

# Whickham School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	108404
<b>Local Authority</b>	Gateshead
<b>Inspection number</b>	337068
<b>Inspection dates</b>	22–23 November 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	David Scott

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1670
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	357
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Thomas Hopper
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr John Bleasdale
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	23 January 2007
<b>School address</b>	Burnthouse Lane Whickham, Newcastle-upon-Tyne Tyne and Wear NE16 5AR
<b>Telephone number</b>	0191 496 0026
<b>Fax number</b>	0191 488 0968
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by six additional inspectors. The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 47 part lessons, seeing 47 teachers, and had meetings with a governor, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at self-evaluation documentation, monitoring and assessment information, lesson plans and school policies. They analysed questionnaires from 271 parents and carers, 229 from students and 75 from staff. The school's safeguarding procedures were also evaluated.

- Are students' learning and progress in lessons good enough to raise their attainment at Key Stage 4?
- Are the school's leaders taking the necessary actions to sustain improvements in the quality of provision for students in the sixth form?
- Has the school put in place effective strategies to improve the behaviour, safety and attendance of pupils?
- How well does the school provide for more-able students and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities?

## Information about the school

Whickham school is much larger in size than most secondary schools. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is well below average. The proportion of students who are from minority ethnic groups is well below average. The largest group of students are of White British heritage. In the main school, the proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. In the sixth form, over a third of students are in receipt of the educational maintenance allowance. Just over one in ten students, a proportion that is half that found nationally, have special educational needs and/or disabilities. These are mainly specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia and autism. The school has specialist sports college and applied learning status and since the previous inspection, has gained the Healthy Schools award.

The school hosts a fully integrated resource base which provides specialist support for up to 22 students with autism. In 2008, a serious fire destroyed the sixth form centre, library and music department. In February 2010, an ambitious building programme commenced on a architect-designed sixth form base which is due to open in January 2011.

In September 2008, the governing body invited two former deputy headteachers to assume the role of joint headteachers for two years. A designate headteacher has been appointed and has worked alongside the current headteacher since September 2010 and will take up the substantive position in January 2011.

**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?****2****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****2**

## Main findings

Whickham school provides a good standard of education, and one that is improving. The school is a welcoming and harmonious community. It has excellent partnerships with the local community, particularly with a special school, its cluster primary schools, teacher-training universities and sports service providers. Students feel happy and extremely safe and make good academic progress. They behave well, respect the views of others and have a well-developed sense of what it means to live a healthy lifestyle.

By the end of Year 11, students achieve well in their learning because the school has very high expectations of them, and also of staff. It has been highly effective in enabling those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities both from the on-site resource base and in the main school to make exceptional progress and closing the gap in performance of boys and girls. In reaching above average attainment in 2010, students are well prepared for the next stage of their careers. Performance in English is stronger than in mathematics. Achievement in the sixth form is good and is improving rapidly.

The school has brought about these improvements because of the robust way in which senior leaders and many middle managers have tackled students' previous underperformance, weaknesses in teaching and the management of behaviour. Nevertheless, in some lessons, activities and questioning are not always sufficiently probing or finely matched to students' varied needs. Highly effective pastoral support and guidance, especially for those students and their families who are experiencing difficulties, make a strong contribution to the school's improving relationships with parents and carers. The school has worked assiduously to improve attendance which is now well above the national average.

Leaders have brought about many improvements through honest and accurate self-evaluation. Concerted action, by all staff, has developed teachers' skills, and as a result, teaching and learning are good. Nevertheless, teachers are not routinely taking opportunities to promote students' literacy and numeracy skills in their subjects. Leaders also know that, although there are examples of good assessment practice, the quality across the school is too variable. Monitoring information is used regularly and with increasing accuracy to identify what the school does well and to plan for improvement. Criteria against which to judge the impact of any changes are not always measurable. The governing body meets its statutory responsibilities and supports the school's work well. Since the last inspection, the school has reduced exclusions, raised attainment and has improved attendance significantly. These actions demonstrate that it has a good capacity to make further improvements.

