

The Whitehaven Academy

Cleator Moor Road, Hensingham, Whitehaven, Cumbria CA28 8TY

Inspection dates

19–20 October 2016

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
16 to 19 study programmes	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- All groups of pupils make inadequate progress from their starting points. Outcomes for pupils were well below national averages in the last two years and show no signs of improvement for current cohorts of pupils.
- Disadvantaged pupils achieve much less well than other pupils nationally and these differences are not diminishing.
- The work that teachers set often fails to challenge pupils sufficiently, especially in mathematics. Some teachers have low expectations of what pupils should achieve, including in the sixth form.
- Leaders have not developed accurate assessment processes which tell them how well pupils are performing.
- The sixth form programmes of study do not meet statutory requirements. Students do not receive their entitlement to work experience, and the careers guidance they receive is weak.
- The curriculum is inadequate. It does not include some essential elements, such as religious education. The teaching of fundamental British values is weak. Leaders have recently recognised that the way the school day is timetabled is compounding poor learning.
- The sponsor, Bright Tribe, has only recently begun to support the school's improvement and hold its leaders to account. As a result, there has been insufficient improvement and the school has failed too many of its pupils.
- Governance arrangements are currently ineffective.

The school has the following strengths

- In a short space of time, the newly appointed headteacher has put in place rigorous systems to monitor the quality of the school's provision. He is providing the school with dynamic and determined leadership.
- Pupils' attendance has improved significantly since the start of this school year.
- Pupils dress smartly. They are courteous and respectful and most are keen to learn.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement and improve pupils' progress, by:
 - taking urgent steps to improve the quality of teaching
 - ensuring that teachers in all subjects, and especially in mathematics and in the sixth form, give pupils work which challenges them sufficiently
 - ensuring that teachers raise their expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - ensuring that teachers identify where pupils have literacy and numeracy difficulties and help pupils to overcome them
 - ensuring that disadvantaged pupils are fully supported, so that they make progress which is similar to that of their peers
 - ensuring that teachers use agreed behaviour systems consistently to manage any poor behaviour in their lessons
 - urgently devising and implementing reliable tracking systems, so that all teachers, departments and leaders can accurately assess the progress pupils are making.
- Improve the quality of education in the sixth form, by:
 - ensuring that the 16 to 19 study programmes meet statutory requirements
 - improving the learning experience for students in the sixth form, so that they make better progress from their starting points and more students stay on to follow Year 13 courses.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by taking the following actions:
 - school leaders and the sponsor should ensure that teachers and leaders have opportunities to develop their skills through working with colleagues in schools beyond the academy
 - leaders should review the curriculum to ensure that pupils receive their entitlement to the teaching of religious education, careers, British values and personal, social, health and economic education
 - the sponsor should take action to ensure that governance is effective and holds the school rigorously to account
 - take steps to communicate governance arrangements to members of the school's community, so that parents and staff fully understand them
 - the sponsor should take steps to improve the school's learning environment.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- The sponsor of the multi-academy trust, Bright Tribe, has had overall responsibility for the quality of education provided since January 2014 when the school opened as an academy. During these two and a half years, outcomes for pupils have been poor, and in 2016 pupils' progress declined further. Many parents who communicated with inspectors expressed their view that the sponsor had not done enough to improve the school.
- During the years of the sponsor's tenure, the school has had several headteachers. The sponsor's representatives told inspectors that some of these appointments were necessarily temporary and short-term. Nonetheless, many parents feel that this lack of stability in leadership has hampered the school's improvement and momentum. The sponsor had supported the previous headteacher with the management of finances, staffing and other important aspects, such as improving teaching and leadership. Towards the end of the 2015/16 academic year, the sponsor's directors realised that the school was still not making rapid enough improvement and they took decisive action to address this. The current headteacher took up his post in September 2016, and both his appointment and the appointment of the deputy headteacher are permanent.
- The school environment is in a poor state of repair and does not encourage or celebrate learning. The sponsor has begun work to improve the buildings, such as by refurbishing the canteen. However, the net impact of work done has been limited and much more remains to be done to improve the poor learning conditions for pupils.
- The Bright Tribe Trust has an experienced executive principal in place for the Whitehaven Academy and also a director of school improvement, both of whom support and work with the headteacher to set pace and direction. These colleagues have visited the Whitehaven Academy over the last few months to offer support and challenge, and they have assisted with monitoring the school's work. However, over time, the school has become insular and detached from local partnerships. This isolation has led to leaders and teachers missing out on important discussions, such as about changes to examinations. The headteacher is intent on the school becoming an active partner in local alliances as soon as is practicable.
- The headteacher, who is an experienced school leader, had been in post only six weeks when the inspection took place. He inherited a legacy of poor practice across much of the school's work, but he has worked tirelessly and has already brought about some positive improvements. He has introduced new behaviour management systems, along with intensive, robust monitoring of the school's work and evaluation of its quality. He has already formed a strong picture of teaching across the school and knows where it needs to improve. The sponsor has had success in supporting the headteacher to raise attendance, which has seen a significant improvement this year to date.
- Staff say that the headteacher is already making a difference and that morale has improved under his leadership. New performance management arrangements for staff are rigorous. The headteacher is making strenuous efforts to engage with parents and the local community, and a number of parents expressed confidence in his leadership. Several parents commented on the increased momentum towards improvement in the current term in comparison with a long period of malaise previously.

