

Whitstone School

Charlton Road, Shepton Mallet, Somerset, BA4 5PF

Inspection dates

20–21 February 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Examination results have improved across the vast majority of subjects, so that by the end of Year 11 students have made good progress.
- Teaching is typically good. In many lessons, activities actively engage students' learning. Teachers have high expectations and levels of mutual respect. This has resulted in a positive learning climate across the school.
- Behaviour is good in lessons and during social time. Students are well cared for and feel safe.
- The governors, headteacher and senior team are ambitious in their pursuit to raise standards further. Their efforts are evident in terms of the students' improving progress, improved GCSE attainment and good quality teaching.
- School attendance has improved significantly and the need to use fixed-term exclusions has reduced considerably, so that the rates are lower compared to other schools nationally.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The school's actions in ensuring that all students make excellent progress are not always effective.
- The proportion of lessons where the teaching is outstanding is too low. Not all teaching provides students with enough opportunities to fully stretch their thinking, particularly those who are capable of doing harder work.
- Students' literacy skills, particularly writing, are not yet sufficiently well supported in lessons by all teachers.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 34 lessons, of which eight were observed jointly with senior staff.
- Discussions were held with groups of students from different age groups.
- As well as evaluating students' written work and teachers' marking during lessons, a selected sample was also scrutinised by inspectors.
- Meetings were held with representatives of the governing body, a small group of parents, the headteacher, senior staff and middle leaders.
- Inspectors evaluated school documentation including information on GCSE results, current progress of students, the curriculum and improvement plans, as well as procedures and records on safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors took account of the 14 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and parental surveys carried out by the school. Inspectors received 24 questionnaires completed by staff.
- Inspectors studied the school's self-evaluation and development plans and looked at the achievement tracking procedures.

Inspection team

Philip Storey, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Marcia Headon

Additional Inspector

Glenn Moyah

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Whitstone School converted to become an academy school in August 2011. When its predecessor school was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be satisfactory.
- The school is smaller than the average secondary school and accepts students of all abilities.
- The school meets the current government floor standards which set the minimum expectations for secondary schools.
- The vast majority of students are of White British heritage. Less than a tenth is from minority ethnic groups. A very small proportion of students, approximately half the national average, speaks English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs who receive support at school action is slightly above the national average. The proportion of students who are supported at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs, is well under half the national average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for students known to be entitled to free school meals, children in the care of the local authority and those from service families) is below average. The number of children in the care of the local authority is exceptionally low.
- No students are taught off site at alternative provision.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by ensuring that all teachers have a strong focus on:
 - planning carefully to meet the needs of students of all abilities
 - asking more searching questions in order to develop students' thinking skills, particularly of the more able
 - ensuring that monitoring focuses more directly on increasing the pace of students' learning.
- Strengthen the impact of the school's plan to develop students' writing skills in all lessons where appropriate and by a greater number of staff.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students join the academy with attainment significantly below national averages. Taking into account these starting points, students make good progress.
- Although overall GCSE attainment was still below national average in 2012, it is rising rapidly. Students' performance in GCSE mathematics and English is rising at a faster rate than nationally.
- As a result of improving teaching, close monitoring and well-targeted support, the majority of students make good progress and achieve well by the end of Year 11. There are still some students, particularly those who are disabled and those who have special educational needs, who do not always reach the levels they are capable of, particularly in their writing skills.
- There has been a significant reduction in the variation in GCSE performance across subjects since the summer 2011. Where inconsistencies remained the following year, the school has taken appropriate action. Although the percentage of students achieving A* to C grades is broadly in line with national averages, the percentage of students achieving A and A* grades is less favourable. However, a greater proportion of students now achieve the highest grades at GCSE in the science subjects and in English.
- Where appropriate, more able students are entered for some GCSE examinations early. Those students who do not achieve their potential continue to study until the end of Year 11 to improve their grades.
- All groups of students supported by the pupil premium now achieve well. This is as a result of the careful targeting of this additional resource towards improving their performance in English and mathematics. For this group at GCSE, the average point score in English and mathematics is rapidly accelerating so that their progress is now closing the gap on other Year 11 students at the school and nationally.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress in English and mathematics compared with the national average for students with low Key Stage 2 prior attainment. This is due to an appropriate curriculum, good teaching and effective additional literacy support, particularly reading.
- The school has an increasing emphasis on improving reading skills for disabled students and those who have special educational needs as well as those students who speak English as an additional language. This has had a marked impact on levels of confidence and how well these students access learning across the curriculum.
- The small number of students who speak English as an additional language makes good progress as a result of intensive additional support.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching is good and particularly so in English, mathematics and science. The positive actions already taken in other departments are helping to improve teaching in the vast majority of lessons. Where teaching is outstanding, for example in a discussion during a French lesson, the teacher used extremely skilled questioning techniques which engaged and stretched students of all abilities. Students were enthusiastic and keen to deepen their learning by listening very carefully and asking their own searching questions. However, the use of such questioning is not used as well as it should be.
- Usually, most teachers plan carefully to meet the needs of students of different abilities. Teachers circulate around the classrooms giving effective support through guiding questions. They check understanding thoroughly and reshape teaching and learning activities in response to students who need advice and guidance.
- In the few lessons where teaching is less effective:
 - there is a lack of challenge and pace, particularly for the most able students

