

The Whitby High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111429
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	318775
Inspection dates	16–17 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Leszek Iwaskow HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1581
6th form	216
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cllr Myles Hogg
Headteacher	Mrs M Hughes
Date of previous school inspection	15 April 2002
School address	Sycamore Drive Whitby Ellesmere Port Merseyside CH66 2NU
Telephone number	0151 355 8445
Fax number	0151 357 2955

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The Whitby High School is a larger than average mixed secondary school with a large sixth form. It is a specialist technology college and is popular and oversubscribed. The school is situated in the more affluent part of Ellesmere Port, although students are drawn from a wide range of socio-economic groupings. Attainment on entry is broadly average. Boys outnumber girls in the main school but this is reversed in the sixth form with significantly more girls staying on to pursue further studies. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well below the national average and there are few students from minority ethnic groups. The number of learners with complex learning difficulties is growing, although those with statements remain below 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

Whitby High is a complex school which is facing a period of change. There are many things which the school does well and some which it still needs to improve. As a result, its overall effectiveness is satisfactory.

In the last few years, the school has made a conscious effort to change direction and make what it offers to its students more relevant to their needs. It has also had to cope with significant staff changes as well as the insecurity that proposed school reorganisation in the local area brings. The need to raise performance has led to a realisation that both the culture and the curriculum in the school needed challenging and changing. This has meant encompassing a broader curriculum, having a clearer emphasis on learning and recognising the need to meet the skills requirements that will equip the students for the world of work. A focus on improving classroom practice is having clear benefits at Key Stage 3 where the best teaching was observed and this is now beginning to impact on achievement at Key Stage 4. Standards are broadly average and achievement is satisfactory. The sixth form is inclusive and encourages students of all abilities to stay on in education and most make at least satisfactory progress.

The curriculum has been broadened to enable students to follow more personalised pathways which support both those who wish to pursue more academic courses as well as those students who wish to enter the world of work or take apprenticeships. Technology status has helped the school to support a wider range of vocational courses which meets students' needs better and helps to provide them with the skills that will serve them well in the future.

The greater majority of parents and students are proud of their school and their achievements. The school is warm and welcoming and provides a safe environment in which students can learn. Several parents remarked that 'Whenever I, or my children, have had a problem, I feel I have been able to approach the school'. Incidents are dealt with promptly and equitably. Behaviour is good. Students enjoy coming to school and talk with enthusiasm about their experiences. They benefit from the wide range of visits, enrichment opportunities and sporting activities. They are proud of their theatre successes when starring in 'Grease' or 'Fame', reminisce about 'yomping' through the Welsh hills as part of their Duke of Edinburgh expedition, and enjoy recounting their successes on the sporting field. Students appreciate the extra time and effort that staff take to provide them with these opportunities. They are aware of the need to lead healthy lives and many attempt to do so although sometimes they bring unhealthy snacks in their packed lunches from home. They thrive on responsibility and willingly participate in the life of the school. The school council provides them with a platform to share in changing the school for the better.

Students prefer lessons which allow them to develop independent learning skills and to work practically. In many lessons, they are encouraged to do so, especially in Key Stage 3 where teaching is better focused on learning. There remain some inconsistencies across the school especially in the marking of students' work and in tracking their progress. Students learn better when they are clear about what they need to do to improve and where support is clearly targeted.

There is a steely determination to improve the school and senior managers and governors provide clear direction and purpose. The greater involvement of subject leaders in this process is encouraging better teamwork and the sharing of effective practice, the benefits of which are becoming more evident particularly at Key Stage 3. Parents and students are appreciative of the efforts being made and are supportive of the changes. The school has found itself at a

crossroads but is now moving in the right direction and is clearly at the heart of a community which values what is provided for their children. As one parent remarked with sadness, 'When our last child leaves this year and we no longer have any connections - it will feel like the end of an era'.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The majority of students move from Year 11 into the sixth form. All but a few complete the courses they have chosen. Over two-thirds proceed to higher education. Overall, they make satisfactory progress. Their personal development is good and students display a level of maturity beyond their years. They make a very positive contribution to the life of the school. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Teachers have good subject knowledge although some tend to lead learning too much. The curriculum is good and well balanced. Students are particularly appreciative of the wide range of enrichment activities available to them. They are well supported but do not always have sufficiently challenging academic targets. One student told inspectors, 'We get lots of help and advice about courses and opportunities after sixth form'. The leadership of the sixth form is good. The role has been revised to strengthen management and monitoring alongside the well established pastoral function.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement, especially at Key Stage 4.
- Enhance teaching to improve the quality of learning and to stretch the most able.
- Ensure that academic tracking is used consistently to raise standards and achievement.
- Ensure that marking is consistent and informs pupils of what they must do to improve.

