

Whitley Abbey Business and Enterprise College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103734
Local Authority	Coventry
Inspection number	308406
Inspection dates	16–17 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Pam Haezewindt HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	696
6th form	85
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Stephenson
Headteacher	Lorraine Allen
Date of previous school inspection	16 May 2005
School address	Abbey Road Whitley Coventry CV3 4BD
Telephone number	02476 302580
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Age group	11–18
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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

Whitley Abbey is a smaller than average school. It has a smaller than average sixth form which has increased in size since the last inspection, and which is part of a local consortium. Overall, students' attainment on entry to the school is below average. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average. The school gained Investor in People and the Healthy Schools Gold Award in 2006. It became a specialist school in Business and Enterprise in September 2007. The school is now working towards Trust status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The overall effectiveness of the school, including the sixth form, is good. There are outstanding features. Since the last inspection, the school has been on a journey of improvement and strives continually on that journey, knowing that it has done well but can always do better. Key to the school's effectiveness is the enjoyment students get from their learning at Whitley Abbey and their increasing desire to come to school. For example, a group of students told inspectors that they enjoy coming to school because 'we learn, teachers care for us and it is a nice environment'. They said that they are prepared well for their national tests. Students' standards are higher than they were at the time of the last inspection and almost all are making good progress from their starting points. This is due to a combination of factors that stem from outstanding leadership and management and which demonstrate the school's excellent capacity for continued improvement.

The school tracks students' progress very regularly and rigorously, and provides support and intervention to ensure that they achieve well. Beyond this, curriculum provision is well tailored to needs and there is excellent support and guidance focused on individual need. As one member of staff put it, 'The school's ethos is child-centred.' The school sets targets that encourage students to give their individual best and show them that they are believed in. The school's motto, 'Be the best you can be', is shared by all. Celebration of all types of achievement is embedded across the school and visible in corridors and classrooms and in the entrance hall. Teaching and learning are also predominantly good and mostly enable students to learn in a supportive yet challenging environment. Teaching and learning are monitored very regularly and inspectors agree with the school's judgements. Occasionally, lessons are a bit too passive, and the most able learners are not always well provided for.

The school provides the wherewithal for students to understand the importance of healthy lifestyles and many do so. The take-up of extra-curricular sport is good. Students know how to stay safe and they feel very safe at school. After quite a long period where attendance was low, it is very much improved. The school is rightly proud of this improvement that is as much down to the school's robust systems as it is to better overall provision. There are rigorous systems for ensuring behaviour is good in lessons and teachers apply them well where they need to. Students contribute to the community in school and beyond, for example, by supporting younger students, contributing to the interviews for new staff, and contributing to charities and voluntary work. They make suggestions and voice their concerns, and these are taken notice of. Through the school council, they are currently discussing the state of the lake with building contractors on site. Such activities make a valuable contribution to the development of citizenship across the school.

Business and Enterprise college status is helping to provide good opportunities for all students to develop workplace skills which contribute to their economic well-being. There is a big drive in the school to improve oral and written literacy across the curriculum, a key issue in the last inspection, and the Opening Minds curriculum in Key Stage 3 is instrumental in moving this forward. In a very purposeful Year 7 form tutor session, for example, it was clear that students were being helped very well to express themselves articulately. Students' moral, social and cultural development is good, although there are too few opportunities within the curriculum for good spiritual development. There are also too few regular enrichment opportunities beyond those for sports.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is good. Students' current levels of attainment are in line with national averages, despite considerable variations between subjects. Performance at A2 level is stronger than at AS level. Students' achievement is good. In some cases, progress made is outstanding, for example, in Year 12 art. Students' personal development is very good. Their behaviour is excellent. They make an excellent contribution to the school and wider community and now feel that, when they make suggestions, these are listened to and acted upon. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and of examination requirements, and they support students well. Some lessons include good opportunities for independent work. Through increasingly close collaboration with the school's main partner in the consortium, students have access to a good range of courses at all levels. The school coordinates students' timetables and provides transport to off-site provision. Students' progress is regularly and closely monitored, including the progress of those who take courses at other institutions. Leadership and management of the sixth form are excellent. Leaders have been responsible for a large and successful expansion of the sixth form in terms of numbers of students and the curriculum on offer, and show a good awareness of strengths and weaknesses, as evident in the detailed sixth form self-evaluation report. They are strongly committed to helping individual students to succeed, and to overcome the barriers to success that many face. Increasing numbers of students are progressing to higher education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all teaching and learning are exciting and engaging; that they consistently encourage students to go the extra mile, and challenge the most able and gifted and talented students.
- Increase the choice of regular enrichment activities beyond sports and provide more opportunities for students' spiritual development.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

