



Whitecross High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 116935
Local Authority Herefordshire
Inspection number 290682
Inspection dates 20–21 September 2006
Reporting inspector Brian Cartwright HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Baggallay Street
School category	Community		Hereford
Age range of pupils	11–16		HR4 0EA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01432 376080
Number on roll (school)	901	Fax number	01432 350219
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Brian Chave
		Headteacher	Denise Strutt
Date of previous school inspection	9 December 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–16	20–21 September 2006	290682

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school has just (June 2006) moved into new purpose-built accommodation about half a mile from the old site, to the western edge of Hereford. Local socio-economic indicators are generally on the favourable side of average. The number of students entitled to free school meals is lower than average. There are low but rising numbers of European immigrant students whose first language is not English. There are a significant number of looked-after students. Specialist sports college status was gained in 2004.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Whitecross High school is a satisfactory school. It is well placed to seize this moment to step up its performance to a higher level, and fulfil its vision where 'everything we do is in the context of convincing our students, their parents and our staff that they can achieve more and deserve to achieve more'. The recent efficiently administered move to new premises has, in combination with staff restructuring, established a very favourable new environment for further improvements. Staff, parents, governors and students consistently expressed enthusiasm and hope for their future and shared a new sense of pride and commitment to fulfilling their considerable potential. Standards achieved by students have remained satisfactory since the previous inspection, although recent examination results are lower than hoped-for targets. The school does have the capacity to improve, with recent refinements to behaviour policy, restructured staff middle management to improve academic tracking, and improvements in English Key Stage 3 results worth noting. But monitoring and evaluation of the impact of its provision has been inadequate, resulting in some key policies such as assessment being inconsistently implemented. Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. In combination with their satisfactory academic achievements and good involvement with healthy activities and healthy eating, students are being soundly prepared for their future adult lives. Their behaviour is good, both within lessons and in the calm, secure and pleasant climate at break and lunch times. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall; it is at its best when teachers plan and deliver lessons well matched to student ability. One student told us he enjoyed lessons most when they were 'challenging', but many more said this did not occur that often. The curriculum meets the needs of the majority of learners satisfactorily. Some departments have been very creative in providing a wide range of alternative pathways, but there needs to be a further increase in the variety of curriculum routes to success for more students. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall. Vulnerable learners are well cared for, particularly looked-after students and recent immigrant learners. The development of the sports college started slowly after designation in 2004. As yet, there is no evidence of impact on standards across the school except in GCSE physical education. The college's specialism has enabled it to work successfully with local primary schools. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall, notwithstanding inadequate monitoring and evaluation. Good financial and administrative management has ensured a commendably smooth transition to the new school, which provides an excellent learning environment that is bright, safe and secure. The school has successfully tackled many of the issues of the previous inspection, notably achieving a better match of staff expertise to the curriculum and improving the school's accommodation. Governors take seriously their duty to hold the school to account.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so every student consistently experiences challenging lessons in which they actively participate, and so gain greater enjoyment from learning and achieve more.

- Improve the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation so that the school meets challenging performance targets.
- Increase the variety of learning routes to meet the needs and interests of every student more effectively.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Students' attainment when they start school is about average, with fewer higher attaining students, and a higher than average proportion of middle attaining students. Standards in examinations at Key Stages 3 and 4 have been broadly in line with national averages since the previous inspection in 2002, although a significant gap has opened as national results have risen in this period. The most recent 2006 results show some improvements in English at Key Stage 3. Girls met the 2006 GCSE targets, but generally the school fell short of many of its published local authority targets, in part because of some underachievement amongst boys. Frequent changes of staff in information and communication technology (ICT) contributed to some lower grades than expected, and science GCSE results in 2006 were surprisingly lower than in previous years. Progress measures show that students continue to make satisfactory progress overall. In Key Stage 3 best progress is evident in mathematics, and previous weak performance in English at Key Stage 3 is not evident at Key Stage 4. The school's leadership honestly accepts responsibility for the shortfalls in some boys' performance, identifying a new behaviour support programme that left them disaffected. Inspection evidence from student interviews in the current Year 11 confirms that corrective measures have now resolved these earlier problems, but came too late to recover the attitudes of some previous Year 11 boys.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Most students enjoy coming to school now and arrive very willing to learn and work hard. They behave well in lessons and around the school and show courtesy in their interactions with each other. They are proud of their new school and committed to ensuring that it stays a pleasant place to learn. They feel safe in this new environment. Their social and moral understanding is good, as almost all have a good sense of right and wrong and most are socially adept. Spiritual and cultural opportunities are well provided through the citizenship programme. They know how to stay healthy and a large proportion of them participate voluntarily in a variety of sporting activities. Many also cycle to school. There is a good range of healthy food available at break and lunch times, with a high uptake. The sports leaders programme, part of the specialist school initiative, is having a positive impact on students' personal development and is reducing potential disaffection. The 'Let's improve personal situations' programme is improving relationships between younger and older students. The school involves students