- It is too soon to gauge the impact of the headteacher's work on the quality of teaching, on outcomes for pupils and on the curriculum. Leaders have not done enough over time to improve teaching. Much more remains to be done to bring these aspects up to an acceptable quality.
- The school was unable to present inspectors with any convincing assessment or progress data for its current pupils as it has no reliable tracking system. Senior leaders have no confidence in assessment data relating to pupils currently in Year 11. Where subject leaders were able to define their predictions for pupils' GCSE performance in 2017, these revealed very wide differences between the expected performance of disadvantaged students and that of other pupils nationally. The most able disadvantaged pupils are also making much less progress than other pupils nationally who had similar high starting points at the end of key stage 2.
- The curriculum is inadequate. The headteacher recognises that the way the school day is timetabled is compounding poor learning. Pupils do not receive their full entitlement to subjects such as religious education and personal, social, health and economic education. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is underdeveloped and the school does not teach pupils in sufficient depth about British values and the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Reading is developed well in English, but not in other subjects.
- The school offers its pupils a range of extra-curricular activities, such as 'Rock Challenge' for drama and music, and visits abroad. Pupils enjoy these opportunities.
- The quality of leadership beyond the headteacher is very variable. The headteacher has restructured his senior team in order to meet the needs of the school better. As a result, some senior leaders are still growing into their new roles, such as taking responsibility for the line management of faculties, and have had little time to make an impact. Some subject leaders are also relatively new to post. Subject leaders agree that the headteacher has increased the demands on them as leaders and is seeking to ensure that they, in turn, robustly hold their teams of teachers to account for performance.
- The great majority of parents who communicated with the inspection team would not recommend the school to other parents. Many expressed disappointment that the sponsor had often failed to communicate effectively, for example about the departure of previous leaders and the disbanding of the former governing body. However, the sponsor's representatives told inspectors that in some cases the trust was legally constrained by what it could say regarding these departures. The sponsor's representatives have worked hard recently to build bridges with the local community, especially since the start of the current year. The headteacher and the trust have arranged and been present at a number of meetings with parents, which have been well attended. The headteacher makes himself available to any parent who wishes to contact him.

Governance of the school

- Governance is inadequate.
- The former local governing body had presided over inadequate outcomes and did not demonstrate the capacity to secure improvements.
- Governors have not ensured that pupil premium funding has been used to good effect.
- The sponsor disbanded the local governing body late in the last academic year and replaced it with new governing body arrangements including a regional accountability

board. The first meeting of this board is due to take place in November 2016. This board will be supplemented by a more local team, which will oversee and manage projects and initiatives.

- Parents and staff are unclear about governance arrangements. They do not know who to turn to if they have a problem they wish to discuss.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective and meet statutory requirements.
- Training in child protection is kept up to date for all staff and the school keeps good records of any issues arising. The school has rigorous checking procedures in place for child protection and it follows up any issues thoroughly with the appropriate agencies. Staff have had training on radicalisation and extremism.
- School staff run a daily attendance check on those pupils who attend alternative provision to ensure that they are safe.
- Pupils have had a range of assemblies, including from external agencies, on issues such as e-safety and hate crime. The school has filters in place to prevent inappropriate internet usage.
- Pupils have been taught how to keep themselves safe. However, sixth form students felt that they have not been given enough information on this theme.
- Safeguarding policies have been updated in line with current regulations. Sometimes, however, the school adopts the sponsor's policies without adapting them to local circumstances.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- Teaching over time has been inadequate, and pupils' outcomes in the two years since the academy opened have been very poor. The school's own self-evaluation of its teaching at the end of academic year 2015/16 judged that it was inadequate.
- The headteacher has put in place new processes by which to monitor and improve teaching and has introduced robust systems to hold teachers to account for their performance. There are pockets of stronger teaching, but teaching overall is not good enough to improve outcomes quickly and sustainably.
- Too much teaching fails to challenge pupils, and this limits their progress. Teachers' expectations of what pupils should achieve are often too low. In some subjects, including in the sixth form, pupils do work which is pitched at levels well below their potential.
- The teaching of mathematics is weak. Pupils are often given undemanding work which is too easy for them. For instance, inspectors saw examples of Year 11 work in mathematics where the most able pupils were doing exactly the same low-level work as pupils with lower starting points.
- In the majority of lessons observed, pupils behaved well and worked positively. They generally arrive at lessons willing and ready to learn, but in several classes, pupils' poor behaviour and attitudes hindered their progress. Teachers do not use the school's new behaviour management systems consistently in response to poor behaviour.
- Most teachers are using the marking policy that was recently introduced by the new headteacher. Some teachers are offering pupils detailed guidance on how to improve their work, but this is not consistent across the school. Where pupils act on this

