

Inspection of Whitburn Church of England Academy

Whitburn, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear SR6 7EF

Inspection dates: 12–13 November 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are very proud to attend Whitburn Church of England Academy. They feel safe and secure. Pupils say that they have a strong sense of belonging. They enjoy excellent relationships with the staff. They also have great confidence in the principal's leadership. They recognise he is taking steps to improve the school.

Pupils enjoy learning. They feel that the school supports them well academically. Most pupils are ambitious and keen to be successful. Teachers know their subjects well. Many bring real expertise to the classroom. They teach with enthusiasm and bring topics to life. Sometimes, though, they do not challenge the most able pupils enough. Some teachers also need to adapt lessons more for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

The school's values and ethos are tangible. The staff encourage pupils to respect one another and treat everyone kindly. Bullying rarely happens. Pupils have great confidence in the staff to sort out any bullying that may occur. Many pupils take part in the wealth of extra-curricular opportunities. Students in the sixth form are excellent role models. Sixth-form students have set up several societies where they debate and deepen their knowledge. This has helped them to secure places in university.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

In recent years, pupils have not made the outstanding progress they once did. Some pupils, such as those who are disadvantaged and pupils with SEND, do not do as well as they should. The school's governors have not challenged leaders enough. The new principal and other leaders know this. They know what needs to be improved. Although school finances are challenging, they are making good progress. In most foundation subjects, the curriculum is very well planned and challenges pupils. Much of the teaching is strong and helps pupils to gain a deep understanding and love of the subject. There is some variability, however. Some curriculum planning in subjects such as English and mathematics is not as strong. This is most obvious in key stage 3. In English, for example, leaders are yet to make sure that the curriculum contains enough challenging knowledge. As yet, it does not build seamlessly on the content that pupils learn in primary school.

The curriculum at key stage 4 provides a broad choice of subjects. Each year, the curriculum delivers above-average GCSE examination results. But the curriculum is no longer balanced as well as it should be. Three years ago, nearly half of pupils studied the suite of subjects in the English Baccalaureate. Since then, fewer and fewer pupils have opted to do so. Currently, only around a fifth of pupils in Years 10 and 11 are studying this challenging combination of subjects. This does not reflect the high standards these pupils achieved at primary school. It is also a long way short of the government's national ambition for the English Baccalaureate.

The school's values centre on being respectful, kind, helpful and fair. Pupils

understand and abide by these values. They behave impeccably and conduct themselves with great maturity across the day. Older pupils, especially students in the sixth form, set a good example to others in how they conduct themselves. Pupils pay attention in lessons and complete homework diligently. They take excellent care of their books. Most pupils attend school well. But the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is well below that of other pupils. The lower attendance of this group of pupils contributed to their weaker examination results.

Support for pupils' personal development is outstanding. School leaders plan the content of personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) lessons in detail. Content covered is carefully matched to pupils' age and maturity. There is extensive coverage of how to stay safe. Issues such as mental health and sex and relationships are covered sensitively. The curriculum is enriched with numerous visits to places of cultural interest. There are a range of exciting programmes that help to build pupils' character. Pupils are actively encouraged and supported to express their identity. Many pupils take full advantage of the wealth of after-school clubs.

In 2015, school leaders took the decision to open a sixth form. Since then, results have been broadly average. Teachers are continuing to build their subject expertise and refine their curriculum planning. The head of sixth form sets high academic expectations. Students are delighted with the quality of teaching they receive. The work they are set is demanding. Students are ambitious and committed to their studies. Leaders make sure that study programmes include meaningful work experience and helpful careers guidance. Almost all students progress from Year 12 into Year 13. All students progress into further education, employment or training.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders are very knowledgeable about safeguarding. They ensure that the culture in school is one of vigilance. They provide up-to-date training for all members of staff. They take account of local intelligence from partners such as the police. This means that members of staff are quick to spot any signs of concern. Leaders work effectively with other agencies. The detailed records of the actions they take show that they push hard to find solutions.

Leaders make sure that pupils are well informed about risks to their safety. The curriculum helps pupils to recognise when they might be vulnerable. There is excellent provision in place to support pupils to stay physically and mentally healthy.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- When the national curriculum expectations were raised, and new GCSE specifications were introduced, school leaders provided time for departments to adapt their curriculum planning. In most departments, GCSE and A-level courses

were rewritten effectively. However, curriculum planning at key stage 3 developed in a more piecemeal manner. This means that the quality of key stage 3 planning is variable. Leaders must ensure that the key stage 3 curriculum contains sufficiently detailed and demanding knowledge, so that pupils are well prepared to study GCSE and A-level subjects.

- Over half of pupils enter the school having attained highly at primary school. However, the proportion of pupils following the suite of subjects in the English Baccalaureate has been falling steadily. Leaders need to rebalance the key stage 4 curriculum and ensure that more of the most able pupils follow a challenging academic programme. They should ensure that the English Baccalaureate is at its heart.
- The progress made by some pupils with SEND is not what it should be. Many aspects of SEND provision are working well. Pupils with additional needs are identified and their needs are accurately assessed. Their support plans are well written. However, teachers do not consistently act on these plans. Leaders should check that teachers adapt or tailor lessons in response to pupils' additional needs.
- Over time, governors have not held leaders to account tightly enough. They did not challenge leaders enough when pupils' progress began to dip in 2017. Their oversight of school finances in the past has also lacked rigour. They have not, for example, challenged leaders on how pupil premium funding has been spent. At the time of this inspection, an external review of governance was being undertaken. Leaders and governors should ensure that the recommendations from this review are fully implemented.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	136386
Local authority	South Tyneside
Inspection number	10087664
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,200
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	200
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Jean Mulley
Principal	John Crowe
Website	www.whitburncofeacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Whitburn Church of England Academy converted to an academy in 2011. The predecessor school, Whitburn Church of England School, was judged to be outstanding. The academy added a sixth form in 2015. The current principal was appointed in May 2019.
- The school does not place any pupils in alternative education.
- The school has a Church of England denomination. The school's last section 48 inspection took place in May 2019. The next section 48 inspection will be due in 2024.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We deemed the inspection a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

- We met the principal and other senior leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) and the head of sixth form. We met the chair of the board of trustees and four members of the governing body. We also met a representative of the Church of England diocese.
- We focused on the quality of the curriculum in English, mathematics, modern foreign languages, history and art and design. We looked at these subjects across the full age range, including the sixth form. We met the curriculum leaders for each subject, visited lessons, talked to pupils, looked at pupils' workbooks and talked to teachers.
- We met the SENCo and visited lessons to look at how well teachers supported pupils with special educational needs.
- We looked at other information about behaviour, attendance, extra-curricular activities and wider enrichment events. We took parents' responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, into account.
- We looked at pupils' punctuality, behaviour and conduct across the school day. The team held discussions with groups of pupils. We also spoke to different members of staff, including a newly qualified teacher, a cleaner, a member of kitchen staff and a teaching assistant to gauge their views about how well pupils behave and conduct themselves. We also met some pupils who have received sanctions in the past.
- We looked at the vetting checks leaders make on adults who work in the school. We also talked to the principal and leader in charge of safeguarding arrangements. We looked at records of the actions taken by leaders to protect pupils at risk. The team spoke to pupils to check how safe they felt. We also checked whether members of staff understand and abide by the school's safeguarding policy.

Inspection team

Chris Smith, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Garry Stout	Ofsted Inspector
Angela White	Ofsted Inspector
Michael Wardle	Her Majesty's Inspector
Geoffrey Lumsdon	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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