

Whitgift School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118067
Local Authority	North East Lincolnshire
Inspection number	312799
Inspection dates	4–5 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Jim Bennetts

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	750
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs C Dixon
Headteacher	Mr M Rushby
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2005
School address	Crosland Road Grimsby DN37 9EH
Telephone number	01472 887117
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Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school serves an area of private and public housing in the western suburbs of Grimsby. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is a little above average and there are more students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities than normal. The great majority of students are of White British family background. There are a small but increasing number of students for whom English is an additional language. Over the last few years the number of students has fallen by about 250, and there are fewer younger students than older ones.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

This is an improving school. In many ways it is better than at the last inspection. However, test and examination results are stubbornly slow to improve. For this reason, the school's overall effectiveness is inadequate.

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to achievement and standards.

Students have slightly below average standards when they join the school in Year 7. However, tests at age 14 and GCSE results show that achievement has been inadequate in relation to students' starting points: standards are low. In lessons, learning is currently never less than satisfactory, but it is apparent that some students should have made more progress over time. There are minor variations, but achievement is much the same for all groups of students. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar progress to others.

Students enjoy school; they are exuberant in physical education (PE) and accomplished in technology. Most feel safe. They behave well, have positive attitudes, get on well, and like to make a contribution to school life. Attendance is below average but improving and the number of exclusions has reduced dramatically. The welfare systems are good. There are sound procedures for assessment and the tracking of students' progress. However, assessment could sometimes be more reliable and intervention to improve progress could be more finely tuned.

Students are provided with a curriculum that is at present satisfactory, with promise of suitable development. Most teachers are new to the school and faculties have been reorganised. Teaching is satisfactory with many strengths, and in lessons there is generally effective learning; yet there is dissonance between the many lessons that are outstanding and those that are only satisfactory. In some lessons, expectations are not high enough and tasks could be better matched to the learning needs of individual students. Marking is variable and it could sometimes be more helpful in pointing the way for improvement in subsequent pieces of work.

Senior staff have been unflinching in tackling obstinate problems. They have established a more harmonious school community and a wholesome learning culture. They have been persevering in levering up the quality of teaching. They are taking action to consolidate improvements and refine quality assurance mechanisms. Sound capacity for improvement has been demonstrated; unwavering fortitude is needed in seeing improvements through to better examination results.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the achievement of all students, prioritising those in Year 11 and Year 9.
- Improve teaching ensuring that expectations are always high and that students of differing ability are suitably catered for.
- Sharpen quality assurance systems, such as those for monitoring and improving teachers' work and students' progress.
- Improve attendance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Standards in national tests and GCSE examinations are low, showing inadequate achievement during the time that students have been in the school. Three quarters of the staff joined the school over the last two years and there is now effective learning in lessons.

Students joining the school in Year 7 have standards that are a little lower than average. Over the last few years, the standards in Year 7 have fallen year by year. At age 14, standards in national tests in English, mathematics and science have been low. In 2006, students' achievement was unsatisfactory; progress through their first three years at the school was in the bottom 10% of that found nationally. Progress in the Year 9 classes of 2006–2007 was hampered by the intake of a large number of students, who swelled class sizes and in some cases introduced difficulties in the classroom. The results for 2007 were a little lower than the previous year. Results have tended to be strongest in mathematics.

GCSE results have been low for some years. In 2006, results showed that students' achievement in relation to their starting points at age 11 was in the bottom 5% when compared with similar schools nationally. In 2007 there was modest improvement. The proportion gaining five or more passes at grade C or above rose from 34% to 38.5% and the figure inclusive of English and mathematics rose from 23% to 26%. Results have been consistently strong in some subjects, for example in sport, art and design and technology; in some technology courses students had results that were at least a grade higher than their average GCSE grade.

During the inspection, work of particularly high quality was seen in technology and PE. In general, lessons and books show that students' standards are now rising at a rate that ranges from satisfactory to outstanding – though sometimes from low starting points. There is little difference in the progress of boys, girls and different groups of students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being are good. Students feel that their school has improved enormously over the last 18 months. They enjoy lessons. They feel well informed about their progress and value guidance for improvement. They recognise the importance of basic skills in literacy and numeracy for their later life.

Because students feel safe and secure, they are confident and articulate. Relationships throughout the school are very good. The great majority of students behave well and those with learning or behavioural difficulties value the new systems and the support they receive; there has been a huge reduction in exclusions. Although attendance remains below average, it is improving as a result of actions the school has taken. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is satisfactory but there is limited development of students' understanding of cultural diversity. Through the school council and a range of activities, students make a contribution to the life of the school and the wider community.

The PE and sport, both in lessons and in voluntary activities, are outstanding and are particular strengths of the school. Inclusion of, and participation by, all students – including those who would otherwise be uninterested – is particularly impressive. Certification, including sports

leadership qualification, reinforces this. It also involves working with primary school children, and so contributes to the well-being of others in the community.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall with more strengths than weaknesses. No lessons were unsatisfactory.

Teachers have sound subject knowledge and most lessons are well prepared, with a variety of activities to maintain students' interest. Lesson objectives are shared at the beginning of lessons so that students know what they are to learn. There are good relationships between teachers and students; students behave well. They are encouraged to do investigative work, particularly in science, and to be independent learners. Many lessons make use of group work, where students share ideas productively. However, in a small proportion of lessons, teachers' expectations are not high enough and there is insufficient challenge which sometimes leads to boredom and underachievement. In many lessons, different approaches are planned for those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for the most able, but these are not always put into practice. Sometimes, teachers do not anticipate with sufficient clarity the needs of the more able for extension tasks, or of the less able for 'stepping stones' to help them on their way. During lessons teachers do not always notice quickly when some students have already mastered a task, or when others are floundering.