effectively in decisions, for example in helping to design features in the new school. Senior students take their responsibilities seriously. Students participate well in a wide range of local charity work. Despite these good features, students' attendance has fallen over the past two years, from previously above average levels to marginally below average in 2005/06. Exclusions rose as a result of some student disaffection in the recent past, which the school attributes to the initial impact of the behaviour for learning policy. This was most evident in a high proportion of fixed-term exclusions amongst boys, affecting about one in five. The absence of an education welfare officer for most of last year compounded the situation, the old registration system led to gaps in the school's knowledge of problems, and staff structural changes all created the opportunity for some issues to go unresolved for too long. The new 'Academies' staff structure explicitly assigns responsibility for attendance to key staff, and the new registration system in the new school works effectively.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, confirmed by inspection evidence and by the school's own records of teaching quality. Sound planning ensures students make adequate progress, although better use of the school's good performance tracking systems would ensure closer match of task to individual student capability. For example, good lessons were well paced, involved students actively participating and effectively challenged all abilities of student. But some satisfactory lessons missed opportunities for students to solve problems for themselves and others had undemanding activities. Quite distinctively, all lessons regardless of standards were characterised by excellent teacher–student relationships. Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching both within and across departments are understood by senior leaders, and they are taking steps to share known best practice. Whilst students enjoy some of their lessons and make good progress in these lessons, they find others to be uninspiring and lacking in challenge. Most do not enjoy copying text from boards. Assessment of students' work is carried out regularly but the quality of marking designed to help them improve is not consistent across the school despite some excellent examples seen in English and ICT coursework. Procedures to monitor assessment are in the early stages of development. More middle managers need to take part in this work scrutiny, and in lesson observations with colleagues outside of the formal performance management structure, with a view to learn from and support each other.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory with some good features. For example, in physical education a good range of options in Years 10 and 11 provides all students with an assessed physical education qualification of some kind. This good model in which students can learn through a variety of qualifications and different styles of learning

is not widespread enough. A number of students take up vocational options provided by the increased flexibility project. About half the students experience an element of vocational work in their curriculum. These include vocational courses at local colleges of further education, and some young apprenticeships. About half the students participate in the optional enrichment hour programme on Wednesday afternoons. The impact of these wide-ranging opportunities has not been evaluated effectively, so the school is unable to be sure of its effect on raising standards. Good citizenship education, including spiritual, social, moral and cultural aspects, systematically develops skills which prepare students well for life.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The quality of care, guidance and support is satisfactory. Students feel safe in school, especially in the new premises, and all child protection requirements are met. Students feel able to seek help from staff if they need it and the school deals effectively with issues such as bullying. However, the initial impact of a new 'zero tolerance' behaviour policy compromised the learning attitudes of some older students and corrections were not applied quickly enough to fully support some of the Year 11 boys last year. Transition pathways from Year 9 to Year 10 are limited both by lack of variety of curriculum provision and students' low level of awareness of the potential of vocational opportunities. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities, and other vulnerable students, are well cared for and make satisfactory progress, with good support and monitoring of individual students most at risk. Students in the care of the local authority receive good support, and achieve as well as other learners.

Interventions to support students who do not meet their attainment targets have not been consistent across the school. The school has now radically changed its staffing structure to more explicitly ensure middle managers take responsibility for tracking and guiding students in each of the new 'Academies'.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. The headteacher and leadership team provide a clear lead to colleagues. They support colleagues with commitment and drive, characterised by enthusiasm, good humour and honesty. They work well together to promote a sense of teamwork, and effectively involve members of the school staff in leading the school. Recent restructuring of the leadership group has clarified roles for managers, who are buzzing with enthusiasm and eager to make the new structure work in the new school. The confidence of parents in the school's leadership is high and leaders have worked hard to ensure that they reach out and find out what parents' views are of the school. Parental surveys returned to inspectors were overwhelmingly positive, with the majority of parents responding; this is a most welcome (and unusual!) sign of their commitment to the future success of the school. Whilst recognising the potential for future improvement, the quality of evaluation of

the school's performance by middle and senior managers has been inadequate since the previous inspection. The school's view of its leadership and management, curriculum and care as good is too generous, although it does have an accurate view of its overall effectiveness, students' achievement and of teaching and learning. However, this understanding has not led to sufficient improvement in the quality of teaching and learning and the raising of standards. Unsatisfactory teaching, although identified, had not been promptly resolved and has had a negative impact on some students' progress. Targets for students' achievement have not been set at a challenging level for the school or individual students. Although still representing 'satisfactory' achievement, it is not ambitious enough to be aiming for average standards at the end of Key Stage 4, if standards on entry to the school are also average, particularly for a specialist college. The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. The recent transfer of premises has been very well managed by all staff and has had a minimal impact on students as a result. Governance is satisfactory. Governors take their responsibilities seriously, and have shown their commitment to take tough decisions once they have been given the relevant information. Financial administration of the school is good. This was evident in the effective deployment of resources shown in the recent move.

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

Thank you for your time and energetic contributions to our discussions with you during the inspection. Your consistently good behaviour and honest opinions convinced us that you and your school are well set up to become a really special place to learn. We very much respect your pride in your new school. The last time the school was inspected it was judged to be satisfactory. That is still the case, based on what we know from previous examination and test results and what the school has said about itself. We do think, however, that the new buildings, new staff arrangements, and your huge enthusiasm to do your best provide every potential for the school to get much better. You want to work hard and enjoy being challenged, and we think teachers are particularly good at being approachable, supportive and helpful. They honestly want you to have the best they can do, from headteacher through to associate staff. We think the school needs to make sure that the best practice in teaching, marking, and curriculum choices are available in every class and subject. In the past, the school has missed opportunities to bring about improvement because it has not always been checking that what it is doing is actually improving standards quickly enough. We hope teachers hear your clear message that the best lessons are those where learning is made interesting, enjoyable and challenges you at your current level of understanding. You can help by making sure you insist teachers tell you how well you are doing, and what you need to do to improve. You have a great opportunity to all be involved in making this school really superb.