



Whickham School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 108404
Local Authority Gateshead
Inspection number 288092
Inspection date 23 January 2007
Reporting inspector Lesley Aers

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Burnthouse Lane
School category	Community		Whickham, Newcastle upon Tyne
Age range of pupils	11–18		Tyne and Wear, NE16 5AR
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0191 496 0026
Number on roll (school)	1639	Fax number	0191 488 0968
Number on roll (6th form)	312		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Tom Hopper
		Headteacher	Mr Neil Morrison
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2001		

Age group	Inspection date	Inspection number
11–18	23 January 2007	288092

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Whickham School is much larger than average. Students enter the school with standards slightly above average. The number of students eligible for free school meals is below average. The number of students from minority ethnic groups is very small. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The school is very popular and is annually over-subscribed. It is a specialist sports college. It has the gold award for Artsmark and Sportsmark, and also has the Healthy Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with many outstanding features. Currently, standards and achievement overall are good, and they are improving in crucial areas. The school has a very accurate view of its own effectiveness, due to rigorous monitoring. Everyone in the school is involved in this process. Students feel that their views are listened to. Parents take part in an annual survey, which shows that their views are overwhelmingly supportive, and only a few negative. Many have commented, in particular, on the excellent support that has been given to their children, in various circumstances.

The curriculum is outstanding, with enough flexibility and variety to enable students to pursue the most appropriate course. It is the curriculum, together with the good quality of teaching and learning, which has led the school to its highest point in 2006, of 84% 5 A* to C results in GCSE. This demonstrates the excellent progress made by pupils in many areas of the curriculum. However, the proportion of students achieving 5 A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics, while above average, is lower than it could be, as the school recognises. The school's sports college status makes a strong contribution to the curriculum and to the partnerships with other institutions. It is a factor in the school's vibrant atmosphere. The school also celebrates the arts, and students take part in a wide variety of artistic activities.

It is a school where every individual is cared for. This starts before students arrive in school, with highly effective transfer arrangements from primary school. Students' progress is carefully monitored throughout the school. Students appreciate the opportunity to have personal interviews each term. They say they are given very good advice on how to improve their work, and excellent guidance on future choices. Their personal development and well-being are outstanding. They leave the school with a strong sense of responsibility towards others, and to themselves. Staff are also carefully nurtured and training is provided appropriate to each stage in their career.

School leaders are exemplary and set a tone of high expectations for the school. The senior leadership team is constantly reflecting on quality and practice. The capacity to improve is outstanding, evidenced by improvements from the last inspection being quickly and successfully dealt with, and the rate of current progress.

There are weaknesses in the accommodation, apart from the sports facilities. The school site is difficult to manage as buildings are scattered, and some are dilapidated. Nevertheless, students move around in an orderly way and behaviour is good. Staff and students are tolerant of the accommodation and it does not appear to hinder progress.

Overall, the school gives good value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are very effective in providing care and guidance for every learner in the sixth form. Learners expressed pleasure in the courses they had

chosen, and one learner who decided to change his course early on said that staff had been very helpful in facilitating this. Learners are regularly assessed against their target grades. Overall, standards in examinations are around the national average but achievement, given a wide range of prior attainment, is good. All learners have a discussion with a mentor each term, so that any concerns can be aired. The head of sixth form works with departments to monitor the quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form, and also monitors the overall experience of learners, including extra-curricular activities. Learners are keen to work for the school as a whole; for example, they run a games group for vulnerable learners, and sit in on the anti-bullying committee.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of students who achieve 5 A* to C GCSE grades in English and, in particular, in mathematics.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students enter the school with attainment above the national average. Results in national tests taken by students at age 14 in 2005 were above average, but not higher than would be expected. In 2006, results demonstrated good achievement in the number of pupils improving on their prior attainment by two levels. GCSE results have risen steadily from 66% 5 A* to C grades in 2003 to 84% in 2006. This is definitely higher than would be expected, and represents outstanding achievement. However, results at 5 A* to C grades including English and mathematics are barely above the national average. Standards in the sixth form are average but, given the fact that there is a wide entry policy into Year 12, achievement is good, in both academic and vocational subjects. Taken overall, standards and achievement at Whickham School are good. Year on year there are small variations in the achievement of different groups, but generally all students achieve equally well, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, those from minority ethnic groups, and vulnerable students.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Personal development, including students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. Students' moral and social awareness is raised very well through the many opportunities to take responsibility and to serve both the school and the wider community. The sports leadership programmes, in which all students participate, help to develop confidence as well as leadership skills. Most students enjoy coming to school and attendance is above average. They are very well aware of how to stay healthy and safe. The development of key skills is outstanding, so that students