Most students are aware of their targets. However, the quality of marking is variable and does not always give students clear advice on how to improve their work. There is a whole school policy for the setting of homework but practice is inconsistent.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory; it meets statutory requirements and provides appropriate opportunities for all students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The Key Stage 4 curriculum currently offers a range of vocational opportunities, including courses in science, sport and engineering, and such provision is being extended. There are challenging opportunities for some students to gain early qualifications in English and statistics. Certificated programmes are available for all students in PE. Good links with local colleges and businesses enrich students' learning experiences and personal development. Sensible alternative curricular provision is planned for Key Stage 3.

Careers education and citizenship lessons prepare students well for the challenges ahead. The personal social and health education (PSHE) courses ensure that learners are adequately informed about healthy and safe lifestyles, though the piecemeal delivery of the programme involves some inconsistency, for instance in appreciating the connection between substance abuse and relationships. Extra-curricular provision is good: the school boasts numerous sporting, creative and musical activities at lunchtime and after school, which students appreciate and enjoy.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good, with some elements of considerable strength and others that the school is seeking to develop further. Child protection and safeguarding procedures are in place and staff receive appropriate training. The school is successfully tackling both attendance and behaviour. Behaviour has improved enormously. On a daily basis, students feel well cared for. A very small number of parents expressed concerns about bullying, but students feel this is dealt with well by the school. Some said that they had moved to this school from elsewhere and were delighted to find such a friendly and pleasant atmosphere.

The school is diligent in looking to the interests of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Classroom support is well deployed and generally very effective. The supported Individual Studies Group is particularly successful in facilitating success for those who find it difficult to make headway with a traditional curriculum; they prosper through vocational and community activities, while retaining access to the full mainstream curriculum. Care and support for the increasing number of students with English as a second language are strengths. Students like the Year 7 to Year 11 mixed-age tutor group system; it affords good opportunities for role modelling – though the delivery of PSHE appropriate to students' age and development can be problematic, for instance in consideration of issues related to sexual development. There is a school nurse, and the school has a drop-in facility for students to seek confidential support.

Sound systems have recently been established to record assessment information and track individual students' progress. The school recognises that there has been a mismatch between teachers' assessments and external test results; it is taking action to improve the reliability of assessment. Staff are now seeking to pin-point students' areas of weakness and provide well focused help for any students who are not making the grade.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and the fairly recently established senior team strive relentlessly for improvement. Much has been achieved. Whitgift has blossomed into a happy school where students enjoy learning. Behaviour and attitudes are good: they are significantly better than at the last inspection. Senior staff have been resolute in ensuring improvement in teaching; firm action has been taken successfully in relation to inadequate teaching. Progress in lessons and that to be seen in books is satisfactory and often good. The recent examination results reflect problems largely of the past and the accumulation of underachievement over time.

At the time of the last inspection, there were pressing day-to-day problems and a lack of leadership and management structures to drive improvement in either the pastoral or academic work of the school. New approaches to the leadership of staff and management of students' welfare are proving effective, and are bedding down. Some innovations are recent and lack refinement. For example, the system for tracking students' progress is limited by uncertain assessment information in some subjects. Interpretation of data is not always reliable. There is a marking policy, but marking is variable and often not as good as it needs to be to help students improve. Whilst a substantial amount of teaching is brisk and well-tuned to the diverse needs of all individuals in the class, some lacks these qualities. The cultivation of high quality teaching has further to go.

The school has falling student numbers. There has been reduction in staffing and this will continue. The precarious budget position is being managed satisfactorily – though costs are high in relation to the standards being achieved. The governing body is steadfast in its determination to establish good education at the school. It is tenacious, yet sympathetic, in holding the school and its staff to account. Leaders are candid in weighing up how things stand. The school has demonstrated sound capacity for further improvement.

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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
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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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?	2

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?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
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	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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?	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

8 October 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Whitgift School, North East Lincolnshire, DN37 9EH

Thank you for all the help you gave us when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking with you in discussion groups, in lessons and as we chanced to meet around the school.

Whitgift is an improving school. Over the last couple of years, things have been getting better all the time. Behaviour is now good. You enjoy school life. You generally get on well together. You work hard and want to do well. We saw no unsatisfactory lessons; most were at least good and quite a few were outstanding. We saw particularly high quality work in some PE and technology lessons. You have an appropriate selection of courses and you are well looked after. All this has come about because the school is being run effectively.

Despite all this improvement, results in tests at age 14 and in GCSE are not good enough yet. It often takes a little while for improvements to work through to examination results. Because results are too low at present, the school has been given a Notice to Improve.

We have asked the school to work on a few particular things.

- Improve results.
- Make all lessons as effective as the best.
- Sharpen up some procedures – such as those for checking on your progress and sorting out specific problems that you are having with your work.
- Improve attendance further.

This is a school where you can do well. We know that you are proud of your school. It is a pity that a few of you are not there more often – make sure that you get to school unless you are really too unwell.

We wish you and the school every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Jim Bennetts

(Lead inspector)