

Ashington Hirst Park Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122345
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	342366
Inspection dates	7–8 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Mrs Ann Wallis

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	480
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Chris Smith
Headteacher	Mr Andrew Roberts
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2006
School address	Third Avenue Ashington Northumberland NE63 9BE
Telephone number	01670 813111
Fax number	01670 851027

Age group	9–13
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Ashington Hirst Park is an average sized middle school. It is situated in an area of significant deprivation and an above average proportion of students are entitled to free school meals. Very few students are from minority ethnic groups and of these nearly all have English as their first language. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The school is part of a federation with a high school, a middle school, a special school and two first schools and has trust status. It was designated as a joint specialist sports college in September 2008. The school is subject to reorganisation proposals.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Hirst Park Middle School is a good school which provides good value for money. It has some real strengths in:

- the strong partnerships it has forged with other schools and organisations which enhance students' learning and ensure they have a very smooth transition between schools
- the innovative leadership of recently appointed senior and middle managers which is leading to rising standards, particularly in mathematics and English
- a creative curriculum which develops skills well and is carefully matched to the needs of students
- the very good provision for music and the good use made by students and staff of information and communication technology
- the very comprehensive support provided for vulnerable students, those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with behavioural difficulties.

Students achieve well and reach average standards by the time they leave Year 8. They make good progress from their below average starting points on entry to Year 5. Although test results at the end of Year 6 in English and mathematics have been below average in the past three years, standards are now beginning to rise. The most recent test results, work in books and the progress current students were seen to be making in lessons all confirm that progress is good and students are achieving well. Teaching and learning are consistently good across the school and improved planning and delivery of lessons in mathematics and English have led to rising standards. However, the school is not complacent and realises that there is a need to raise standards and achievement further by ensuring that work in lessons is well matched to the needs of all students and that whole school targets are sufficiently challenging.

In this very inclusive school, students receive good care, guidance and support which promote their good personal development. Students' health, safety, enjoyment and achievement are at the heart of all the school does. Students respond by behaving well and most work hard. Relationships are good. Students enjoy taking responsibility and develop good team working skills through contributing to both the school and the wider community. The school is increasing its efforts to work more closely with parents and families to involve them in their children's learning and to reduce the number of students who do not attend school regularly. Students' progress is tracked carefully and extra help is given to any students who are falling behind.

The school is well led and managed. The headteacher has been successful in bringing about improvements through his strong leadership of a talented and hardworking team of senior and middle managers. Senior leaders and governors monitor the school's work well, have a clear view of its strengths and weaknesses and know what is needed to promote further improvement. The school has recently been designated as a specialist sports college but this has not yet begun to have a real impact on enriching the curriculum and enhancing learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to raise standards and achievement in English and mathematics by:
 - matching work more closely to the needs of all students
 - raising aspirations of what students can achieve by setting more challenging whole school targets.
- Work more closely with parents to involve them in their children's learning and so improve attainment and attendance.
- Implement plans to make the most of specialist sports college status to enhance students' learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are average and the achievement of all students is good. Students enter the school in Year 5 with below average standards. They make satisfactory progress in Years 5 and 6 to reach close to average standards at the end of Year 6. Results in tests in English and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2 have been below average for the last three years. However, standards are now beginning to rise and provisional results for 2009 are closer to the national average. Targets in English and mathematics were met. Current students were seen to be making good progress in most lessons. Scrutiny of their work in books confirmed this. The school's detailed and robust monitoring data show that most students are making good progress and this accelerates in Years 7 and 8. They achieve well and reach broadly average standards by the time they leave the middle school. Students in Years 7 and 8 are on track to meet, or have already met, their targets in both English and mathematics. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported and make equally as good progress as their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of students are good. Behaviour, both in lessons and around school, is good. Parents and students agree that incidents of bullying are usually dealt with effectively when they occur. Students understand the recently revised behaviour management systems, and the fairness of the staged consequences to their actions. Instances of serious misconduct are infrequent. As a result, the use of exclusion as a sanction is significantly reducing, particularly in response to the school's strong provision for supporting vulnerable students. Many enjoy coming to school. Attendance figures, although showing some improvement, remain just below national levels. The school is increasing its efforts to reduce the significant minority of persistent absentees by working more closely with students and their families. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, and is effectively supported by a well planned personal education programme that promotes their skills in citizenship and personal relationships. Their understanding of the need to maintain a healthy lifestyle is developing well through healthy meal choices, and good opportunities to participate in sport and physical exercise. The views of students are represented well through the effective school council. Students have a good understanding of their responsibilities to the school and its wider