feedback, as in some English and geography classes, they improve their work and their progress quickens. However, this is a new development and in some subjects pupils are not yet using feedback effectively. Some teachers overlook basic literacy errors in pupils' work so that spelling, grammar and punctuation mistakes persist.

- The school's assessment processes are inadequate. Senior and middle leaders have little confidence in the reliability of progress data which was produced at the end of the 2015/16 academic year. They have not yet assessed the progress that pupils are making this year, so teachers and leaders do not have an accurate knowledge of pupils' progress and cannot pinpoint where there is under-achievement. Some teachers are planning lessons in line with the school's policy. However, they are not using precise assessment information to plan the next stages of pupils' learning because this does not yet exist.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Most of the pupils the inspectors met said that teachers and staff care for and support them well. Most are confident that if they are worried about anything they can approach members of staff for help, though a few pupils in key stage 4 were less positive about the support they receive. For example, some Year 11 pupils told inspectors that their requests for extra help with science had gone unheeded.
- Pupils generally feel safe in school. They told inspectors that there is little bullying and that staff will deal with it effectively when it arises. The school has recorded very few instances of racist or homophobic bullying. Pupils relate well to one another and respect each other's differences.
- Pupils wear their uniform smartly and are generally courteous and respectful. However, some pupils do not take enough pride in their work and teachers sometimes do not set high enough standards for the quality of work they expect from pupils.
- The school has done positive work to promote equality and diversity, for example through its work on Black history. Some pupils are not yet aware of fundamental British values, however. Staff have not planned their approach to developing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness with sufficient rigour. As a result, this aspect of pupils' learning remains under-developed.
- Careers education, information and guidance for pupils is poorly planned. It does not provide pupils with sufficient information to make informed choices about their careers.
- The school has placed a small number of pupils with alternative providers in order to meet their needs better. School staff monitor their attendance regularly and make visits to the providers to meet the pupils and their teachers. School staff say that the behaviour of these pupils has improved as a result of these placements.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Pupils show positive attitudes to learning in most lessons. Relationships between teachers and pupils, and between pupils themselves, are generally positive. However, there are examples of poor behaviour which teachers manage ineffectively. Pupils who

spoke to inspectors said that disruption occurs in some lessons, especially in key stage 3.

- A minority of parents who contacted inspectors expressed concerns about behaviour management. On the other hand, staff feel that behaviour has improved since the arrival of the headteacher and pupils generally concur with this view. The number of behaviour incidents logged by staff this term shows a significant reduction from previous figures.
- The great majority of pupils behave sensibly and in an orderly fashion at social times and when moving between lessons. Pupils move promptly to lessons without needing to be reminded by staff.
- Exclusion figures remain too high, but are reducing. The school now works well with its alternative providers to help it to reduce exclusions.
- Attendance was well below national averages in recent years but has improved markedly since the arrival of the headteacher, and is now in line with national figures. Persistent absence has also reduced significantly. The sponsor deployed a leader with considerable experience of managing behaviour and attendance to support the school. He has helped staff to improve systems and is having a positive impact. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils is weaker than that of their peers, however.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- In 2015, and again in 2016, outcomes for pupils were inadequate. All groups of pupils made insufficient progress from their starting points.
- In 2016, provisional examination results show that although the percentage of pupils achieving good GCSE passes in English and mathematics rose slightly, pupils' Progress 8 score (the new government measure by which the progress of Year 11 pupils is assessed) was very low and put the school in the lowest 10% of all schools nationally. Pupils made insufficient progress from their starting points and attained lower results than their peers nationally in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics.
- There are no signs of an upturn in this picture at the start of this school year. The school cannot point to any improvement in the progress pupils make because it has not assessed their progress accurately yet and has no reliable tracking information. Teaching in a number of subjects is not consistently enabling pupils to make good progress.
- Heads of subjects in the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) have made tentative predictions of GCSE attainment scores for 2017. Some of these, in English and history for example, suggest that pupils might achieve significantly better grades in 2017, whereas pupils in mathematics and modern foreign languages are predicted to score poorly. However, senior and middle leaders generally have little confidence in the assessment information which was produced for this year group at the end of 2015/16, so cannot say how accurate or reliable these predictions are.
- Pupils in several subjects are doing work which is too easy for them. In mathematics lessons and in work in pupils' books, inspectors noted work which was set at very low levels, including for the most able pupils, while in English the most able were not being challenged effectively to produce more complex and sophisticated writing. The school is performing poorly relative to the national picture in terms of the proportions of pupils attaining the top grades at GCSE in many subjects. Most-able pupils achieved, on average, around one grade less than the national average in 2016.

