

Whitworth Park School and Sixth Form College

Whitworth Lane, Spennymoor, County Durham DL16 7LN

Inspection dates

7–8 December 2016

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Despite current improvements, over time, pupils have made significantly less progress across a broad range of subjects than should be expected. Outcomes in science have been particularly weak. In the sixth form, learners make no better than average progress.
- Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and the most able have been too low.
- Some pupils, especially boys, lack the self-confidence to participate fully in lessons. Consequently, boys make less progress than girls.
- The school's assessment system is not reliable enough to provide leaders with accurate information about pupils' progress. As a result, pupils who fall behind do not always get the right support to help them catch up.
- The quality of subject leadership is too variable. In some departments better pupil outcomes are not being secured rapidly enough.
- Levels of attendance are below the national average. In particular, too many disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities regularly miss school.
- During the prolonged absences of the headteacher and deputy headteacher, systems to check on the quality of teaching and on pupils' progress did not function effectively enough. As a result, weaknesses in the quality of teaching were not identified and tackled swiftly so pupils' progress declined.

The school has the following strengths

- Governors have responded assertively to the decline in performance. They have created a sense of urgency and are robustly holding leaders to account.
- Since their return, the effective actions of the headteacher and deputy headteacher have addressed key weaknesses in teaching. Lessons are now more purposeful and most pupils take pride in their work.
- Support for lower-attaining pupils is effective and quickly addresses gaps in their literacy and numeracy skills. Over time, lower-attaining pupils make better progress than their peers.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve further the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in order to ensure that all pupils, and especially boys, make good progress by:
 - strengthening the reliability and consistency of assessment across and within subjects, so that teachers know the next steps pupils need to take
 - ensuring that teachers use assessment information to inform their lesson planning
 - making sure that teachers' planning consistently stretches and challenges all pupils, especially the most able pupils and boys
 - ensuring teachers consistently use approaches that engage, motivate and encourage boys, so that their attitudes to learning become more positive.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - restructuring roles and responsibilities within the senior leadership team in order to make the best possible use of existing skills
 - strengthening the skills of senior and middle leaders so that they can accurately evaluate the quality of teaching and learning and take decisive action to bring about improvements
 - strengthening the quality of training and professional development that teachers receive so that teaching more effectively meets the needs of the disadvantaged and the most able pupils
 - refining the school's assessment system so that pupils' progress towards their targets is accurately tracked
 - evaluating the impact of the pupil premium more systematically and ensuring that allocated funding is spent on meeting the needs of disadvantaged pupils.
- Improve attendance and reduce the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent, particularly among disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Develop the effectiveness of 16 to 19 study programmes by:
 - ensuring that the curriculum has sufficient breadth and teaching is consistently good enough to attract a greater numbers of learners
 - addressing the variability in the quality of teaching and outcomes achieved across different subjects
 - ensuring that teaching is consistently challenging and equips learners with the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding to attain high grades in examinations.

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

Requires improvement

- Since the last inspection the quality of leadership was hampered by the long-term absences of key senior leaders, including the headteacher. During these absences, some crucial leadership and management systems did not function effectively enough and a decline in pupils' outcomes resulted.
- During this period, leaders' checks on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment were not robust enough to give an accurate picture of teachers' strengths and weaknesses. Assessment information was unreliable and predictions for examination results were overly generous. Leaders believed the quality of teaching was leading to better outcomes for pupils than it was.
- Since their return, the headteacher and deputy headteacher have taken decisive action to tackle weaker teaching. They have tightened up arrangements for the management of teachers' performance and have held challenging conversations with teachers who were not meeting the required standards.
- Some successful new appointments have been made, although leaders have struggled to recruit teachers with the necessary expertise and not all appointments have worked out. In the interim, temporary teachers have been used to fill gaps and the progress made by pupils in some departments, such as mathematics and science, has been adversely affected.
- Better training and professional development is providing teachers with more helpful guidance. Training is accurately focused on addressing key weaknesses in the school's performance and is having a positive impact on improving aspects of teaching. However, some teachers need more information and guidance on how they can improve the progress of the most able pupils.
- The quality of middle leadership is variable and some new subject leadership appointments are still required. There is good support in place from senior line managers who meet frequently with subject leaders. Monitoring activities are better planned and checks on the quality of provision are becoming more effective.
- The lengthy absences of key senior leaders prevented a planned restructure of the senior leadership team. This is now urgently required in order to make best use of the skills senior leaders possess. Some talented leaders currently do not hold responsibilities where their abilities can best be used.
- In the past, the curriculum has not met pupils' academic needs well enough. Last year, some pupils followed courses at key stage 4 that did not appeal to their interests and failed to motivate them. This led to some disaffection in Year 11 last year, with associated problems in behaviour and attendance. As a result, outcomes in a number of subjects including science, geography and history were low. Lessons were learned from this and the current curriculum now meets pupils' needs more effectively. Opportunities for extra-curricular activities are broad, although until recently there were few additional opportunities to meet the needs of the most able pupils. A helpful programme of masterclasses and university visits has now been introduced.
- Pupils' personal development needs are met effectively. Weekly lessons promote pupils' safety and tackle a wide range of sensitive topics head-on. Other subjects contribute well. For example, inspectors noted a sequence of lessons in religious education that

