

Inspection of a good school: The Whitstable School

Bellevue Road, Whitstable, Kent CT5 1PX

Inspection dates:

13 and 14 December 2022

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school's core values, referred to by adults and pupils as 'TRACK' values (tolerance, resilience, achievement, courtesy and knowledge), are well respected across the school. Most classrooms are calm and purposeful, with pupils demonstrating positive behaviours towards staff and their peers.

Pupils enjoy a wide range of enrichment activities. These include sports and arts clubs and opportunities to participate in events during lunchtimes and after school. Beyond these, there are a variety of leadership roles available to pupils, such as being a prefect or an ambassador representing a subject or year group. These opportunities are open to all pupils. Those involved relish the skills that they develop through taking part.

Pupils are confident that if bullying occurs, it is dealt with appropriately by an adult. As a result, pupils trust that adults take seriously any concerns or worries they have. Leaders, however, recognise that further steps are needed to ensure that all records regarding safeguarding concerns are clear and accurate.

Parents are positive about the direction in which leaders are taking the school. As one parent said, 'The Whitstable school has come a long way and it is now a school that local people want to send their children to.'

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

The curriculum is broad and balanced. In most subjects, leaders have thought carefully about what it is that they want pupils to learn and in which order. Staff, including those who teach sixth-form students, have good subject knowledge. As a result, they support all pupils to learn through effective explanations and helpful examples. Leaders have provided suitable training about effective teaching approaches, which is improving the

consistency of teaching across the school. In most subjects, teachers regularly check what pupils know and can do before moving on to cover more complex content. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported to access the curriculum and achieve well. Many pupils with SEND also benefit from thoughtful and individualised support outside of their lessons.

Reading is prioritised across the school. Struggling readers are identified quickly and provided with targeted support to improve their reading confidence and fluency. Staff model reading effectively and provide opportunities for pupils to read across the curriculum.

Pupils behave well in the majority of lessons. Most pupils respond positively to the high expectations of staff and the routines in place to maintain focused learning environments. In a very small number of lessons where staff were required to manage behaviour, they did so with success, and the learning of others was not disrupted.

The school's personal development programme is broad and ambitious. Pupils benefit from the range of extra-curricular clubs available as well as an array of leadership opportunities. Some of the leadership opportunities are carefully aligned to the broader goals of the school. For example, some sixth-form students have supported struggling readers in younger year groups. Participation in this project benefits both the younger readers and the sixth formers who supported them.

Pupils speak positively about their futures. They receive impartial careers guidance that informs them about the different choices and opportunities available. To further support pupils' decision-making, leaders have carefully considered the topics and issues that pupils need to learn about. This important content is then taught through the mentor programme and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education lessons. Together the mentor programme and PSHE lessons provide pupils with the knowledge they need to inform their decisions about their safety and their future as active citizens in society.

Leaders take workload and the well-being of staff seriously. Staff feel well supported and valued. They appreciate the actions that leaders take to provide opportunities for them to share good practice and their views. One staff member commented, 'Well-being isn't just token gestures here.'

Local governors and the board of trustees keep themselves reliably informed about the school. They are committed to supporting the vision of the school. They are ambitious for all pupils and provide leaders with suitable support and challenge to ensure that all are clear about priorities moving forward. Where appropriate, they have sought external support to provide assurances about the quality of education and the safety of pupils. They must now ensure that areas that they have identified as part of the school's improvement journey are responded to within appropriate time frames.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders prioritise the safety of all pupils. More recently, they have extended the capacity of the safeguarding team. Safeguarding leaders take appropriate action if pupils are at risk of harm. They work together with external partners to provide the right help for pupils. Leaders at a trust and governor level seek assurances that pupils are safe through detailed and regular auditing. As a result, they are aware of the need to improve record-keeping. Records do not always contain all of the actions that leaders are taking to support pupils at risk of harm.

Pupils demonstrate a clear understanding of actions to take to stay safe. They speak confidently about making informed decisions about their safety.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Written safeguarding records do not always accurately provide all details of the actions taken and decisions reached. This means that some records do not always provide a clear and coherent account of all relevant and required details. Leaders must ensure that the collation of information is accurate, up to date and clearly demonstrates the actions they have taken to keep pupils safe.
- Trust leaders and governors with oversight of safeguarding take appropriate steps to support leaders to identify actions to improve safeguarding practices. There are many strengths in safeguarding that mean that safeguarding is effective. However, leaders have identified that improvements to recording still need to be made. They must now ensure that actions to improve record-keeping are robust and are delivered urgently. They must assure themselves that all staff receive the training required to improve safeguarding records.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, The Community College Whitstable, to be good in February 2018.

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	144354
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10241575
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
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	1,089
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	88
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Paul Goodson
Headteacher	Ana Gibson
Website	www.thewhitstableschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The Whitstable School converted to become an academy school in September 2018, joining the Swale Academies Trust. When its predecessor school, The Community College Whitstable, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good.
- The school uses four alternative providers to provide education and support for a small number of pupils.
- 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.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic

began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, languages and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with the subject leader, observed pupils at work, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at a sample of pupils' work. The lead inspector also looked at curriculum documentation from religious education.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other leaders. The lead inspector also met with the chair of the local governing board and representatives from the trust, including the chief executive officer.
- The inspection team reviewed a wide range of information provided by the school, including information about behaviour, minutes of governor meetings, external audits and relevant school policies. Inspectors also reviewed leaders' own evaluation of the effectiveness of the school and their plans for further improvement.
- Inspectors talked to a wide range of pupils and observed their behaviour in lessons and during social times.
- Inspectors reviewed the arrangements for safeguarding by looking at relevant documentation, staff recruitment checks and training records. The inspectors also talked to a range of staff and pupils about safeguarding.
- Inspectors spoke with staff and pupils to gather their views. They considered 201 responses to Ofsted Parent View, including 156 free-text comments. Inspectors also took account of 73 responses to the staff survey and 392 responses to the pupil survey.

Inspection team

Hanna Miller, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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His Majesty's Inspector

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