- the quality of marking and advice to students is not fully effective in ensuring the quicker progress of students, especially in developing their writing skills
- teaching assistants are not always deployed effectively and do not always ensure there is the right balance between support and challenge for targeted students.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students' attitudes to learning are positive and behaviour is consistently good. On the few occasions where students lose concentration in class, teachers intervene promptly and appropriately without jeopardising the respectful relationship established between students and staff.
- Students feel safe, happy and like coming to school. More careful monitoring of students' attendance, with a particular focus on those students who regularly miss school, has improved overall attendance levels. The school's records show that the use of fixed-term exclusions is declining rapidly. Specific support is in place to address any potential behaviour issues. When inspectors met with students, students reported that behaviour had improved.
- Individual case studies demonstrate marked improvements in behaviour for targeted students. Rewards for positive behaviour, particularly the introduction of Excellent Student status, are highly valued by them and have had a marked impact on students' pride in the school and their sense of responsibility.
- Bullying is rare and the school deals effectively with the few incidents that do occur. Students and staff are clearly aware of how to deal with bullying and good procedures are in place. Students know about different forms of victimisation, such as cyber bullying, racism and homophobia, as well as how to keep themselves safe.
- The school's positive atmosphere supports students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Activities such as forming a partnership with a school in Ghana, which includes educational exchange visits, have contributed well to the development of students' appreciation of different cultures.
- Parental surveys carried out by the school, Parent View (the on-line Ofsted questionnaire) and a meeting with parents and carers, all indicated that there is a good standard of behaviour at the school. Parents and carers agreed that their children are kept safe and that they would recommend the school to other parents and carers.
- Staff who responded to the questionnaire were positive about the good behaviour of the students and were proud to work at Whitstone School.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher provides strong leadership. Where changes have been made these have had a marked impact. For example, a more rigorous approach to monitoring, support and intervention for students has resulted in improving standards. In particular, there has been a notable increase in the proportion of students achieving five good passes at GCSE including English and mathematics.
- The headteacher is well supported by the senior leadership team and the governing body. Together, they demonstrate an ability to strive continually to improve outcomes further.
- Subject leadership has improved significantly, but is not always consistent so that the assessment policy, for example, is fully implemented across all areas of the curriculum. This is particular the case with regard to ensuring further improvements of students' writing skills.
- The school's self-evaluation is detailed and accurate. The improvement plans are prioritised, clear and specific.
- The school provides a broad and balanced range of subjects, which provides well-considered

courses of study for students with a variety of aspirations and abilities. In Key Stage 4, a very small number of students attend a successful off-site motor mechanics course in addition to other subjects. Students have sufficient time to practise their reading skills, but not always to improve their writing skills across different subjects.

- The students have good guidance and support as they move from the school to further education colleges or other schools for post-16 provision. This means that the proportion of students continuing in education, employment or training is considerably higher than the national average.
- The quality of teaching is monitored rigorously. The judgements made by school leaders were well matched to inspectors' judgements. However, school leaders recognise the need to ensure that the assessment policy is further developed to enable teachers to check students' understanding more fully and help to accelerate progress.
- Arrangements for managing teachers' performance, together with a bespoke training and development programme, have been effective in improving teaching. Only those teachers who meet the required high standards move up the salary scale.
- Safeguarding procedures are robust and child protection arrangements are securely in place. School leaders work hard to establish good links with parents, ensure all students are treated equally and that there is no discrimination.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Members of the governing body provide good support and challenge for the headteacher, particularly with regard to staffing and finance. This has resulted in constructive use of the pupil premium to raise the achievement of those students eligible for the funding. Members of the governing body ensure that the performance of staff is monitored. They take well-considered actions to ensure salary progression and promotion are linked to teachers' performance. Governors are kept well informed about students' progress, the quality of teaching, behaviour and exclusions. They have a good understanding of how the school compares to others as regular training has helped improve their awareness of these aspects. The budget is well managed.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	137192
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	406658

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	545
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	0
Appropriate authority	Somerset
Chair	Philip Eavis
Head teacher	Gill Rennard
Date of previous school inspection	Not applicable (converter academy)
Telephone number	01749 345555
Fax number	
Email address	

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