broadened pupils' understanding of the consequences of war, including mass migration and radicalisation. There are good opportunities for pupils to discuss prejudice and discrimination. Consequently, the curriculum successfully prepares pupils for life in modern Britain and contributes effectively to their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development.

- The school's use of the pupil premium has lacked tenacity and in recent years disadvantaged pupils have made insufficient progress. The pupil premium was not spent exclusively on disadvantaged pupils and too much funding was used to tackle small numbers of pupils that exhibited the most challenging behaviour. The leadership of this area is now more effective. Additional support for disadvantaged pupils has been strengthened and teachers are more aware of their needs in day-to-day lessons.
- Additional Year 7 catch-up funding for literacy and numeracy is being used effectively. There are good arrangements in place to provide extra teaching of English and mathematics for lower-attaining pupils. The school's reading programme is effective and is supporting better progress for lower-attaining Year 7 pupils. Special educational needs funding is used well. There is good provision in place to support vulnerable pupils which helps them to cope at school and feel safe.

Governance of the school

- The long-term absence of key senior leaders hindered the ambitions of a skilled and determined governing body. As a result, the necessary actions required to stem a decline in outcomes were not taken rapidly enough.
- Inaccurate assessment information meant governors did not expect the disappointing outcomes in 2016, which acted as a wake-up call and has galvanised a strong response. The governors acted quickly to implement a short-term recovery plan, address pressing issues in the sixth form and strengthen their scrutiny of the impact of leaders and managers. They have created a sense of urgency and momentum for change.
- Governors know they need to sustain robust checks on key aspects of the school's performance and are demonstrating the necessary zeal to do so. They are pushing ahead with a restructure of the senior leadership team and working effectively with the local authority to strengthen leaders' skills.
- A determined scrutiny committee is meeting regularly to check on the school's progress and hold leaders sharply to account.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's safeguarding policy is being reviewed in order to meet current requirements. Safeguarding leaders manage safeguarding concerns effectively because they have a detailed knowledge of vulnerable pupils and their families. Members of staff receive regular e-bulletins that share intelligence and information. As a result, all members of staff have a good understanding of referral routes and know how to recognise the signs of neglect or abuse. Senior leaders act appropriately when concerns become apparent and quickly draw upon the support of external agencies. There are good partnerships in place with a wide range of external professionals to support pupils at risk.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement. Although in the past teaching has been weak and led to inadequate outcomes the assertive actions of senior leaders have ensured that the majority of lessons are now purposeful and productive. Most pupils now take pride in their work. However, the legacy of weaker teaching means that some pupils are still making inadequate progress over time.
- In some subjects, such as science, the needs of pupils of different abilities are not always well met. For many, tasks are too easy and do not require pupils to think deeply or apply their knowledge. When pupils' progress is checked through the use of examination-style tests, many pupils fall well short of expectations because they have not secured a deep understanding of topics. This leads to frequent recapping and re-teaching which prevents pupils from making good progress.
- In some subjects teaching does not engage and interest boys well enough. Inspectors noted how some boys are reticent to participate fully in lessons. The progress made by boys has been consistently weaker than that of girls in recent years.
- Homework does not contribute to pupils' learning and progress consistently well. While in some subjects appropriate homework is set, in others, homework is optional or is not checked to see if it has been done.
- Most teachers use questioning well to probe pupils' level of understanding and some teachers act on their findings to quickly adapt lessons. However, some teachers do not expect pupils to give well-considered answers and are too accepting of short replies that do not use subject-specific vocabulary. In particular, many boys lack confidence to participate and get away with weak responses or no answer at all.
- New assessment systems at key stage 3 are not well enough established. Some teachers are unsure and struggle to assess pupils' progress accurately. For example, in science and mathematics, pupils were unclear about their targets and teachers were uncertain about how to track pupils' progress towards their target. Consequently, leaders are unsure which pupils need additional support and which do not.
- Where pupils are given additional support, such as for Year 7 pupils who started with standards that were below those expected in English and mathematics, the quality of teaching is well focused. Here, teachers skilfully identify the gaps in pupils' knowledge and plan appropriate teaching to meet pupils' needs.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement because many pupils, especially boys, lack self-confidence and the self-assurance to participate fully in lessons. Typically, boys are more reluctant to answer questions and many opt not to provide well-reasoned or extended answers. Some teachers are aware of this and have begun to employ strategies to involve the boys, but more needs to be done to address the notable difference between the progress of girls and boys.
- Since the last inspection leaders have put in place a new pastoral structure. Non-teaching pastoral managers provide effective support and are readily available to meet