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## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve progress and learning in lessons to raise attainment, especially in mathematics by:
  - ensuring that all teaching provides challenging activities that match the needs of all students and support the development of their literacy and numeracy skills
  - asking more probing questions in lessons which give students opportunities to develop and explain their ideas fully especially for more-able students
  - ensuring that lessons are active to engage students and accelerate their progress
  - reviewing targets more systematically with students so that they clearly understand how to improve their work.
- Sharpen the effectiveness of all leaders and managers, in driving improvement by:
  - ensuring that tracking and monitoring information is analysed robustly and new developments are evaluated against measurable criteria
  - intensifying the programme for spreading good practice in assessment throughout the school, by coaching and mentoring.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

**2**

The quality of learning and progress in lessons are good and, as a result, students are motivated to learn because of the good relationships with staff and each other. Their positive behaviour and real desire to improve contribute very effectively to their learning. Most of those who previously demonstrated challenging behaviour have bought into the school's drive to help students achieve. This school has been successful in encouraging students to engage more actively with their learning. This was very evident in a Year 7 boys' physical education (PE) lesson on vaulting where students were enthusiastically engaged in improving their jumping technique. Students were very well motivated and skilled at assessing each other's performance and suggesting points for improvement, and as a result, made good progress.

Similarly, Year 10 students showed great enthusiasm for discussing and writing about their hobbies and interests in German. Students' learning flourished because the teacher carefully planned and matched the tasks to students' individual needs.

From broadly average starting points students' progress accelerates as they move through the school and as a result, by Year 11 attainment is above average. Through changes to the curriculum and the systematic monitoring of the work of departments, unevenness in subject performance has been partially eliminated. For example, students' performance in mathematics has improved, as has that in science, although not yet to the same level as the sustained record achieved in English. Those students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, both from the on-site resource base and within the main school make exceptional progress, as do those who are at the early stages of learning English as an additional language. This is as a result of one-to-one tuition and highly-focused guidance and help.

Students' spiritual, moral and cultural development is good overall. Outcomes in the specialist sports and applied subjects make a significant contribution to helping students

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gain good life skills that prepare them well for education, training and employment. Many students are keen to take on responsibilities and report the value of the active school council in getting things done. For example, they were involved in the appointment of four senior leaders in the last year, including the new headteacher. In discussions, students demonstrated a mature understanding of how to stay safe and they reported that they feel very safe in school. Through the work associated with the national awards, students have a good understanding of the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle, participating enthusiastically in sporting activities and physical pursuits. Students make a good contribution to their local community by acting as young leaders, coaches and peer support mentors to over eight primary schools and contribute more widely through Whickham's partnership with schools and charities overseas in Bolivia, Egypt and Mexico.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

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

<sup>1</sup> 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?**

Teaching is improving due to more rigorous monitoring and is good, with a few lessons being outstanding. Relationships between staff and students are good and subject planning is strong, so explanations are well structured and confident. New technology is used well, where available, to make the lessons interesting. Students who find learning difficult or who have particular learning barriers are supported well because staff focus sharply on their needs. There are pockets of good practice in the effective use of assessment which have been used well to drive up attainment within English, modern

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foreign languages and PE. Within this positive picture, occasionally teachers' explanations are too long, which reduces the opportunity for students, particularly the more-able, to explain their ideas, and target-setting does not always 'sign post' clearly how students can improve their work.

The well-orchestrated curriculum has been redesigned to meet the needs and interests of all learners. Students experience a wide range of activities, including guest speakers, musical productions and dance extravaganzas, festival of sports and clubs ranging from cookit to 'debating matters'. These contribute strongly to students' enthusiasm for school life. Each year over 50 trips take place, with over 200 students going abroad to countries such as France, Germany, Holland and the USA, providing excellent opportunities for students to broaden their personal and academic skills. As a result of the programme for building the new school being withdrawn, the development of information and communication technology provision across subject areas has been limited. As a result, teachers have not been able to utilise the full range of interactive features in their lessons.

The school is rightly proud of its highly effective care, guidance and support. Students new to English are integrated and supported well in lessons. Consequently, once they have mastered English they make the same progress as their classmates. The most vulnerable students benefit greatly from effective work the school carries out with external agencies. Staff can point to real successes in helping students to overcome difficult histories and challenging episodes in their lives. As one parent commented, 'Staff are always willing to listen, and there is a strong partnership between child, parent and school.' The inclusion team provides a wide range of support to enable vulnerable students and those from the resource base to play a full part in school life and is increasingly successful at engaging hard-to-reach families.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

**How effective are leadership and management?**

Progress and learning are accelerating at Whickham school because of the determination of the headteacher, with the support of all staff, to ensure that 'every student is challenged, guided and supported in order to achieve their potential.' The school has a strong commitment to ensuring that every student has an equal chance to learn. It works effectively to eradicate any differences in the achievement of groups of students. Senior leaders guide staff so that equality of opportunity and inclusion are successful, but recognise that occasionally, although improving, the more-able pupils do not do as well as other groups of learners.