community through charity fundraising work, involvement in enterprise activities and good opportunities to develop and exercise their leadership skills. Students are proud of their school and its environment, and this is reflected in the good care they take to look after the building and school equipment.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers know the students well, have good relationships with them and create an environment through good classroom management in which the students are ready to learn. Teachers have good subject knowledge and engage learners well through good questions and interesting activities. They use interactive technology very effectively to enhance students' interest and enjoyment of learning. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan lessons that are appropriate for all. However, the delivery of the lesson does not always match the planning, particularly in relation to how activities will be adjusted to meet the students' different levels of attainment. Work is marked regularly. When work is marked as part of a focused marking activity students are provided with good quality feedback which helps them to improve further. This practice is not yet consistent in all subjects. This limits students' knowledge of what they need to do to get better and also restricts parents' involvement in their children's learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum meets the needs of students well, it is relevant to their interests and there are good opportunities to link literacy, numeracy and particularly ICT. The school develops students skills well by using an innovative 'skills matrix' to identify those skills which students most need to develop. The school has successfully revised the curriculum for the teaching of citizenship, an issue identified as being in need of improvement at the last inspection. This underpins students' personal development well and provides them with a good understanding of issues such as human rights, democracy and other local and national concerns such as vandalism and crime. Special theme days include topics to enhance the curriculum. The focus on global awareness provides opportunities for students to work alongside their peers from other schools and contributes well to the promotion of community cohesion. The range of visits and special events enriches the curriculum well. Provision for music is particularly strong. Numerous and varied extra-curricular activities provide for a wide range of interests including opportunities for physical activity which effectively promote the development of healthy lifestyles. This rich variety of activities, together with a broad and relevant curriculum, adds significantly to students' enjoyment of learning.

However, while students' achievement is improving, current strengths within curriculum provision are yet to impact fully on the standards attained in literacy and numeracy. The school is adjusting the curriculum to make the most of its recent designation as a specialist sports college but changes have yet to be developed to enrich the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support of students are good. Staff have a strong concern for, and commitment to, the welfare of every student. Students of all abilities and backgrounds feel they have a trusted adult to whom they can turn should they have a problem. The effective arrangements for pastoral care ensure good guidance and support for students, who say they feel safe and secure in this well ordered community. Procedures for safeguarding students are in place. Comprehensive support is successfully provided for vulnerable students, and for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or behavioural problems. The personal development centre and the support provided by teachers, support staff, learning mentors and others link well with outside agencies to ensure that these students are given constructive, sensitive help and guidance. Very good links between schools ensure a smooth transfer for students. Good use is made of data systems to track students' academic progress. Although they are aware of their targets, not all students are always clear about how to improve their work to move to the next levels. Those who fall behind are quickly identified and given additional support to bring them back on track.

Links with parents are maintained through regular progress reports, newsletters, and parents' meetings. Attempts to emphasise the importance of students' regular attendance are yielding some improvement although more remains to be done to stress to parents the importance of regular attendance. However, many parents are very satisfied with the school, and both they and their children appreciate the good care provided by school staff.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has a clear vision for further improvement and is ably supported by a new senior team. Talented middle managers are very successfully leading the drive to raise standards in English and mathematics. Although not yet fully established, this work is beginning to have an impact. Changes to the curriculum, improved teaching and learning and better systems to track students' progress are all leading to improved results and achievement in English and mathematics. Senior leaders now recognise the need to raise students aspirations further by setting more challenging whole school targets. The wider leadership team is increasingly involved in monitoring the school's work and consequently knows its strengths and weaknesses well. The school has recently been designated a specialist sports college and although changes are being made these, as yet, have not had a real impact on students' learning.

Governance is good. Governors know the school well and have a good overview of its contribution to, and the benefits it gains from, the federation of schools to which it belongs. Partnerships with schools within the federation, with higher education and businesses through the school's trust status and with other agencies are very strong. They make a major contribution to enriching the curriculum, ensuring the very smooth transfer of students between schools, supporting students' personal development and sharing good practice. The school makes a good contribution to community cohesion. Sporting events, music and arts projects, links with other countries, work with charities, links with partner schools and organisations and the

taught curriculum are all ensuring students have a good understanding of the needs of global, national and local communities whose faiths and cultures differ from their own.

The school has successfully addressed areas for improvement from the last inspection. Standards are rising and the school has good capacity to improve.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate.	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of boarding provision	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B



9 July 2009

Dear Students

**Inspection of Ashington Hirst Park Middle School, Northumberland,
NE63 9BE**

Thank you for making me and the inspection team so welcome when we visited your school this week. A particular thank you to those of you who took time to tell us about your school, about the lessons and activities you enjoy and about the progress you are making. Please also thank your parents for returning the questionnaires and letting us know what they think about your school.

These are the main findings included in our report.

- Hirst Park Middle is a good school.
- You reach average standards and achieve well.
- Your school is well led and managed.
- You behave well.
- Lessons are good and the curriculum you follow is good.
- Your school gives you good care, guidance and support and your personal development is good.

What I have asked your school to do now:

- help you reach higher standards and achieve even better in mathematics and English by:
 - making sure the work you do is at exactly the right level for you
 - encouraging all of you to aim even higher by setting more challenging targets for the whole school.
- work more closely with your parents to involve them in your learning and help all of you to attend school regularly and reach higher standards in your work
- make the most of your school's new status as a specialist sports college.

You can help your school to improve even further by attending regularly and working with your teachers to achieve the very best you can. Best wishes for the future.

Yours faithfully

Ann Wallis
Lead inspector