

# Whitstone

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	123872
<b>Local Authority</b>	Somerset
<b>Inspection number</b>	314750
<b>Inspection dates</b>	11–12 June 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Wiola Hola HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	722
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Philip Eavis
<b>Headteacher</b>	Tony Wilson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	12 January 2004
<b>School address</b>	Charlton Road Shepton Mallet BA4 5PF
<b>Telephone number</b>	01749 345555
<b>Fax number</b>	01749 345243

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<b>Age group</b>	11–16
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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 is smaller than average. Most students are White British and the others are mostly from other white backgrounds. There are slightly more girls than boys, particularly in Year 7. Fourteen students have English as an additional language. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportions of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, both with and without a statement of special educational need, are well below average. The nature of these difficulties or disabilities is mainly in relation to moderate learning difficulties or behavioural, emotional or social difficulties. The school has been a specialist technology college since September 2000.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

Whitstone is an improving school because of the determined and effective actions of the headteacher, staff, governors and students. Standards are rising. Good teaching means that students' progress is being speeded up, most noticeably in Years 7 to 9. Progress is increasing in Years 10 and 11 but not yet to the point at which students' overall progress since starting at the school can be judged to be better than satisfactory.

Standards in GCSE or equivalent examinations in 2007 were broadly average and showed that students had made satisfactory progress overall from Year 7 to Year 11. The results of the 2007 national tests in Year 9 were also average overall. They showed students' good progress from Year 7 in mathematics and science, and excellent progress in English. Tests and examination results in 2008 are expected to continue the steadily rising trend.

Students' personal development and well-being are good and promoted well in many ways, and especially on the days devoted to cross-curricular activities, known as 'CoreCurr' days, that occur fortnightly. Behaviour is good overall, although both students and parents speak of instances of less than satisfactory behaviour. The school takes both firm and supportive action to deal with this and whilst the rate of exclusions is relatively high, it is reducing. Students are helpful and polite. They have a good understanding of how to lead safe and healthy lives. They engage willingly in the wide range of opportunities provided for them to take responsibility and make good contributions to the school and wider community.

Teaching and learning are good and have improved since the last inspection. Lessons, however, still show considerable variation in their quality and this is remarked upon with justification by students and parents. Teaching and learning show strengths in some aspects, in teachers' good subject knowledge and generally well-planned and well-paced lessons, for example. The extent to which teachers give good advice on how well students are doing and how they might improve their work is excellent in English for Years 7 to 9 but varies greatly elsewhere. Some of the school's good systems for responding to students' work are not being applied uniformly well across all subjects. Homework is set well for some students but sporadically for others, and parents are right to express their confusion about this. Nevertheless, the current quality of teaching and learning is contributing to raising students' achievements, although the full impact has yet to be seen in outcomes for students in Year 11.

The school has worked, and is working, very effectively to improve the quality of the curriculum, which is good. The care and support students receive for their personal well-being are also good. Academic guidance, based on good use of data and challenging targets, is satisfactory and improving.

Leadership and management are good with strengths in the work of the headteacher, the senior leadership team, governance and in much of the middle leadership. Some relative weaknesses exist in a few areas of middle leadership and management where the quality of review lacks the depth and rigour of the existing best. The school has made sound use of its specialist status as a technology college; students' outcomes in design and technology are good, as are their skills in using information and communication technology (ICT). Teachers generally make good use of ICT in lessons. The headteacher and senior leaders, with governors and other staff, have worked to articulate a clear vision for the future of the school and are working to realise it with enthusiasm whilst planning carefully to balance a reducing budget. In view of the positive

impact of the school's past and present actions to raise standards, the school has good capacity to improve further.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Raise the quality of teaching and learning by eradicating inconsistencies, particularly in the use of data to ensure students' good progress, in the quality of feedback to students about their work and how to improve it, and in the expectations in relation to the setting of homework.
- Improve the effectiveness of some middle leaders in terms of self-evaluation and target setting, so as to speed up students' progress.

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' attainment on entry to the school is below average and has been for the last few years. It was broadly average for students now in Year 11 and for those who left recently. The school's strong focus over the past few years on improving teaching and learning, particularly in Years 7 to 9, has resulted in improved achievement and rising standards. In the end of Year 9 tests in 2007, results were broadly in line with national averages. These results represent excellent progress in English and good progress in mathematics and science.

