

Thomas Whitham Sixth Form

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135000
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	360673
Inspection dates	5–6 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Marguerite Murphy HMI

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	16–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	411
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	411
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Kathryn Molloy
Headteacher	Mr Stuart Smith
Date of previous school inspection	18 March 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. They observed 21 lessons taught by 21 teachers and spoke to many students during lessons or independent study. Although Year 13 students have now left school, a group came in to meet with inspectors. Meetings were also held with leaders, managers and other staff, and two members of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at records of students' attainment and progress, minutes of governing body meetings, self-evaluation and improvement plans, attendance records and safeguarding documentation. Inspectors also evaluated questionnaire responses from 73 students, 46 staff and 50 parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The extent of the sixth form's success in raising attainment and improving further students' rates of progress since the last inspection.
- The quality of the curriculum and whether it has improved sufficiently since the last inspection to be graded outstanding, as the sixth form believes.
- The rigour and accuracy with which leaders at all levels evaluate the sixth-form's performance and the impact of subsequent action plans on driving improvements rapidly across the full range of subjects.

Information about the school

Thomas Whitham Sixth Form was established in September 2006 under its previous name of Burnley Schools' Sixth Form. It moved into its present building in September 2008, since when the number of students on roll has increased significantly in line with its planned growth following the closure of sixth forms in local secondary schools. It is situated on the Burnley Campus, which delivers a wide range of extended services through community facilities including a sports hall, fitness suite, dance/drama studio, a faith centre, café and public library. The sixth form works collaboratively with its five partner 11 to 16 secondary schools in Burnley. It is one of only very few 16 to 19 schools in the country. A proportion of students, up to 20%, come from schools outside of the Burnley area.

Over half of the students are of White British heritage. Just under half of the students are of Asian heritage; the largest proportion of this group is Pakistani. More than a third of students speak English as an additional language, although none are at an early stage of learning English. A much higher than average proportion of students, about 70%, is in receipt of education maintenance allowance payments. Just under 10% of students have special educational needs and/or disabilities and five students have a statement of special educational needs. The most common additional needs are for moderate learning difficulties or emotional and social difficulties.

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

Thomas Whitham Sixth Form is a good school that has several outstanding features, not least of which are its highly inclusive ethos; its care, guidance and support; and outstanding partnerships. These contribute to the sixth-form's vibrant position at the heart of the local community and the national award it achieved with its campus partners - the 'Building Schools for the Future Community Hub 2009'. The sixth form has consolidated and further improved on the good performance identified at its first inspection three years ago.

The sixth form welcomes students from the full range of prior attainment; a significant proportion falls below the typical sixth-form average entry requirement of five GCSE subjects at grade C or above. For some of these students, a three-year course of study includes re-taking AS or A-level examinations in order to realise their potential. Overall, students make good progress and achieve well. Some, particularly those who study for three years, make outstanding progress. This reflects the quality of teaching and the curriculum, both of which are good and improving. The sixth form has made efforts to increase its offer of vocational courses to meet students' differing needs in line with its inclusive admissions policy. However, there are occasions when students are enrolled on subject courses that are not fully suited to their ability.

The headteacher and senior leaders demonstrate a commitment to inclusion and excellence that is evidently shared by staff, the governing body and the sixth form and campus community. Morale is high, staff feel supported and valued and are proud to be members of the sixth-form team, as shown in the positive responses to the staff questionnaires. While the sixth-form's self-evaluation is generally accurate, it is not always sufficiently focused on providing clear evidence of the impact of its work on students' outcomes. Action planning, particularly following middle leaders' area reviews, lacks some rigour in checking the sixth-form's progress against clear success criteria and providing higher levels of challenge for future improvement. The sixth form analyses the performance of groups of students to identify any gaps or underachievement. However, this is not always in sufficient depth to gain a full understanding of potential differences between all groups of learners and what academic interventions could be put into place as a matter of urgency.

