

Inspection of Whitworth Park Academy

Whitworth Lane, Spennymoor, County Durham DL16 7LN

Inspection dates: 5 and 6 October 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Whitworth Park Academy is a welcoming and inclusive school. Pupils develop a strong sense of belonging and pride in their school community. Leaders have high expectations for pupils' academic success. Staff help pupils to develop strength of character and resilience. The ethos 'children at the heart of everything we do' is a strong feature of life at the school.

There have been significant changes at the school in a short space of time. The vision, determination and actions of leaders and staff have led to considerable improvement.

Pupils behave well in lessons. They are keen to answer questions and share their ideas. Bullying is rare. If pupils raise a concern, they know that staff will take action to address it. They understand how to stay safe in person and online. Pupils are well supported by staff that know and care for them.

Pupils' personal development is a strength in the school. Leaders plan a number of 'Inspire' days throughout the year which enrich pupils' understanding of their local community and the wider world. Pupils hear from visiting speakers, go on educational visits and take part in team building activities. Pupils value these opportunities to learn outside of the classroom.

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

Leaders have designed a curriculum to meet the needs of all pupils. There are planned opportunities for pupils to explore a diverse range of texts in English and solve complex problems in mathematics. Teachers are knowledgeable and passionate about their subjects. Most teachers help pupils gain a detailed understanding of each subject by asking them challenging questions. However, some teachers do not carefully adapt their explanations or activity choices to help pupils understand more complex topics. This means that learning in some lessons is not as effective as it could be.

Pupils have access to a broad range of subjects at key stage 3. In art and technology lessons, pupils learn important skills that are needed in several subjects. However, pupils do not study some subjects in depth. They do not have the opportunity to re-visit important knowledge. This is because the time allocated to study each topic is too short.

Teachers carefully check what pupils do, and do not, understand in each lesson. They use formal assessment to identify what pupils do and do not remember over time. Teachers use this information well to improve pupils' knowledge and understanding of the curriculum.

Leaders have taken steps to increase the number of pupils taking the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) suite of subjects, for example by introducing a second language to the curriculum. However, all pupils are required to study a qualification in information and communication technology at key stage 4. This limits the choice of other qualifications they can choose to study.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have detailed plans in place to support them. Teachers have developed specific strategies to support pupils with SEND. However, while teachers have the information they need to be able to plan lessons to meet the needs of pupils with SEND, some teachers do not use this information well enough.

Leaders have identified pupils who struggle to read fluently. A reading programme to support these pupils is in place. It is taught by a teacher with specialist training. Additional staff are currently being trained to ensure all pupils who need extra help with their reading receive it.

Over time, incidents of poor behaviour, numbers of suspensions and permanent exclusions have fallen. Rates of attendance are closely monitored. Leaders have developed a 'Support 4 Success' provision in the school. This targets pupils who are persistently absent or struggling to re-engage with education following the pandemic. This has been successful in improving the attendance of many pupils who attend this programme.

The curriculum for personal, social and health education is precisely planned. It helps pupils to understand a range of important topics, such as healthy living, positive relationships and becoming an active citizen. Leaders ensure pupils have the opportunity to learn about further education and employment. Independent careers advice is available. This information helps pupils make informed choices about their futures.

School leaders and those responsible for governance have a clear vision for the future of the school. Staff share this vision. They feel their views and well-being are carefully considered by leaders. Professional development is a priority. Staff value the opportunity to strengthen their practice and work together as a team. Leaders have an accurate understanding of how to further improve the school. However, some changes they have made are very recent and are not fully embedded.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders responsible for safeguarding are skilled and knowledgeable. They provide training for staff to help them recognise when a young person may be at risk of harm. Staff understand these risks. They know how to report their concerns and feel they will be acted on quickly once raised. Records show that leaders take effective and timely action to address safeguarding concerns.

Leaders have established strong links with organisations that support vulnerable pupils. This ensures pupils who need it receive swift and effective help that supports their physical and mental well-being. Leaders provide regular safeguarding updates for parents, related to online risks, for example, that help keep pupils safe outside of school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some pupils do not have the opportunity to study a wide range of subjects at all stages of their education. This, in part, is due to the limited curriculum time given to some subjects at key stage 3. As a result, not all pupils receive a broad, rich set of experiences. Leaders should ensure they review and amend the curriculum offer to ensure that all pupils have the opportunity to develop talents and interests across all curriculum areas.
- In some lessons, teachers do not consistently implement planned strategies to meet the needs of all pupils, including those with SEND. Consequently, pupils including those with SEND, do not learn as well as they might. Leaders should ensure that staff receive further training to help them adapt and implement teaching strategies to meet the needs of all pupils.
- New leaders have identified a number of priorities to further strengthen the quality of education pupils receive. Some of these changes are very new. Senior leaders should ensure that there is the capacity to quality assure the impact of these changes and provide further staff training to support ongoing school improvement.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

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	145564
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10227832
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	858
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Alan Boddy
Headteacher	David Stone
Website	www.whitworthpark.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school has undergone significant change since the last inspection. The headteacher, deputy headteacher and several other leaders are new to post.
- The school became part of the Advance Learning Partnership multi-academy trust in 2018.
- The school currently uses two alternative providers, Durham Gateway and Engage at East Durham College. Both are registered with the Department for Education.
- Through its careers programme, the school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school is registered as providing an education for pupils from the ages of 11 to 18. However, the school has not educated pupils above the age of 16 for several years.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors met with the head teacher, senior leaders and a representative of the trust. Inspectors spoke to teaching and non-teaching staff, in addition to representatives of the academy council and trust board.
- To evaluate the quality of education, deep dives were carried out in English, mathematics, science, art and design and design technology. Inspectors spoke with curriculum leaders, visited lessons, looked at books and spoke to both pupils and staff. Aspects of other subjects, including geography and information communication technology, were also reviewed.
- Inspectors checked the school's safeguarding policies and procedures, including checks made on all adults who come on to the school site. Inspectors spoke with pupils and staff to ensure their understanding of safeguarding procedures. An inspector met with the designated safeguarding leader to check on their work to keep pupils safe in school.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's parent, pupil and staff surveys, including free-text responses.

Inspection team

John Linkins, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Janet Sheriff	Ofsted Inspector
Gill Booth	Ofsted Inspector
Melanie Kane	Ofsted Inspector
James Duncan	His Majesty's Inspector

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