The proportion of students gaining five or more grades A\*–C was below average in 2007. The proportion gaining five such grades including English and mathematics, however, has risen particularly well in recent years, and was in line with the national average in 2007. Students' relative achievements were best in design and technology, geography, music and religious education. They were least good in science, dance and drama. There are no major significant differences between the achievements of different groups of students. Good support enables those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to achieve as well as others.

A recent start on increasing the level of challenge in the targets set for students' attainment is also speeding up students' progress. The school expects results in 2008 to continue an upward trend.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

Relationships are good and most students get on very well with each other and with their teachers. Students are generally positive about the school and their attendance is average overall. They are attentive and work purposefully in nearly all lessons. They behave sensibly as they move around the school. Reported instances of bullying are rare. Students say that occurrences of bullying are nearly always dealt with promptly and appropriately. The rate of exclusions has been relatively high, although it has fallen significantly over the current academic year. The school has been taking a firm stance on instances of unacceptable behaviour of a small minority of students.

Students respond well to the encouragement they receive to adopt safe and healthy lifestyles. They develop well their skills of leadership, independent learning, problem solving and

co-operative working, all of which contribute to their future economic well-being. The good curriculum enables students to develop well their understanding of other cultures and beliefs. Students take many opportunities to be involved in the work of the school and significant numbers apply to become prefects or take on other roles of responsibility. Many students make a positive contribution to the community beyond school through a range of voluntary work and fundraising events, and the school is increasingly developing an international dimension through its links with partner schools in France, Ghana and Portugal. The school council has been active in pursuing a number of projects, including an environmental initiative at the school.

The views of students are regularly sought and listened to; this is an improvement since the last inspection. For example, the newly established 'learning team' is helping the school improve teaching and learning by providing feedback on lessons from the students' perspective.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Good teaching and learning are clearly evident, although some inconsistencies still exist across the school. Teachers have good subject knowledge, and plan lessons well with clear objectives and a variety of learning activities. Most students have positive attitudes to learning and concentrate well on their work. Relationships and classroom management are generally good. Many lessons are enhanced by teachers' good use of ICT, although students' use of it varies somewhat between subjects. Teachers are generally adept at using data about students' previous attainment to plan for all the different abilities in a class. In the small minority of less successful lessons, however, there is little to challenge students' thinking and the pace is relatively slow. Homework is not used consistently well to support learning and raise standards. 'We should have more,' was the consensus of a group of students interviewed. The school has developed a number of useful strategies through which teachers can respond to students' work but these are applied with varying degrees of frequency or helpfulness. In English and religious education, for example, marking is of high quality overall. Whilst many students are clear about how to improve their work, others are not.

Students show particularly high levels of enjoyment and independence in many of the learning activities that take place on 'CoreCurr' days, and more so than at other times. Those students who have the opportunity to observe lessons and give teachers their feedback do so perceptively and with great courtesy. Their views are adding to the school's successful work on improving the quality of lessons.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

Students enjoy a well-constructed curriculum that meets statutory requirements and caters for their needs and capabilities. In Years 10 and 11, students can choose from a wide range of academic and vocational courses. In keeping with the school's technology specialist status, design and technology is taken by all students. The particular needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are met very well through a good range of well-planned strategies and provision. The school's homework policy is not entirely clear to many parents and results in great variance between students as to how much work is done beyond lessons and with what frequency.

The 'CoreCurr' days afford opportunities for staff to work together, often across subject areas, to plan highly interesting and engaging activities that provide substantial support for students' academic and personal development. On one day, for example, Year 8 students had sessions with a cultural focus that included work on Chinese dance, Russian language, Spanish opera, Italian drama and life in The Philippines. Students spoke about these activities very positively. The wide range of opportunities for students to take part in extra-curricular activities, together with extensive trips both at home and abroad, are greatly appreciated by students and contribute significantly to their enjoyment of school and to their educational outcomes.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The school provides students with a safe and secure environment. Procedures for child protection and safety, in school and on visits, are known by staff and adhered to rigorously. The care and support given to vulnerable pupils are good. For example, those students whose first language is not English benefit from the good work of a specialist teacher. This helps them to integrate rapidly into school life.

