addition, inspectors looked at the progress that pupils are making and the standards that they are reaching in English and mathematics, alongside colleagues with responsibility for these subjects. Inspectors also listened to some pupils read.
- Formal and informal discussions took place with senior leaders, middle leaders, members of staff and parents. An inspector met with a representative from the local authority. Meetings were also held with the special educational needs coordinators and members of staff with responsibility for safeguarding. A meeting was held with members of the governing body.
- Documentation relating to the school's website and safeguarding, including the single central record and information linked to recruitment checks, was scrutinised.
- A range of other documents were examined, including the school's self-evaluation, evidence from the monitoring of teaching, plans for improvement and the school's own analysis of pupils' attainment, progress, behaviour, exclusions and attendance.
- Pupils' behaviour was observed by inspectors in lessons, during breaktimes and at lunchtimes. Inspectors spoke with pupils about their work informally during lessons and met with two groups of pupils to discuss their learning and listen to their views about their school. There were 77 responses to the online pupil survey.
- Inspectors talked to a number of parents at the start of the school day and took account of the 119 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, in addition to the free-text responses. Inspectors also considered the 16 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

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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. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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