

Whitworth Community High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119753
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	313413
Inspection dates	19–20 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Sonya Williamson HMI

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	570
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter Davenport
Headteacher	Mr John Ferguson
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2003
School address	Hall Fold Whitworth Rochdale Lancashire OL12 8TS
Telephone number	01706 343218
Fax number	01706 759850

Age group	11-16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Whitworth Community High School is much smaller than average size. The school serves a socially mixed area in the extreme south-east of Lancashire but also draws a proportion of its students from Rochdale. The number of students eligible for free school meals is slightly higher than average. It has very small proportions of students from minority ethnic groups and very few whose first language is other than English. Although the percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is slightly lower than national, the proportion with statements of special educational need is almost twice the national average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Whitworth Community High School provides a happy and caring environment for learning which both students and their parents appreciate. One parent reported that 'the headteacher and staff did everything possible to make transition from primary to secondary school easy'. Many parents reported how happy their children are at the school. The confidence that is shown in the school is reflected by the fact that its numbers are rising despite falling numbers of students in the community overall. Students' personal development and well being are good as a result of the good care, guidance and support they receive. All groups of students achieve equally well. Vulnerable students are as confident as others. Attendance could be better; it is affected by a minority of students who are frequently absent. The great majority of students behave well and enjoy school.

There is a culture of improvement across the school that is driven by the headteacher with effective support from other senior leaders. The school knows its strengths and weaknesses because it is increasingly checking how good things are and how well systems are working. This means that suitable priorities for developing this satisfactory school further have already been identified. The curriculum has already been developed to meet better the needs and interests of students. It is being reviewed further to create more individual flexibility despite this being difficult in a small school. Teaching and learning are good because teachers have been given appropriate professional support and training, and because weaker teaching has been challenged. The relationships between teachers and their students are strong and teachers have high expectations of their students overall. However, not all teachers ensure that students are aware of what they can do to improve their work.

Achievement and standards are satisfactory but they have risen significantly faster than national rates of increase during the last year. Further increase is a number one priority in the school improvement plan. Students do not make progress as quickly in Key Stage 4 as they do in Key Stage 3. Progress is less rapid when curriculum areas do not make effective use of the information they have about students' prior achievements and expected targets.

Leaders and managers have taken steps to promote improvement in the weaker areas identified in the previous inspection. Governors hold the school to account well. They ensure that the school moves forward although they are working within budgetary constraints. They pay good attention to recruitment strategies so that staff have the skills the school needs. Existing staff respond well to the combination of challenge and support provided by senior leaders. When these aspects are considered alongside the increases in test and examination results, it is clear that the school has good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Build on improvements at Key Stage 3 to ensure that Key Stage 4 results meet national expectations.
- Develop the use of prior attainment data and tracking systems to maintain pupil progress effectively in all subject areas.
- Ensure students consistently understand what the next steps in their learning should be.
- Improve attendance.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students' achievement throughout the school is satisfactory. Standards, although still below average overall, are improving. Students join the school at age eleven with standards that are broadly average. Fewer than average higher attaining students, and especially boys, transfer to the school at age eleven. Results in the 2006 Key Stage 3 national tests continued the improving trend and standards were broadly average. English met its statutory target and increased the numbers achieving the higher levels. However, students, especially girls, performed less well in mathematics and science. In 2007, the Key Stage 3 test results exceeded the governors' challenging targets.

The proportion of students who gained five A*-C grades at GCSE in 2006 rose significantly compared to the previous year. The proportion of students who gained five grades at A*-C, including English and mathematics, was below the national figure. School data shows that there was considerable improvement in GCSE results in 2007. They are now close to national figures and meet the school's targets. The progress made by all students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is satisfactory overall.

Evidence from the inspection indicates that recent improvements are due to the successful measures to raise standards that the school has put in place. However, the rigour with which progress is checked is too variable and this leads to inconsistency in the performance of different subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The educational provision helps to produce young adults who are happy, confident and well equipped to continue into work or further education. Students are smartly dressed, polite, confident and articulate, including those who are more vulnerable. Careers education and improvements to the provision for literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) are all helping to prepare students for their futures. There are very good opportunities for students to develop socially and emotionally through a variety of curricular activities and the rich programme of events outside lessons. Students have good environmental awareness. Some are working on the development of a sensory garden and students take good care of the school facilities. Although attendance is below average, much of this is due to persistent poor attendance from a small number of students. Students are generally healthy as a result of their good participation in physical activity and the increased provision of healthy diet choices for those students who remain in school at lunchtime.