A small minority of students who are at a risk of exclusion are supported effectively through the work of the 'Positive Behaviour Base'. This work is helping to reduce the number of fixed term and permanent exclusions. The arrangements to reintegrate excluded students are good and the instances of repeat exclusions are rare.

The school works well with its partner agencies in a number of areas, for example to ease the transition of pupils from primary schools, in its work with a nearby special school and, through the 'Youth Inclusion Project', in engaging those students who might be at risk of offending.

Data on students' attainment, behaviour and attitude to learning are recorded and reviewed. This information is generally used well by senior staff to identify at an early stage those students who are at risk of underachieving. The use of such data to plan activities that fully challenge students is not yet consistently good in all lessons. In some subjects and lessons, more could be done to indicate to students what they need to do to improve. Until recently, targets set for students proposed no more than typically expected progress. Comprehensive careers advice ensures that students make informed choices about their future options. The school is rightly proud of the number of its former students who remain in education or begin apprenticeships when they leave.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

This school is improving because of good leadership and management that have strengthened the quality of educational provision so that the overall trend of improvement in standards has been maintained. Moreover, a very clear vision for further development has been established, based on high quality evaluations, in the main, of existing work in the school and its effectiveness. These evaluations are largely accurate and incisive, although those at subject level are of variable quality and include presentations of great thoroughness alongside a few that are sketchy or have little underpinning information to support judgements. Nevertheless, senior staff know full well what is working successfully and what needs to be improved. The school works in good partnership with outside agencies to enhance the quality of provision, care and support for students, particularly the most vulnerable.

Senior leaders and managers, together with governors, are steering the school well and have shown with other staff, in effective past and current actions, that the school has good capacity to improve further. The 'School Transformation Strategy' is being applied with much enthusiasm and with valuable contributions from students as well as staff. Staff are clear that students' achievements by Year 11, whilst satisfactory overall, can be boosted further, as has already been shown in the Year 9 test results. Target setting has increased very recently in its level of challenge, and the ambitious targets are replacing those that previously set expectations of students' progress at broadly average levels. One middle leader said, 'We have a wealth of data; perhaps we need a sharper analysis of it,' and this is true for some middle leaders, if not others, in order to ensure the best possible provision and outcomes for all students.

The headteacher, senior staff and governors are taking care to ensure that the quality of provision does not suffer as the numbers of students entering Year 7 decline for reasons of local demography. They are taking appropriate action to ensure a balanced budget.



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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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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	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	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

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	3
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	3
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

Dear Students

Inspection of Whitstone, Shepton Mallet, Somerset BA4 5PF

Thank you for your welcome when a team of inspectors visited your school recently. Thank you for sharing your views about the school so confidently and politely. This letter is to let you know about our findings.

Whitstone is an improving school where standards are rising. In the 2007 tests and examinations, results were in line with national averages. They showed that the students in Year 9 made good progress in mathematics and science, and excellent progress in English. Year 11 students made satisfactory progress overall.

Most lessons are now good and this is speeding up your progress. Teachers generally plan interesting activities for you. You and your parents, however, told us that the quality of teaching is variable, and we agree. We have asked the school to make all lessons as good as the best: tasks should always be suitably challenging and teachers should give you consistently good feedback on how well you are doing and how to improve your work. We have also asked the school to clarify its expectations about what homework is set.

You clearly enjoy the activities on 'CoreCurr' days. They certainly provide you with a wealth of valuable experiences and are part of the good curriculum you receive. The school has made sound use of its specialist status as a technology college. You told us about the many opportunities you have to take responsibility, and about your links with schools in Ghana and Portugal. You are cared for and supported well. You have a good understanding of how to lead safe and healthy lives. Most of you behave well. The school takes firm and supportive action over any unsatisfactory behaviour.

Your school is led well and there are good plans for its future development. We have asked that some leaders strengthen their work in ensuring that you make the best possible progress in their subjects. We hope that you will continue to work hard, attend school regularly and achieve your best, academically and in your personal development.

We wish you all the very best for your own futures and for the future of the school.

Yours faithfully

Wiola Hola Her Majesty's Inspector