

Whitstone

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123872
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	359536
Inspection dates	6–7 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Anne Looney

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	643
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Philip Eavis
Headteacher	Gill Rennard
Date of previous school inspection	7 October 2010
School address	Charlton Road Shepton Mallet BA4 5PF
Telephone number	01749 345555
Fax number	01749 345243
Email address	whitstone@educ.somerset.gov.uk

Age group	11–16
Inspection dates	6–7 October 2010
Inspection number	359536

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 1234 234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 1234 234

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2010

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 29 lessons, observed 25 teachers and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning documents, policy documents and students' work and considered external evaluations of the school's work. They also scrutinised 183 questionnaires sent in by parents and carers, and those completed by staff and a sample of students from each year group.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- The achievement of all students and, in particular, the achievement of lower attaining students and those who speak English as an additional language. ♦
- The effectiveness of provision to meet the needs of all groups of students and to support them to achieve and develop personally.
- The effectiveness of leaders at all levels to analyse data to detect underachievement, to act on that analysis to close any achievement gaps, and their effectiveness in monitoring, evaluating and improving provision. ♦

Information about the school

The school is smaller than average. Most students are White British. The number of students who speak English as an additional language has grown and there are now 28 students. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free schools meals is below average as is the proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The nature of these difficulties or disabilities is mainly in relation to moderate learning difficulties or behavioural, emotional or social difficulties. The school has been a specialist technology college since 2000. Since the last inspection the number of students on roll has fallen and there have been a number of staff redundancies. The headteacher left the school at Christmas 2009 and one of the deputy headteachers took on the role of acting headteacher for two terms. The new permanent headteacher has been in post since September 2010.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Whitstone School is a satisfactory school which has maintained a trend of improvement at a time of considerable staff changes, particularly at senior leadership level. Following a sharp drop in GCSE results in 2008 the school acted decisively to put in place a series of interventions to support the oldest students to make the best progress they could. This led to considerably improved results in 2009. That improvement was broadly consolidated in 2010. Students' achievement is satisfactory and there is no significant difference in the progress made by different groups. The quality of the care, guidance and support given to the students is good and the overwhelming majority of students who responded to the student questionnaire felt that adults in the school cared about them. Senior leaders are keen to stress that their aim is to foster personal development as well as achievement and this can be seen in the outcomes that relate to students' broader personal development which are all good.

The school's curriculum is satisfactory overall. There are elements, particularly in terms of the breadth on offer at Key Stage 4, which are good. The school's fortnightly core curriculum days have a valuable role in developing broader skills in a cross-curricular context. They do, however, take up a considerable amount of time and there has been an insufficiently thorough evaluation of the impact on students' achievement at subject level. Senior leaders are already reflecting on this.

Teaching is satisfactory. There is some good teaching leading to good gains in learning but too much of the teaching is satisfactory and leads to students making no more than adequate progress. While there has been an improvement in several curriculum areas leading to better progress over time, this improvement is not sufficiently rapid across the school to raise standards at a swift enough rate. Planning is not always explicit enough to show how the needs of different groups are to be met. There is a lack of urgency in some lessons, particularly where tasks are longer, and not all teachers are challenging their students by asking probing questions. Assessment has improved since the last inspection but there still needs to be greater consistency in the guidance given and the use made of assessment information when planning.

Under the acting headteacher, senior leaders set a clear agenda for improvement. The new headteacher has taken decisive steps to consolidate and develop what has been started. Her arrival has been welcomed by parents and staff morale is now higher.