are prepared successfully for their future lives. This has been helped by improved access to computers in recent years. Sixth formers continue the public-spirited ethos of the school, giving time to help younger children, and also organising 'Charity Week' every year.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are consistently good. Some lessons are exemplary. In a small number, challenge is not high enough. The school has a very accurate assessment of its own teaching and learning, and ensures that good practice is widely disseminated. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are familiar with examination criteria. They work hard to engage students in lessons through collaborative activities. In individual work, for example in art and textiles, students are encouraged to be creative and independent. Teachers provide students with models of good achievement to meet their differing needs. All staff are familiar with students' prior attainment and their targets. Assessment of work is thorough, and useful suggestions for improvement are made. Students are involved in their own assessment, and effectively in assessing other students' work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. It is planned thoughtfully and adapted to meet the needs of individual students. There is a wide range of vocational courses, and all students are able to study some of these, if they wish. There are excellent opportunities for work-related enterprise learning through links with local businesses. Careers education is also a strength. There is an efficient programme of personal, health and social education. The school encourages independent learning and is already moving towards a programme of 'personalised learning'. There is an excellent choice of courses in the sixth form. Across the whole school, students appreciate the outstanding range of extra-curricular activities, especially extra sport, but there are also memorable productions of plays and musicals.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Care, guidance and support are excellent. All safeguarding procedures are in place and risk assessments are up to date. Information is checked frequently and shared with all who need to know. There is excellent provision for vulnerable students, for example,

the quiet base set aside for autistic children. Students' progress is tracked carefully in all departments so that underachievement can be identified. Intervention, additional support and mentoring are all used very effectively. Students appreciate the guidance they are given on how to improve their work, and they say it is clear and easy to understand. They also say they are given excellent guidance on choosing courses and, in the sixth form, detailed advice on universities and employment opportunities.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Leadership and management are excellent. The most outstanding feature is the high quality of self-evaluation, which involves staff at all levels of management. Governors contribute extremely well to the evaluation process, and they are prepared to challenge the leadership team if necessary. Managers are well aware of relative weaknesses, and are taking stringent action to address these. There is a large senior leadership team, which has a shared and very clear vision. The headteacher provides exceptional leadership, with a style of collaboration and consultation. This contributes to the ethos in school in which every individual is valued. This is a highly inclusive school, and governors are committed to this. Financial management is efficient, although repairs to the ageing accommodation are a drain on resources.

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Whickham School
Burnthouse Lane
Whickham
Newcastle upon Tyne
Tyne and Wear
NE16 5AR

Dear Students

We recently visited your school to find out how well you are doing and how much you participate in the life of your school. We were only there for a day so we did not have time to talk to very many of you, but we are very grateful to your school council and sixth form committee who came to talk to us, and those of you in lessons who told us about your work.

We were very impressed by your school. Almost all of you clearly enjoy your time there. Your behaviour is good, and you move sensibly around the buildings, even though they are old and cramped. You take advantage of the numerous activities that are on offer outside of lessons. There are many sports activities, as your school is a specialist sports college, but there are also good opportunities to take part in art, music and drama. Some of you organise clubs and games effectively for younger pupils.

Yours is a good school with outstanding features. The curriculum in particular is outstanding, as you can choose from a wide range of courses from 14 to 19, including vocational options. Those of you who had chosen your courses told us how pleased you were with your options. The curriculum and the good teaching you receive led to the outstanding results gained by Year 11 in 2006, at 84% 5 A* to C grades. However, there is room for some improvement in mathematics, and to a lesser extent English, at GCSE. We know that you and your teachers are already making improvements in these subjects.

The care and guidance you receive in personal and academic development are excellent. You are well prepared for your adult lives. Your school is a caring community. Your school council and sixth form committee told us that you appreciate the advice and support you receive from staff.

Schools that are as good as yours don't just happen. They result from excellent leadership and management at all levels. Your headteacher and his colleagues are working tirelessly to bring improvements to your school, and to give you the best experience you can have.

Good luck for the future.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Aers and Mary Sewell

Inspectors