

Inspection of Queen Elizabeth High School

Whetstone Bridge Road, Hexham, Northumberland NE46 3JB

Inspection dates: 30 April and 1 May 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Sixth-form provision	Good
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Previous inspection grade	Good
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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?

The school is a welcoming, supportive and positive place to learn. Pupils benefit from a rich and broad curriculum. Most pupils learn this curriculum effectively. They achieve well in national assessments and examinations. This is particularly the case in the large sixth form, from which many students go on to competitive courses at university. High expectations drive this achievement.

The range of enrichment opportunities available to pupils is extensive. The extra-curricular programme encompasses the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, theatre visits and a school musical. In March, 70 pupils from the school rowing club competed in the regional regatta. Students in the sixth form recently organised a political debate involving local parliamentary candidates. These opportunities support pupils to thrive.

Pupils feel safe at the school. They behave very well, both in and out of lessons. The school's programme for personal development helps them to become good citizens. Older pupils take on a range of leadership roles, including sports leadership and coaching younger pupils. The school was founded by a charter in 1599 bestowed by Queen Elizabeth I. The school has retained the original motto of 'outstanding eagerness to promote good learning'. This still rings true today.

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

The school is ambitious for all of its pupils. This is reflected in a determination that every pupil will benefit from a curriculum that leads to future success and progression. This ambition includes an effective curriculum for personal development and a wide range of enrichment opportunities. The subject curriculum gradually becomes more complex. This supports pupils to build their knowledge and make connections in their learning. For example, in English, pupils study Thomas More and his contribution to the Renaissance. Pupils encounter sophisticated problem-solving in mathematics. In geography, pupils learn from increasingly detailed case studies to consider concepts such as globalisation.

In some subjects, such as physical education (PE) and design and technology, pupils' understanding is checked regularly and precisely. This enables teachers to pick up on misconceptions and adapt teaching. In these subjects, the curriculum is meeting the needs of the full range of pupils. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This is not routinely the case across the curriculum. The school is working hard to ensure that these effective strategies are embedded across all subjects.

The school accurately identifies the needs of pupils with SEND. The information that teachers receive to adapt their teaching to support pupils with SEND is regularly reviewed. Pupils with SEND have access to the same wide-ranging curriculum as their peers.

The school has a programme in place to support pupils who need to improve their reading. This extra support is effective. This runs alongside strategies for all pupils to develop a love of reading. The library is a vibrant space at the centre of the school. It is well used by pupils, including students in the sixth form.

Personal development is taught to all pupils. Pupils follow up themes from assemblies during form time with their tutors. This programme helps pupils to learn how to keep themselves safe, develop good character and how to prepare for life beyond school. Pupils know about healthy relationships. They demonstrate an effective understanding of diversity based on a culture of tolerance and respect.

Pupils behave very well in school. They are friendly and welcoming. The school environment is positive. This supports pupils with their learning. School is calm and orderly. The positive contribution that pupils make to lessons is a strength of the school. This is exemplified in PE, where there are very high levels of participation. Students in the sixth form are confident and articulate. Sixth-form students particularly appreciate the additional support that teachers offer them in their subjects.

The careers programme for students in the sixth form is wide ranging and highly effective. The school has taken action to strengthen careers education in Years 9 to 11 more recently. Some pupils feel that they would benefit from further careers information and guidance. Leaders know that this is a priority. They are making progress towards expanding the careers programme.

Trustees have a good understanding of their statutory duties. They are well informed. This enables them to both challenge and support the school. Trust leadership is particularly effective in ensuring that there is continuity of transition for pupils between the middle school and the high school. The majority of staff appreciate efforts to manage workload. There are a range of social and sporting activities available for staff. They appreciate these as a contribution to their well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There is some variation in how well teachers check pupils' understanding of the curriculum. This means that, on occasions, gaps in learning for some pupils, particularly those that are disadvantaged, are not clearly identified and addressed. The school should continue to develop strategies to better check pupils' understanding of the curriculum, so that teaching can be adapted to meet pupils' needs.

- Some pupils are less clear about the destinations available to them at the age of 16 than others. This means that they are not as well informed about their potential next steps in education, employment and training as they could be. The school should continue to strengthen the careers programme in Years 9 to 11 so that pupils develop deeper knowledge of careers and the world of work.

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

Unique reference number	143291
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10323085
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	13 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,298
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	385
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Veryan Johnston
Headteacher	Graeme Atkins (executive headteacher)
Website	http://www.qehs.net
Date of previous inspection	21 March 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of Hadrian Learning Trust, which is made up of two schools on the same site, the other being Hexham Middle School.
- The school uses four unregistered alternative education providers and one registered alternative education provider.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgment 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, the head of school and other senior and middle leaders. The lead inspector met with trustees.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, geography, PE and design and technology. For each deep dive, the inspectors met with subject leaders, discussed the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of their work. Inspectors visited lessons and looked at pupils' work in a number of additional 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 evaluated a range of documents, which included minutes of trustee meetings, pupil attendance information, safeguarding records and support plans for pupils with SEND.
- Inspectors held discussions with various groups of pupils, teachers and other staff working in a range of roles across the school. The lead inspector considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and pupils. Inspectors considered the views of parents through Ofsted's online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Carl Sugden, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
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Joanne Maw	Ofsted Inspector
Kate Morris	Ofsted Inspector
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