◆ The school's senior leaders have developed the role, and increased the level of accountability, of middle leaders. They have refined the systems they use to track students' progress and identify areas of underachievement. This facilitates the targeting of support for individual students and gives all teachers a better idea of their role in raising standards. Better systems of subject review have been developed which will involve

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

middle leaders more and encourage teachers to reflect more on learning. These have not yet started at a subject level and so have not yet had time to have a consistent impact on classroom practice. Self-evaluation overall has recently become more rigorous and the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning to accelerate the rate at which all students make progress by:
 - ensuring that teachers in all subject areas plan explicitly to meet the needs of all students
 - ensuring that lessons have pace, challenge and support for all students
 - improving the quality of questioning so that students are encouraged to think more deeply and develop greater independence
 - making consistently effective use of assessment to identify strengths and areas for improvement in students' work, and to plan for the next stages of learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Students show positive attitudes to their learning when their interest is captured by their teachers and by the content of the lesson. They respond well to the opportunities to work independently and in groups but some students, irrespective of their ability, find it difficult to apply themselves when tasks are too open-ended. The large majority of students make satisfactory progress in lessons. Students make good progress when they are very clear what they are to learn and know how their work will be evaluated and assessed. In a small minority of lessons observed during the inspection, students did not make the progress they could have done because they were not sufficiently challenged or they did not get the support they needed.

After the drop in results in 2008, attainment improved so that it is broadly in line with the national average. The school maintained that improvement in 2010 with the proportion of students attaining five A* to C grades but did not improve on the 2009 figure of those students attaining five A* to C grades including mathematics and English. The figures were, however, very close to the targets set by the school and constitute satisfactory progress for a cohort whose attainment on entry was slightly below average. Standards in English have continued to rise and although there was an improvement in results in mathematics the senior leaders recognise the need, and are planning, for continued intervention in the subject. The school's own tracking data have become increasingly accurate and reliable and indicate that unevenness of progress of groups has been ironed out and that lower attaining students and those who speak English as an additional language achieve on a par with their peers. These data also show that the current Year 11 cohort is making sound progress towards what are challenging but realistic targets. The achievement of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is also satisfactory.

◆ Students say that they feel safe in the school and are confident that any incidents will be dealt with by the school. A small minority of students and parents who responded to the inspection questionnaires said that behaviour was not good in the school. Although

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

inspectors saw generally good behaviour around the school and in most lessons, there were some instances of less satisfactory behaviour in lessons where students were not engaged by their work. Students make a good contribution both to their school and to the wider community, for example as junior sports leaders or as teachers of modern foreign languages to primary school pupils. They also develop good workplace skills through the core curriculum provision and their computer literacy levels are high as a result of the school's work in its specialism. ♦ Students have a good awareness of right and wrong and have good relationships with their peers. Their understanding of other cultures is not as deep as it might be although the school is aware of the need to challenge any intolerance, however small.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

The school works well with the feeder primary schools to support transition into the school and students in Year 7 told inspectors that they had settled in well. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported and the support for challenging students at risk of exclusion is also good. This support, together with an appropriate curriculum, has helped retain those students in full-time education. There is effective guidance on the next stage of education, training or employment.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

The range and variety of courses offered at Key Stage 4 is a strength and is the result of close work with partner schools, colleges and even a local stable. The personal, social and health education programme is enhanced by the regularity of its sessions and by the input of visitors. The core curriculum time provides a good opportunity for extended projects and visits out of school but reduces the time spent on subject teaching.

◆ Although teaching is satisfactory overall there is some good teaching across a range of subjects. Particularly effective teaching was seen in English and in the subjects of the school's specialism. The good lessons observed were characterised by strong relationships, student enjoyment and good planning with clear, purposeful learning objectives; all of which led to students making good progress. There was a small amount of unsatisfactory teaching seen where low expectations by teachers meant that students did not make adequate progress. A greater variety of assessment techniques are now used by teachers and some good marking was seen in English, modern foreign languages and art. There is still a need for greater consistency so that all students know the levels at which they are working and how they can improve.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Under the acting headteacher the interim leadership team was effective in continuing the drive for improved standards started in the previous year. That drive is continuing at a brisk pace under the leadership of the new headteacher. In the past, targets set at school level had been seen by some middle managers as aspirational. There is now a better understanding at middle management level that these targets are challenging, but realistic. Monitoring of students' performance at whole-school level is good and faculties now use data better to identify underperformance, particularly after examinations. Not all faculties are yet interrogating that data to look closely at the performance of specific groups of students, although this is done well at school level. Improvement planning is now more appropriately focused on improving teaching and learning and success criteria is better linked to outcomes for students. Senior leaders acknowledge that their monitoring of teaching in the past focused too much on teaching and insufficiently on learning and was overly generous in its grading of teaching as a result. The new systems set up are being well supported by appropriate professional development for middle leaders.