Attendance is high when compared to most post-16 education providers. Students enjoy their time at the sixth form enormously and display exemplary behaviour and attitudes to their work. Many students demonstrate impressive maturity and independent learning and study skills. Questionnaires and discussions with students demonstrated almost unanimous agreement that they feel safe, well cared for and know how well they are doing in their work. They rightly describe the sixth form as a happy and harmonious learning community where discrimination is not tolerated and everyone is respected as an individual.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality and impact of the sixth-form's self-evaluation and development planning by:
- using the sixth-form's range of student achievement data to analyse more closely the rates of progress made by different groups of students across all subjects, ensuring rapid intervention in areas of underperformance
- ensuring that this information is used effectively to evaluate the impact of sixth-form initiatives on improving students' achievements and other outcomes against clear and measurable success criteria
- improving the quality of middle leader area reviews to ensure a robust challenge of performance and a more significant contribution to the development of a higher proportion of outstanding teaching
- building further on the development of curriculum pathways that ensure that appropriate courses and qualifications fully meet the needs of all students.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students' outstanding behaviour and positive attitudes to learning contribute to their good overall achievement. They have a mature and conscientious approach to their work and show good levels of concentration in lessons. They take up opportunities for independent study in the sixth-form's learning areas and benefit from additional support sessions offered by teachers or mentors. Despite minor fluctuations in results at AS and A2 level across the range of subjects, the profile remains very positive. Examination results represent good and sometimes outstanding progress from students' starting points on entry to the sixth form. Some students who might otherwise have struggled to achieve any examination successes have been able to do so through their own determination and the sixth-form's high-quality support. This includes those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, who make similarly good progress to their peers.

Students make a good contribution to the sixth form, the campus and the wider community. For example, by volunteering to participate in recruitment activities such as open evenings at their former schools and colleges; organising primary school athletic competitions on the sixth-form facilities; and supporting many charity and fundraising activities. The Student Voice forum helps to generate ideas for improvements to the campus and student experiences. Students' development in spiritual, moral, social and cultural matters is outstanding overall. They agree that the faith centre makes an excellent contribution to this, as do the interesting variety of assembly themes and the external speakers and visits.

In discussions with inspectors, students agreed that they are helped to make informed choices about issues such as drugs, alcohol and sexual health. Students do not always make healthy choices about their diet or take up the opportunities available for physical exercise, although some feel that they would like to see more extra-curricular sports clubs, for example.

Views expressed by students across the sixth form who spoke with inspectors were extremely positive and reflected their enjoyment: 'It's like a big family.' 'There's no racism here.' 'Teachers are very friendly and give a lot more than they need to.' 'The sixth form is

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really helping to improve our community.' and 'This has really exceeded all my expectations.'

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	IE ²
Pupils' attainment ¹	
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	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
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	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

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

² IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

How effective is the provision?

Most teaching is good and sometimes outstanding, enabling students to make good or better progress in lessons. Teachers have very good specialist subject knowledge and plan their lessons well. Relationships between staff and students are excellent and make a positive contribution to the quality of learning. Teachers make good use of resources, particularly information and communication technology, to enhance learning. In the most successful lessons teachers express high expectations of all students and provide suitably challenging work that is closely matched to their individual needs and aspirations. Students are questioned and required to think deeply, applying their knowledge and independent learning skills to improve their understanding. In these lessons, students have a detailed awareness of their aspirational target grades, of the level they are currently performing at, and what they need to do to achieve a higher grade. They are able to engage in self- and peer-assessment to identify areas for improvement. In less successful lessons, the level of challenge is lower and students are less engaged in collaborative or independent work when tasks are predominantly led by teacher instruction. The pace of learning slows as a result.

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The sixth-form's curriculum provides a wide range of traditional academic subjects and is beginning to expand its vocational courses. All groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, have a good range of opportunities to achieve their potential, which, for some, includes improving on previous performance. Some teaching staff from the sixth-form's 11 to 16 partner schools also teach their subjects here, reflecting the close collaboration arrangements to promote continuity and breadth in the curriculum. The sixth form provides a good number of enrichment activities, trips and visits to enhance its curriculum offer.