In 2007, Year 11 students' standards were below the national average but students achieved the challenging targets set for attaining five A*-C grades in their GCSE examinations and made satisfactory progress, given their starting points. They achieved relatively well in English and mathematics. The school also achieved a 20% increase in the numbers of students gaining five or more good GCSE grades. This year, following very rigorous tracking and intervention strategies, the school is reaching the national average for students achieving five A*-C or equivalent grades. This represents good progress for many students and outstanding progress for some.

In 2007, Year 9 students made satisfactory progress in achieving results that were just below average in their Key Stage 3 tests. Results were better in English and science than in mathematics. Generally, all groups performed as well as each other, except that boys did less well in English. This has been tackled this year. Challenging targets have been set for 2008 and students' work shows that they are on target to meet these and reach standards that are in line with national expectations.

Almost all students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are making good progress from their initial starting points. There is scope, however, for the higher ability students to reach even higher standards. Despite being less than one year into specialist status, there are good indications that specialist subject targets will be met.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school places a very high priority on the personal development and well-being of all its students. As a consequence, this is outstanding. Students greatly enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in the much improved attendance rates. They are proud of their school and are excited by the wide range of opportunities to develop their personal skills. Through the school council, they feel empowered to influence school policy. Students display a maturity and confidence in their relationships with adults. They are encouraged to take responsibility and to show initiative. These personal skills enable them to develop very well as rounded individuals, able to contribute effectively to the community and eventually transfer to working roles. The Business and Enterprise specialism is effectively supporting this, for example, through the Year 7 bank. Although moral, social and cultural development is good, students have too few opportunities to explore spiritual issues.

Students are aware of how to stay healthy and enjoy the wide range of healthy food on offer in the school canteen. They feel very safe and extremely well supported. Incidents of bullying are minimal and swiftly dealt with if any occur. Older students take an active role in supporting the younger ones and they enjoy working together. Teachers and senior staff know their students exceptionally well and there is a strong ethos of mutual respect and care. Students' attitudes to learning and behaviour in lessons and around the school are good. There is a very strong community spirit.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Key to the school's improvement in the quality of learning has been the use of a rigorous rolling review programme coupled with extensive professional development opportunities. Team teaching, lesson observation, 'hot spotting' (sharing ideas) and the extensive use of advanced skills teachers and local authority consultants are some strategies that have together created a culture in the school whereby the quality of learning is continually improved. The school's approach to Key Stage 3 has challenged traditional models of learning considerably and has been particularly effective in developing students' learning skills.

In the majority of lessons, teachers have high expectations and students make good progress. Teachers make good use of progress and assessment information to ensure that students know the levels or grades they are working towards, and what they need to do to improve further. Almost all teachers use the school's 'behaviour for learning' policy effectively to ensure that students respond positively and are well motivated. As a result, students enjoy and are engaged in their learning. Variety, good pace and clear explanation of ideas and tasks, along with good support, were characteristics of the most effective lessons observed during the inspection.

Students knew exactly what they had to do and tried hard as a result. Just a few lessons were too passive and did not engage students quickly enough. Overall, teaching meets the students' wide range of learning needs well, although, occasionally, the most able students are not as well catered for. Many teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) confidently to engage and delight students in learning. Moreover, a high level of independent learning and thinking are developing in some courses. There are excellent working relationships between staff and students.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum meets statutory requirements, with a good range of academic and vocational courses in place across the school. The school's Opening Minds curriculum in Key Stage 3 provides a competency-based curriculum which is being delivered very effectively to develop the learning skills of younger students and give them an excellent base from which to develop their life-long learning skills. The Business and Enterprise specialism complements the school's curriculum vision. It is used well to develop business and enterprise skills across the whole curriculum. The curriculum is personalised well to meet the needs of students and increase their life chances. The school's continual review ensures that students follow pathways to maximise their achievement and gain accreditation. Where necessary, the school makes individual arrangements for students to access courses that are not offered at Whitley Abbey.