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The headteacher and senior leaders know the strengths of the school well. Their vision to improve achievement for all students has created confidence and a real sense of purpose throughout the school and among parents and carers. The headteacher has worked closely in partnership with the headteacher designate to ensure the smooth succession, based on a detailed knowledge and understanding of the school.

Members of the governing body are fully supportive of the school's aims. They know the school well and have an accurate view of its performance. They challenge the school and hold it to account and are securing more rapid improvement in the quality of learning. The school has good procedures for safeguarding and risk assessment. These meet all government guidelines and include high quality checks on adults and a carefully planned approach to managing the safety of students. The school has evaluated its contribution to community cohesion, which is good. This has been achieved by developing and promoting a detailed understanding of its own community and the different faiths, ethnicities and cultures that exist within it. The school's international partnerships with schools overseas promote good awareness of global issues. Through its specialisms it has been enterprising in developing successful partnerships with other schools and local universities, for example in the training of new teachers.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

**Sixth form**

'Relationships between students and staff in the sixth form are exceptionally good – they always want the best for you', commented a group of sixth form students, echoing the views of most and reflecting the school's efforts to provide a truly inclusive sixth form. Achievement is good overall. The rate of progress is rapidly improving and a large number of students are on track to meet their challenging targets. Students are particularly successful in English, health and social care, travel and tourism and physical education.



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The sixth form is enthusiastically led by a member of the senior leadership team, keenly supported by a committed group of tutors. As a result of more rigorous monitoring, teaching and learning are now consistently good, and the greater proportion of all students complete their courses and proceed to further education and training. Numbers in the sixth form are rising with over two thirds of Year 11 students staying on. Each student's progress is meticulously tracked and remedial action is promptly taken if there are signs that a student is losing momentum or struggling in any way. Students consider that they get constructive, useful feedback on their major written tasks, day-to-day assessment is thorough and students know their targets well in the best lessons.

The attractive curriculum on offer successfully meets the current needs of most students. Plans are well advanced to increase the range of vocational courses as the sixth form expands. Sixth formers make an increasingly positive contribution to the life of the school, for example by acting as reading buddies for younger students and organising fund-raising events to support children with cancer. There is a strong ethos of care and support and students say they feel very well looked after.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

**Views of parents and carers**

The school enjoys the support of most parents and carers who returned questionnaires. Almost all respondents were very positive about the school and felt that it keeps students safe and helps them to prepare for the future. A few parents and carers raised concerns, including support provided for their children's learning, the way unacceptable behaviour is dealt with, and the communication with the school. Inspectors observed standards of behaviour in classes and around the school. They examined policies and relevant records and held discussions with staff and students. In discussing these issues with senior staff, they agreed that these areas will be a priority for improvement for the school. Inspectors were also shown evidence of recent external surveys of parents' views and these were wholly positive.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Whickham 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 271 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1670 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	82	30	167	62	16	6	1	0
The school keeps my child safe	84	31	167	62	14	5	2	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	74	27	172	63	18	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	77	28	158	58	17	6	3	1
The teaching is good at this school	75	28	165	61	15	6	2	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	52	19	154	57	44	16	3	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	49	18	152	56	50	18	2	1
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)	68	25	151	56	22	8	2	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	74	27	167	62	14	5	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	48	18	170	63	29	11	4	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	44	16	166	61	29	11	9	3
The school is led and managed effectively	55	20	161	59	28	10	5	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	82	30	153	56	12	4	5	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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	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](http://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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



24 November 2010

Dear Students

**Inspection of Whickham School, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE16 5AR**

On behalf of the inspectors and myself, I would like to thank you very much for the very warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. We really enjoyed meeting you and seeing you at work and recreation. We very much valued the discussions we had with you and were particularly impressed with how your attendance has improved since the last inspection.

You go to a good school and one that is improving. Your headteacher and teachers are totally committed to making your school an even better place to learn. Inspectors were particularly impressed by the way you get along and respect each other's different cultures and traditions. You, your parents and carers, told us that Whickham is a caring and happy place where you feel totally safe. As one parent commented, 'My daughter is so proud to be a member of this school'.

Your headteacher and teachers are determined to help you succeed and give you the best possible education. We have asked them to:

- plan work that will challenge and engage you in all lessons, showing you ways to learn by yourselves, particularly the more-able among you
- give you clearer advice on how to improve your work so that you can achieve your very best
- look closely at information about your performance, in order to accurately pinpoint, design and share the necessary advice with you so that you have everything you need to accelerate your progress and attainment, particularly in mathematics.

You, too, can all play your part in improving the school by asking for help when you are having difficulties with your learning. Once again, it was very good to meet you all. We wish you and the school all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

David Scott

Lead inspector

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