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

Grade for sixth form: 3

Inspectors agree with the school's judgement that both achievement and standards are satisfactory overall.

Students enter the school in Year 7 with average attainment when compared to schools nationally. By the end of Year 9, standards remain in line with national averages but there is an improving picture in terms of achievement compared with previous years. In 2007 students made significantly better progress than those in similar schools.

Whilst standards at GCSE have remained average overall, achievement has declined over the last three years. The school is aware of this and has worked hard to halt this decline. Evidence available during the inspection indicates that achievement is now satisfactory. This includes at least satisfactory progress observed by inspectors in all lessons. There remains, however, some inconsistent performance across subjects and between boys and girls at GCSE. Few students are gaining the top grades. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress.

In the sixth form, A-level results are in line with national averages. However, the percentage of students who gain higher grades is low.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Overall personal development and well-being is a strength of the school and is judged to be good both in the main school and in sixth form.

Healthy lifestyles are well promoted through the wide range of sporting and other physical activities and through a varied selection of healthy choices in the school canteen. The personal, social, health education and citizenship (PSHCE) curriculum enables all students to learn about health-related issues such as drug and alcohol abuse, sexual health and managing stress. Students feel safe and behaviour around the school and in lessons is good. There are few incidents of bullying and these are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Students and parents say they value the school's calm, civilised atmosphere. The pastoral system ensures a sense of continuity and family. Rewards are used successfully to encourage good habits.

Attendance is improving and is above the national average. Students enjoy their school life and demonstrate a strong sense of commitment to the school's values. Moral and social development is firmly based on the school's secure pastoral system and there are many opportunities to develop an understanding of other cultures. However, spiritual awareness is not developed consistently. Parents are appreciative of the way in which the school encourages students to develop as individuals. As one parent summarised, 'The school helps promote confidence and independence, treats the students fairly and allows them to put over their views and ideas.'

Student voice is outstanding. There is a powerful and effective school council, which has a dedicated budget and has a significant influence on the school's direction. At present working groups of the school council are formulating policies on challenging bullying and improving community links. Many students take on roles of responsibility within the school such as sixth form buddies who support younger students. There are also a number of links into the local community. Each year group, for example, supports a chosen charity. Links with the business community have been strengthened, aspects of financial management are well covered through the curriculum and the school's drive to provide relevant and vocational courses ensures that students develop the skills they need to secure their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory both in the main school and in the sixth form.

In the lessons observed, teaching was more effective in Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 4 but all the teaching was at least satisfactory. Much teaching is good with a significant number of strengths, but these strengths are not uniformly spread. Teachers have good subject knowledge and lesson preparation takes account of national strategies. For example, the school's specialist

status has enabled teachers to make routine use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support and enrich learning.

In lessons, students' attitudes and behaviour are good. Relationships between teachers and students are characterised by mutual respect and lessons take place in a harmonious atmosphere. Learning and achievement are at their strongest when students are stimulated by a variety of activities that require them to make contributions, think for themselves and participate in the assessment of their progress. These factors sustain interest and raise enjoyment and concentration levels. In less effective lessons, work is often not closely matched to differing needs. The teacher frequently dominates and provides few opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning. Consequently, particularly for the more able, their learning becomes passive and there is a lack of challenge.

The investment of energy and resources in developing teaching and learning styles is having a positive impact on lessons, particularly in Key Stage 3. In those subjects where good practice is shared, it is having a real influence on changing the emphasis from teaching to learning and this is helping to improve standards. However, the way targets are set and used remains inconsistent. The quality of marking also varies. As a result, students are not always aware of what they need to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school modestly evaluates the curriculum as satisfactory but the inspectors judge it to be good, both in the main school and in the sixth form.

The curriculum for Years 7 to 9 is broad and balanced, meets statutory requirements and the needs of all students. At Key Stage 4, a new pathways curriculum gives students the opportunity to study a wide range of both GCSE and vocational courses which feeds into the sixth form. This flexibility satisfies the diverse needs and interests of students and keeps the least motivated engaged in learning.

The provision for ICT has improved since the last inspection. Its use across the curriculum in support of learning has also been enhanced. All subject areas have access to whiteboards and projectors for teaching and students are given many opportunities to develop and use their ICT skills in many lessons.