There is a wide range of sports activities before and after school, study support in many subjects, and various trips out in this country and abroad. The recent art and French trip to Paris has inspired Year 11 students to ask for an AS French course on site and this has now been organised. There are, however, few enrichment activities beyond sport on a regular weekly basis and opportunities for students' spiritual development within the curriculum are no more than satisfactory.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Parents hold the school in high regard and comment positively on the support their children receive from the school. Since the last inspection, reporting to parents has improved significantly. Students feel very well cared for and, because relationships are so good, they know they can seek help and support whenever they need it. In Key Stage 3, the use of 'circle time' encourages students to speak freely and openly about matters of concern to them. This makes a very positive contribution to their levels of confidence. Child protection arrangements and procedures are exemplary. Health and safety, including risk assessment, are very effectively managed. Since the last inspection, the school has worked hard to improve absence rates. There is an effective action plan in place and, consequently, attendance has improved significantly.

Learners are guided and supported exceptionally well in all key stages and this contributes to their good progress. The school has outstanding pupils' academic tracking systems in place. These are used extensively to identify where students need extra help and to provide it. Students are well informed about the progress they are making. They know and understand the levels they are working at and how to improve. Mara House learning support makes outstanding provision for all students who require additional support, drawing well on help from outside

agencies. Vulnerable students are quickly identified and are then very well supported and encouraged to achieve so they make good progress. Sixth form students are involved in mentoring younger children and also help younger students with their reading.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The headteacher provides outstanding direction for the school, ably supported by leaders and managers at all levels. The school's vision is very strongly focused on improvement, which shows in all it does to care, guide and support its students, help them to reach their potential and to take pride in doing so. Major strategic changes since the last inspection have had a very good impact on improvement and raising staff and students' expectations. One long-standing member of staff described the school as 'the best it's ever been'. All groups of students spoke about how it is now a school to be proud to come to. Parents are also more involved in the school and the very large majority are very pleased with the education and care it provides.

The school's self-evaluation is excellent. It is accurate because it is based on consistent and regular monitoring of teaching and learning, and robust and systematic analysis of students' academic performance, behaviour and attendance, tracking this over time. This results in action to improve progress which is timely and pragmatic. Planning is very regularly reviewed to ensure targets are being met and to decide whether actions need amendment. An outstanding feature of the regular review of intervention practice is the school's willingness to amend its strategies to better meet individual needs. Senior leaders are innovative in taking on new initiatives to improve students' chances, and rigorous in making them work. The specialism was chosen to further students' skills and to enhance their economic well-being, and school leaders are working to achieve Trust status with similar objectives in mind. Staff do not shy away from the hard work such initiatives involve.

All issues from the last inspection have been tackled well. Having emerged from a period of crippling deficit at the time of the last inspection, the school's finances are now prudently managed, but always with a focus on maintaining the best provision. Accommodation is very good and resources have improved with specialist status. Governance is improving and has been instrumental in the specialist school bid, and now in working towards Trust status. Links with outside agencies and different partners to support students' needs are very good.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	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	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	2
The attendance of learners	2	2
The behaviour of learners	2	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	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?	2	2
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.

Annex A

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
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	2	
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

18 April 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Whitley Abbey Business and Enterprise College, Coventry, West Midlands CV3 48D

On behalf of the inspection team and myself, I should like to thank you for your hospitality and your willingness to talk to us when we visited your school recently.

We found that your school provides a good standard of education for you. It is led and managed excellently and because of this, it has improved very much since its last inspection. You told us that you have noticed the improvements yourselves, that the school's reputation in the community has improved, and that you are proud to be Whitley Abbey students and wear its uniform.

Staff care for you extremely well and make lots of effort to ensure that you make good progress, both academically and personally. We were delighted to see how much you enjoy school and how your attendance has improved. Your personal development is outstanding. You are taught well and the school provides a good curriculum that supports you in gaining workplace skills and proceeding to training and further and higher education.

We have suggested to your headteacher and senior staff that they can improve the school still further by ensuring that:

- All of your lessons are interesting and of the same quality as the best ones.
- The very able amongst you are always challenged in lessons and beyond.
- There is an increased choice of regular extra-curricular activities for those of you who are less inclined towards sports, and more opportunities for you to think and reflect about things.

Thank you again for your help. My very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Pam Haezewindt HMI Lead inspector