the social and emotional needs of pupils within their year groups. Pastoral leaders actively promote the school's anti-bullying policy and record all incidents of bullying in detail. They intervene effectively to address bullying, when it does occur. Records show that incidents of bullying are reducing. Pupils consistently told inspectors they feel safe in school and that bullying is rare.

- The school's tutorial curriculum meets pupils' social development needs effectively. Form tutors are well trained and supported to deliver a thoughtfully planned programme. This is supplemented well through the role of the year and student councils which provide pupils with a platform and a voice of influence.
- Newly developed and impartial careers guidance meets pupils' needs effectively and ensures they are well informed about their options. Pupils and parents receive good impartial advice and benefit from a range of opportunities to meet employers and representatives from further education providers. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about their involvement in enterprise days organised by the school.
- Leaders make appropriate checks on alternative providers to assure themselves that pupils' personal development and welfare needs are met. Pupils that attend alternative provision respond positively and improve their behaviour because the courses they access are relevant to their interests and ambitions.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Although most pupils currently in the school behave well, some pockets of more challenging behaviour remain.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders have worked hard to unify the two communities that previously attended separate secondary schools in the town. Pupils are now proud of their school and very loyal towards their staff. However, there has been a degree of disaffection from some cohorts and the level of exclusions for poor behaviour has been well above that seen nationally.
- The school has a well-understood and well-coordinated approach to behaviour management which is implemented consistently by members of staff. As a result, most lessons flow freely and few are disrupted. Pupils respect the teachers' authority and comply with teachers' instructions readily. When incidents of disruptive behaviour occur, the school has effective systems in place to manage it. The nurture provision and 'the link' provide suitable support or sanctions to tackle more challenging behaviour. Effective work with the local authority and good partnerships with other schools has led to a recent sharp reduction in the use of exclusions.
- At social times, pupils conduct themselves well. They wear the school uniform smartly and there is very little litter dropped outside or in the dining hall area. Almost all pupils are punctual to lessons, which allows them to start promptly.
- Overall attendance is below the national average, but improving. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below that of other pupils. Attendance leaders have focused their efforts on these groups this term. The introduction of a breakfast club and the higher-profile use of attendance rewards have helped to reduce levels of absence this term. However, the regular absence of some pupils continues to adversely affect the progress they make and robust efforts to reduce levels of absence need to be sustained.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Overall, outcomes at the end of key stage 4 have declined since the school was last inspected. The area for improvement from the previous inspection about improving the achievement of the most able pupils has not been successfully addressed.
- Pupils enter the school with levels of attainment that are in line with the national average. In recent years they have made significantly less progress than expected across a broad range of subjects including English and mathematics. Although there was some improvement in English outcomes in 2016, the progress pupils made overall continued to be significantly below expectations. Consequently, levels of attainment at the end of key stage 4 in 2016 were below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils that attained a GCSE grade C or better in both English and mathematics improved in 2016, to be close to the national average. However, attainment in some other subjects was particularly weak. For example, only a quarter of pupils attained a GCSE grade C or better in science and just over a third attained the same measure in humanities subjects.
- The progress made by pupils currently in the school has begun to improve. The work in their books shows that better progress is now being made, particularly in English, business studies, and information and communication technology. Pupils also make strong progress in physical education. The school's tracking information indicates that more pupils in the current Year 11 are on track to make the progress they should.
- The progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils, who make up over a third of the school's population, are of particular concern. Over the last three years the progress they made has been significantly below expectations. In 2016, their progress across a broad range of subjects was in the bottom 10% of schools nationally. Leaders are focusing on this issue in particular and there are signs that the progress of disadvantaged pupils currently in the school is improving. The work in their books is increasingly comparable with that of other pupils and the additional support they receive is being targeted more effectively.
- The quality of pupils' writing and their spelling, punctuation and grammar is improving across the school. In addition, the school's reading programmes are effectively promoting an interest in reading. Weaker readers are well supported and the most able readers are provided with suitably challenging books to fire their imagination and interest.
- More, widely however, teachers are less successful at addressing the needs of the most able pupils. Teaching does not stretch or challenge them sufficiently and consequently they do not make the progress they should. Around 30% of pupils in Year 11 attained standards above expectations when they left primary school, but only 12% went on to attain GCSE A* or A grades in English or mathematics.
- Lower-attaining pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make the progress expected of them because they receive good support and teaching which is carefully tailored to meet their particular needs.
- Outcomes for pupils in alternative provision have been variable. Most pupils who are currently attending alternative providers are on track to complete their courses and attain qualifications. Pupils that attend alternative providers have made marked improvements in their behaviour and attendance and in their commitment to learning.