- In 2015 disadvantaged pupils performed significantly less well than did other pupils nationally, and this picture was repeated in 2016. The progress made by disadvantaged pupils in 2016 was also significantly less than that of other pupils in the school. No disadvantaged pupils achieved the EBacc. Heads of subjects do not expect these very wide differences between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and that of other pupils to diminish in 2017.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported in school, but their progress is limited. There is evidence, however, that the school is using its Year 7 catch-up funding effectively to improve pupils' reading skills.
- Pupils generally are not well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment. Grades achieved in English and mathematics in recent years have been unacceptably low and, in mathematics, show no signs of improvement. The English department is encouraging pupils to read, but this is not replicated in other subjects. The library is untidy and is not being used effectively to promote a love of reading and learning.

16 to 19 study programmes

Inadequate

- Outcomes in the sixth form are inadequate. From their starting points, students do not make sufficient progress. Academic results for students at both A level and AS level are very low compared to national figures. The school's leaders have evaluated the sixth form as inadequate.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is very variable. It is not good enough overall to raise standards to where they should be. Inspectors saw some strong teaching and learning, for example in a mixed-age law lesson, where Year 13 students worked very well in partnership with their Year 12 counterparts to develop understanding of case law. However, in many subjects the level of challenge is much too low for the students.
- The retention of students from Year 12 into Year 13 is very low. Many students have not been guided to follow the most appropriate courses. Leaders have now begun to address this by ensuring that students receive better guidance and embark on appropriate courses of study more suited to their needs. The new headteacher has deliberately guided some students to other institutions where their needs can be better met.
- Attendance in the sixth form has been very low but has improved significantly this year. This is an indication of the higher standards now being set by senior leaders.
- The school is not meeting the statutory requirements of the 16 to 19 study programmes. Not all students have the opportunity to complete work experience. Careers education, advice and guidance for students is poor; students are very disappointed in its quality.
- The school does not do enough to inform students how to stay safe out of school.
- The headteacher and the newly appointed leader of the sixth form have begun to address the long-standing underperformance they inherited with determination; they have started to change the sixth form culture. Some improvements are already evident: students now dress smartly; their attendance has improved; students are being guided on to courses which meet their needs and abilities; students speak of a stronger ethos with raised expectations. Leaders fully accept, however, that improvements so far are fragile and that they have much more to do to bring sixth form provision up to acceptable standards.

School details

Unique reference number	140406
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	10019779

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	621
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	132
Appropriate authority	The multi-academy trust
Chair	Kathy Kirkham
Headteacher	Warren Turner
Telephone number	01946 595 400
Website	http://whitehavenacademy.org.uk/
Email address	schooloffice@whitehavenacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with the Department of Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school is much smaller than the average secondary school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils known to be disadvantaged, and therefore supported through the pupil premium, is higher than the national average.

- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average.
- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectation for pupils' progress across a number of subjects including English and mathematics.
- The school uses the West Cumbria Learning Centre and a pupil referral unit in Barrow-in-Furness to offer a small number of pupils alternative education provision.
- The school converted to become an academy in January 2014 and is a member of the Bright Tribe multi-academy trust.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in a range of lessons, including in the sixth form. They visited form time and an assembly and observed pupils' conduct at break and lunchtime.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work in lessons and scrutinised a sample of work provided by senior leaders.
- Inspectors held discussions with senior leaders, subject leaders, class teachers and several representatives of the sponsor. Inspectors held a telephone conversation with the former chair of governors.
- Inspectors met with four groups of pupils and sixth form students formally and spoke with many more pupils informally. There were no responses to the online pupil survey.
- The inspection team looked at a wide range of documents. These included: development plans and evaluations of the school's progress; documentation regarding Bright Tribe's governance arrangements and its improvement to the fabric of the school building; school policies; safeguarding procedures and records showing how the school supports vulnerable pupils. Inspectors also scrutinised the school's website.
- The team took account of the 51 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and of the 36 free text responses received from parents. Inspectors spoke with a small number of parents on the telephone and read four letters received from parents. They also considered the 21 responses to the staff online questionnaire.

Inspection team

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Toni Roethling	Ofsted Inspector
Will Smith	Her Majesty's Inspector
Claire Hollister	Ofsted Inspector

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