Students benefit from outstanding care, guidance and support. This promotes their confidence and high aspirations and they are enabled to make appropriate choices about their future education or employment. The sixth form is notably successful in helping students who may be vulnerable due to their circumstances. It cultivates excellent partnerships with a range of external agencies to provide support and remove barriers to learning. In some cases it goes the extra mile to meet these needs as some services are not always available to students who have passed the age of 18.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

Good leadership and management have strengthened further since the sixth-form's first inspection three years ago. This is a significant accomplishment during a period of growth in student numbers and the establishment of the new campus. The headteacher inspires both staff and students with a clear sense of purpose and belief in their potential. Senior leaders are aware of changes in the intake, which now includes a higher proportion of students with below-average attainment on entry. They recognise the need to develop further the curriculum pathways on offer in order to meet fully the needs of all students. Middle leaders are developing their skills in monitoring and evaluation and there is a well-understood focus on raising students' attainment by accelerating their rates of progress.

The governing body has a good understanding of the sixth-form's strengths and weaknesses and is increasingly able to challenge its performance and hold leaders to account. The sixth form meets the requirements for safeguarding and has robust risk assessment procedures in place. Leaders and the governing body respond well to the views of parents and carers, and students through regular consultation opportunities. The sixth form demonstrates a clear commitment and determination in promoting equal opportunities and narrowing any gaps in the achievement of different groups of learners. Leaders recognise that aspects of monitoring and evaluation could be more sophisticated

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and influential in enabling the sixth form to improve its effectiveness further in this aspect of its work.

The sixth-form's promotion of community cohesion is outstanding. There is a clear awareness of its religious, ethnic and socio-economic context and its vital place within the local community. The faith centre is utilised well to promote understanding and tolerance of all faiths and develop strong links at local, national and international levels. Improvements since the last inspection and the continuing good and sometimes outstanding outcomes for students demonstrate the sixth-form's good value for money and good capacity for sustained improvement in the future.

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	2
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	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
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	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

As this is a Sixth Form these details are covered in the main findings.

These are the grades for the sixth form

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

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Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire expressed very positive views about the sixth form. They were unanimous in agreeing that their child enjoys being there and feels very safe, and that leadership and management are effective. Inspection evidence supports these views. A few do not feel that the sixth form helps them to support their child's learning. Inspectors found that there are sufficient opportunities for parents and carers to ask for advice in this matter and attend student reviews, for example. They also found that some students who are aged over 18 actively seek to be independent of parental intervention in their studies. The small minority of parents and carers who do not feel that the sixth form helps their child to have a healthy lifestyle expressed similar views to a number of students, although inspectors found that the sixth form has good strategies for promoting good health and encouraging students to respond positively to these.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Thomas Whitham Sixth Form 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 50 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 411 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	24	48	26	52	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	30	60	20	40	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	25	50	21	42	3	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	18	36	30	60	2	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	26	52	23	46	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	18	36	22	44	7	14	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	10	20	27	54	9	18	1	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)	33	66	14	28	1	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	25	50	22	44	3	6	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	22	44	25	50	2	4	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	17	34	28	56	2	4	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	28	56	20	40	1	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	33	66	16	32	1	2	0	0

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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



7 July 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Thomas Whitham Sixth Form, Burnley, BB10 1JD

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your sixth form recently, I would like to express our thanks for the warm welcome we received and the contribution you made to our inspection findings. We enjoyed our time in lessons and around the campus, especially our discussions with many of you. Although Year 13 students have now left, we appreciated the fact that a group of you came in to meet with inspectors.

All of you impressed us with your maturity, confidence and ability to express your views clearly. We could see that you enjoy your time at Thomas Whitham very much and we understand why. You can read the details in the full inspection report, but these are just a few of the highlights.

- You go to a good sixth form that has some outstanding features because it has continued to grow, develop and improve since opening five years ago.
- You make good and sometimes outstanding progress in your courses because of good teaching and leadership and outstanding levels of care and guidance.
- Your sixth form makes an excellent contribution to community cohesion, particularly as a central part of the local 'Community Hub'.

We have suggested a few areas that could be improved in order to support the sixth-form's aim to become outstanding overall. These relate to developing its monitoring systems to make sure they are more rigorous and challenging. Action plans should then be more effective in driving further improvement and ensuring that all students make outstanding progress.

Yours sincerely

Marguerite Murphy

Her Majesty's Inspector

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