- Good careers guidance has helped an increasing proportion of pupils to secure a suitable destination when they leave the school. Almost all pupils secured a place in further education, employment or training. However, a degree of disaffection meant numbers choosing to enter the school's sixth form declined alarmingly last year. A much greater number of pupils in the current Year 11 have indicated an intention to enter the sixth form, although this is yet to be confirmed.

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- Over time, leaders have not been successful enough in reducing the variability in the progress made by learners across different subjects. While learners make good progress on courses such as business and ICT, progress is weaker in mathematics and English literature.
- Outcomes in the sixth form meet the government's 16 to 19 interim minimum standards.
- The school's tracking information indicates that learners currently in the sixth form, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are on course to make better progress than last year. However, tracking information has been inaccurate in the past and more needs to be done to secure its reliability.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is variable. While some teaching supports good progress, some lacks challenge and there are too few opportunities for learners to apply the knowledge and skills they are taught.
- Recruitment into the sixth form is a cause for concern. Few pupils chose to enter the sixth form last year and a number of subject areas have been withdrawn. Some classes have very small numbers. While learners are pleased with the support and individual attention they receive, the long-term future of the sixth form is at risk of becoming untenable.
- The school ensures that the requirements of 16 to 19 study programmes are met. There is good provision in place for learners' personal development through the tutorial programme. For example, learners are taught about the risks of alcohol, drugs and hazardous driving, and about sexual health. All learners have the opportunity to undertake suitable work experience.
- Most learners complete their study programme. The few that do not do so leave the sixth form to take up appropriate apprenticeships or employment with training. Learners receive good careers guidance and support with university applications. The proportion of learners that take their next step into higher education is well above the average for the local authority. In 2016, no learners failed to secure a place in higher education, employment or training on completion of their study programme.
- The small number of learners that enter the sixth form without a GCSE grade C or higher in English or mathematics receive further teaching which addresses the gaps in their knowledge effectively. Most successfully re-sit the examination and improve their grade.

School details

Unique reference number	114300
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10019390

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
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	1038
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	83
Appropriate authority	The governing body.
Chair	Pamela Sneath
Headteacher	Paul Gillis
Telephone number	01388 824800
Website	www.whitworthpark.org.uk
Email address	office@whitworthpark.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	25–26 September 2013

Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of statutory information about special educational needs provision on its website.
- Whitworth Park School and Sixth Form College is slightly larger than the average secondary school.
- Almost all pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is low. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is above the national average.

- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is well below average. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or with an education, health and care plan is average.
- The school meets the government's current floor targets, which are the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress at the end of key stage 4.
- Whitworth Park is a trust school and the lead partner of the Spennymoor Learning Community Trust. The trust is a charitable company that supports pupils' learning through partnerships with other organisations.
- The school hosts a local authority additional resourced provision for pupils with speech and language difficulties. The provision has places for up to 10 pupils. Currently, only two pupils attend the provision.
- Four pupils attend alternative provision at Cornerstones, East Durham College, the Delta School and the local authority's hospital service. In addition, around 20 pupils attend Bishop Auckland College on a part-time basis.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited lessons across all year groups and the sixth form. A number of observations were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. During observations, inspectors sampled pupils' books and talked to pupils in order to evaluate the quality of their current work. In addition inspectors scrutinised in detail a sample of work from pupils in both key stages 3 and 4.
- Inspectors also observed the general climate around the school at social times.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, a group of teachers, a group of subject leaders and groups of pupils from key stages 3 and 4 and some learners in the sixth form. Further meetings were held with the chair of the governing body and three other governors and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, policies, assessment information and records of checks on the quality of teaching. Inspectors looked at records of attendance, behaviour, minutes of governing body meetings and safeguarding information.
- Inspectors took account of the 58 responses to the online survey, Parent View, the 62 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the 47 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.

Inspection team

Chris Smith, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Lynn Kenworthy	Ofsted Inspector
Julie McGrane	Ofsted Inspector
Ashley Wood	Ofsted Inspector
Elizabeth Cresswell	Ofsted Inspector
Malcolm Kirtley	Her Majesty's Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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