The governing body has supported the school well through its staffing difficulties and makes good use of the expertise of its members in the execution of its statutory responsibilities. It has provided robust challenge in all areas of the school's work. The school promotes equality of opportunity well and this has resulted in achievement gaps

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

between different groups closing. Senior leaders acknowledge that links with parents and carers, while satisfactory, can be improved. The acting headteacher re-established a 'friends of the school' group and, to involve parents and carers more in their children's education, the new headteacher is developing an improved approach towards homework.

The school's promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory. The school has a sound understanding of the religious, ethnic and socio-economic characteristics of its community and shows that it is reaching out to other communities. However, its evaluation of this area of its work is patchy.

◆ The school makes good use of its partnerships with organisations, such as the Sheppey Valley Community Partnership and the diploma links with other East Somerset schools, to promote the learning and well-being of its students. There are good procedures in place to ensure the safety of students in the school's care.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

A very large majority of the parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire stated that they were happy with their children's experience at the school and that their children enjoyed school. A few parents felt that the school did not help them enough to support their children's learning. The school has recognised this and is developing a more rigorous approach to homework. A very small minority felt that the school did not help their children have a healthy lifestyle. The inspection team followed up their concerns but found no evidence to support them during the inspection.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Whitstone School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 183 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 643 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	64	35	107	58	5	3	4	2
The school keeps my child safe	47	26	122	67	8	4	2	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	48	26	113	62	10	5	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	43	23	117	61	11	6	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	42	23	117	64	8	4	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	35	19	108	59	25	14	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	31	17	116	63	20	11	4	2
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	40	22	116	63	7	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	36	20	121	66	9	5	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	33	18	104	57	20	11	8	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	32	17	107	58	16	9	3	2
The school is led and managed effectively	31	17	118	64	11	6	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	48	26	114	62	10	5	3	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



11 October 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Whitstone School, Shepton Mallet BA4 5PF

Thank you for your help and for taking the time to talk to us during the recent inspection. We enjoyed meeting you and finding out about your school, which we judged to be satisfactory.

We thought that your school has done well to keep improving at a time when there has been a lot of change at senior leader level. The achievement of all groups of students is satisfactory. The school leaders have improved the accuracy with which they track your progress and are setting you targets which will challenge you but which are well within your reach. You told us that you felt adults in the school cared well for you. We thought too, that the care, guidance and support the school gives you are good and help you to grow in confidence and develop skills that prepare you for later life. We thought that your curriculum was satisfactory overall but that your learning needs were well met at Key Stage 4. We felt that the school had not evaluated carefully enough what the impact of the large amount of time you spend on 'CoreCurr' was on how well you did in all the subjects you are learning. The senior leaders are already thinking about that. Although there is some teaching that is good and that helps you really progress in lessons, we judged that too much of the teaching was satisfactory rather than good. The senior leaders are clear that they need to concentrate on what is happening in the classroom to help raise standards in all subjects. ♦

We have asked the school, therefore, to improve the quality of teaching by getting teachers to plan better for all your needs, to make sure that lessons have pace, challenge and support and to get teachers to be more consistent in the guidance they give you when they assess your work.

You can help in this by working hard in all lessons. I wish you all the best for your future happiness and success.

Yours sincerely

Anne Looney

Her Majesty's Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 1234 234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.