The suspended timetable days for enrichment and the wide range of extra-curricular activities are strengths of the curriculum and make a strong contribution to students' enjoyment and achievement. Parents are very appreciative of the staff who give unstintingly of their time to this aspect of school life.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students are well supported and cared for during their time at school. The school works effectively with parents and other outside agencies to enhance provision for students, particularly vulnerable groups. A number of effective strategies include the 'Centre of Student Intervention' which provides intensive support for students who are at risk of failure and the 'Monitored Study Room' which provides an alternative to fixed term exclusion. Exclusion levels are low.

Transitional arrangements for students entering Year 7 are very good and the needs of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are thoroughly assessed at this stage. Tailored programmes of support are in place for these groups and individuals are fully integrated into the life of the school. Guidance for students throughout the school is also thorough. The school takes seriously the safety of students and child protection and procedures to meet statutory requirements, including those relating to adults who work at the school, are in place. The recent appointment of a site maintenance officer has also strengthened health and safety procedures.

Systems to track academic progress are being developed. However, these are not yet consistently used throughout the school. As a consequence, students and teachers do not yet have a common understanding of how achievement in different subject areas and classes can be compared or how all students who are underachieving can be effectively challenged and supported.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of leadership and management is good. The headteacher is a strong leader with a clear vision for the school's future. 'Authoritative but approachable' was the way a group of sixth formers described her. Her commitment to driving up standards is shared by a senior management team whose backgrounds and experience complement each other. Subject and pastoral departments undertake annual self-assessments. These identify areas for improvement and enable increasingly challenging targets to be set. A rigorous system of internal inspection by senior staff involves lesson observations and input from students. As a result, the school knows itself well. Because of the robust monitoring of performance and achievement, the school's development plan is well informed.

The school plans to extend the membership of the specialist school management group with the aim of using specialist status to drive further developments. The emphasis is on shared responsibility and more transparent management. The roles of curricular leaders, for instance, have recently been expanded so that middle managers play a more positive part in shaping policy. The Leadership for Learning initiative is used as a collaborative means of supporting colleagues and spreading best practice, but is not yet fully embedded into the work of all departments. The school plans to provide further opportunities for its middle managers to access training through in-house Saturday sessions. Consequently, the school and its subject areas have strategies in place to raise achievement. Such developments demonstrate the school's good capacity to make further improvement.

The role of the head of sixth form has also recently been revised to include a greater management role alongside the previous pastoral focus. However, there remains a need to integrate the sixth form more fully into the whole school structure.

Governors are kept well informed by the headteacher. As a result, they are able to challenge the work of the school and to be critical friends. The school plans to build stronger links between departments and individual governors. Since standards and achievement still need further improvement, the school currently gives satisfactory value for money.

Specialist status has impacted positively on leadership and management throughout the school and has strengthened the effectiveness of the school's community links. It has helped attract good quality staff, enabled the provision of better facilities and widened staff experience of

whole school issues. Full service provision was achieved a year early. The targets for staying on have been exceeded but the academic targets have not been met.

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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?	3	3
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?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	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	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	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
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?	3	3
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?	3	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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	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	2
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	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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Inspection of The Whitby High School, Ellesmere Port, CH66 2NU

This letter is to tell you about our recent visit to your school to inspect the quality of the education you are experiencing. The inspectors particularly enjoyed meeting you and talking to you. We found what you told us about your school to be very important. You are very proud of your school and appreciative of the extra time and effort your teachers put into helping you with your work and the many activities and sports you are involved in. There are many things your school does well and also some which it still needs to improve. As a result, we judged that your school provides a satisfactory standard of education. For it to be even better you must also play your part and put in that extra little bit of effort to ensure that you achieve your best, particularly at GCSE. Some of you would get even better results if you got your coursework in on time, for example, or didn't leave it until the last minute.

You particularly like those lessons where you can use your skills and apply these to practical activities. As one of you said, there is a need for 'less on the theory and more on the doing'. Your teachers are aware of this and are determined to make your work more challenging in order that more of you attain the higher grades. They are also going to ensure they provide you with clearer information when marking your work to inform you better of what you must do to improve.

The inspectors were impressed with your overall good behaviour and the way in which you participate in the life of the school. The school council is doing some very good work and is sharing in changing the school for the better. You are also proud of your achievements and your sporting prowess. You obviously enjoy performing in musicals as shown by your success in 'Fame' and 'Grease'. Most of you are aware of the need to lead healthy lives. Many of you are careful with what you eat and try to participate actively, whether it's hiking through the Welsh hills as part of your Duke of Edinburgh experience or representing the school in one of the many school teams. You appear to enjoy challenges - despite the cold and rain.

We have asked your school to put improvements in place as soon as possible. The school may also receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector in order to check that all is going well. I am sure you will give your teachers all the help and support they need to build on the strong foundations that are already there.