Students behave well and have good attitudes to learning because they enjoy their lessons. They have good self-esteem because they have opportunities to take responsibilities, their views are listened to and they are encouraged to participate in discussions. Students look after each other well and know who to turn to if they are ever worried. Parents report that staff are approachable and friendly. The citizenship and tutorial programmes encourage students to reflect, to consider other cultures and to make positive contributions to the local community, such as through the 'Moorathon' charity fundraising events.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good and at best are outstanding. Most teachers prepare lessons well to interest, motivate and challenge all students. These teachers use a rich and varied range of activities that stimulates enthusiastic learning. It is very clear that most teachers have excellent working relationships with students, the majority of whom show they are keen to learn and are proud of the progress they make. Most teachers have high expectations and the work set is well matched to students' needs and capabilities because good use is made of progress data. However, not all teachers teach lessons that stretch students with different ability levels. Students in these lessons are not making expected progress because activities are not varied enough to meet their differing needs. The pace of learning in some lessons is insufficiently brisk. Students say that teachers and support staff help and encourage them when they find work difficult. Students in a few lessons are encouraged to learn by assessing their own work and that of others in the class. The quality and setting of homework and the quality of marking across all subjects are inconsistent. Some examples of diligent marking were seen and students were then clear how well they were doing and how to improve. However, marking and assessment can be cursory and give students little guidance on how to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and meets all statutory requirements. In Year 7, a 'Learning to Learn' course helps students to become independent learners. In both key stages, students have additional time for English and mathematics which builds confidence in literacy and numeracy. At Key Stage 4, the curriculum has been revised to enable students to make more progress in Years 10 and 11. Higher attaining students are able to take additional courses in literature and statistics. All students follow accredited courses in information and communication technology (ICT), religious education and preparation for working life. Although only one vocational GCSE is offered, a growing number of students are able to follow work-related learning courses one day a week.

A well-balanced programme for personal, social and health education, careers guidance and citizenship prepares students well for the future and contributes to their good personal development. All students are engaged in 'Active Citizenship' through an impressive range of charity work. A certificated course to promote personal effectiveness is just one example of how the curriculum is now tailored to meet individual needs.

Extra-curricular opportunities are very good, highly valued and well supported by students. They include an impressive range of sports, music and drama activities. Almost 100 students have peripatetic music lessons in school. In addition there are clubs, theatre visits and trips abroad.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. The school provides a happy, safe environment in which students grow in confidence. Students appreciate the very good relationships throughout the school and feel that their teachers really know them well. Health and safety procedures conform

to local authority guidance and risk assessments are carried out for school trips. Child protection procedures are in place. This is an exceptionally caring school which provides very good support for students with learning difficulties and other vulnerable students. As a result, these students are very well integrated and play a full part in the life of the school, including taking on responsibilities as form representatives, school council members and prefects. The school uses a number of effective inclusion strategies, including an innovative off-site programme to raise the self-esteem and engagement with education of some of the most vulnerable students. Tracking of academic progress is in the early stages of development. The school does not yet use assessment data fully to track individual pupil progress throughout each year against clearly defined subject targets. The school has good procedures to help students move from primary to secondary school and this helps students to settle in quickly. Careers education and guidance are good, and the vast majority of students continue in education when they leave school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The vision and energy of the headteacher are driving forward improvements in all aspects of school life. The senior leaders work well together as a team. They value the challenge that governors provide and also benefit from their additional skills. Improvements have been made despite financial constraints. The headteacher has actively sourced funding and governors have made careful priorities for their spending decisions so that value for money is good.

The combined commitment to improvement is demonstrated in the increased confidence of curriculum leaders and pupil progress managers. They have been given increased opportunities to develop their own ideas and use their specific expertise. However, at the same time, they are closely held to account to try to ensure that the trend in achievement remains upwards overall. Much of the accountability is the result of senior leaders making use of challenging targets for students' progress. Staff are provided with data about the standards their students have previously achieved and what they are expected to achieve at the end of each key stage. However, at present there is no whole school system of tracking in-year progress in each subject to ensure that underachievement is picked up early.

There are still differences in the rates of progress that students make in different subject areas. This is being tackled through the rigorous performance management system and by checking the quality of planning, teaching and marking. As a result, leaders and managers have an accurate view of the strengths and areas for development of the school. This has resulted in suitable priorities for improvement planning. The curriculum is continuing to be developed to meet better the needs and interests of students. The staffing structure has been aptly revised to reflect students' needs. Teachers receive both challenge and support to help them make their teaching increasingly effective. They benefit from professional development and there are growing opportunities to share good practice within a supportive climate.

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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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
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	4
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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
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

21 September 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Whitworth Community High School, Lancashire, OL12 8TS

What a friendly and caring school you have! You have very positive relationships with each other and with your teachers and you extended a warm welcome to the inspectors. Thank you.

We found you to be smartly dressed, confident and articulate. This is because the school cares for you very well and is helping you to develop into good citizens of the future. Your test and examination results at Key Stage 3 and GCSE are satisfactory but they are improving. Your headteacher has made some changes to the school in the last year. The curriculum has been reviewed so that it meets your needs better; teachers observe each others' lessons so that they can share their best ideas and the teachers with extra responsibilities have been given more information about how well you have done in the past and what standards you should be able to achieve. We think the headteacher and senior teachers have made good choices about how to help your school become even better overall because so many aspects of school, including teaching, are good. All the staff value the contributions you make, the ideas you have and the way you join in the many clubs and fundraising events.

We have asked your headteacher and the governors to keep on improving your results, especially at GCSE; so you need to keep working hard too. We want teachers to track your progress more closely and let you know more clearly what you need to do to improve your work. Attendance should be improved because you don't learn when you are not at school. So if this is you, do try to make an effort because so many other students enjoy their lessons and are proud of what they achieve.

We wish you happiness, health and success at Whitworth and in the future.

Best wishes

Sonya Williamson HMI

Lead inspector