

# Whickham School

Burnthouse Lane, Whickham, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Tyne and Wear NE16 5AR

## Inspection dates

27 February–7 March 2018

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
16 to 19 study programmes	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- Current pupils make good progress in a wide range of subjects, including English and mathematics. Standards of attainment are above average by the end of Year 11.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved significantly. Teachers receive relevant training that develops their individual skills. This is because leaders seek specialist advice and guidance to help them quickly address any areas of weakness.
- Disadvantaged pupils make strong progress. Teaching and learning policies place a high priority on accelerating the progress of disadvantaged pupils.
- The headteacher, and other senior leaders, are honest in their evaluation of their work. They appreciate the importance of good examination results but work equally as hard to develop pupils' character and prepare them for life after school.
- Some pupils and teachers do not have clarity about how well they, or their classes, are achieving. As a result, additional support is not always given to the pupils who need it most, including for those pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.
- The quality of provision in the sixth form is very good. Students' progress is above average in a wide range of academic and applied courses. Nearly all students progress to suitable further education courses, employment or additional training providers.
- Pupils' behaviour is good and improving. Relationships between staff and pupils are positive and founded on mutual respect. However, exclusion rates are still above average.
- Pupils' attendance is above average. Pupils who have been persistently absent in the past are now attending more regularly. This is because new pastoral leaders monitor attendance closely and liaise with families more frequently.
- Governors have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are clear that it is their responsibility to support, and challenge leaders in all aspects of their work. This happens regularly.
- Despite a wide range of support programmes on offer, a small minority of pupils, parents and carers are unclear about the advice and guidance available if they have concerns about bullying.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
  - making sure that information about pupils' progress and attainment is shared in a clear and concise way so that pupils are clear about how well they are doing, and what they need to do to improve
  - refining the information shared with teachers about the performance and reading ages of different groups of pupils, including pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, so that they can make best use of it in their planning.
- Improve the effectiveness of personal development, behaviour and well-being by:
  - continuing to raise awareness of the programmes designed to address and eliminate bullying so that parents and pupils are clear about the support available
  - reducing the number of pupils who are excluded from school.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- The headteacher leads by example. He is uncompromising in his desire for all pupils to succeed. He, and other senior leaders, acted swiftly to address the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection. Leaders are honest when they evaluate the impact of their work. When leaders deem that aspects of their work can be improved, they amend plans accordingly. This has contributed to the improved quality of education pupils receive.
- The headteacher believes that 'we can all become better at what we do'. He has sought to improve his own leadership, and that of his team, by developing informal partnerships with other outstanding schools and a range of external advisers. Recent reviews of leadership, pupil premium spending and teaching in English have helped leaders to evaluate effectively the impact of their work. Leaders ensure that the training teachers receive is closely linked to whole-school priorities or the findings from the reviews. As a result, improvements to the quality of teaching have led to improving outcomes for pupils.
- The headteacher acknowledges that pupils' progress in the past was not good enough. However, he is steadfast in his belief that, while very important, examination results alone do not prepare pupils for life after school. The curriculum provides pupils with the opportunity to study a wide range of subjects that improve their academic skills and knowledge, in addition to their personal development. For example, during tutorial time, pupils are encouraged, effectively, to develop their speaking and listening skills by contributing to discussions linked to current affairs, news and citizenship.
- Leaders have improved the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They make regular checks on the quality of teaching and ensure that teachers receive appropriate support and guidance to help them to improve. Leaders have high expectations of teachers and pupils. They insist that all lessons include opportunities for disadvantaged pupils to participate; these pupils are often asked probing questions first. Teachers' planning is improving and most lessons include challenging activities for pupils at different stages of their learning. As a result, most pupils make good progress over time, including disadvantaged pupils.
- Notwithstanding the many changes since 2015, the vast majority of staff are proud to work at the school. Those staff who met with inspectors, and most who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire, believe that the school has improved since the last inspection. Staff welcome the opportunity to be 'leaders' in their own role. They feel that their opinions are valued and that leaders have secured improvements because all staff know what is expected from them.
- Additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils is allocated to a number of appropriate strategies. Until very recently, disadvantaged pupils' progress was poor in a wide range of subjects. However, current disadvantaged pupils make much stronger progress. This is because leaders now focus on each pupil's individual barriers to learning rather than the common issues faced by larger groups in the past.
- Senior leaders frequently check the quality of teaching. This is particularly true in subjects where pupils' progress has not been as strong recently, such as English.

Leaders often share their knowledge of successful teaching strategies acquired through observations in lessons. Similarly, they challenge all teachers to be the best they can be. The increased scrutiny and collaboration is leading to more accountability and improving the quality of teaching overall, including in English.

- Teachers who are new to the profession are fulsome in their praise for the support they receive. They attend collaborative planning sessions with more experienced teachers and they can request training based on their individual needs. As a result, new teachers are quickly developing their confidence and they are not afraid to try out new ideas or activities.
- Newly appointed pastoral leaders are helping to improve attendance and behaviour. They have allocated time to meet with pupils and parents and successfully liaise between home and school to ensure that teachers are aware of any pupil problems or concerns that pupils have.
- Leaders have a clear view of the overarching strengths and aspects of the school which need to improve further. They have used this information to good effect to secure some important improvements to the quality of provision in the school. However, at times, their analysis of the specific groups of pupils who achieve less well lacks precision. As a result, the targets leaders set in the school development plan are not as well focused as they could be to secure rapid improvement.

### **Governance of the school**

- Governance has improved in the last 12 months. The recently appointed chair of the governing body said that there has been a 'culture shift' in how governors work with leaders. Governors now have a clear understanding of their roles. They are linked to subject departments, and to other aspects of leadership, such as the pastoral team or disadvantaged pupils. This enables governors to develop better knowledge of the school's work. They are passionate, committed to the school and possess a wide range of skills and knowledge.
- Governors regularly audit their own skills and ensure that they receive appropriate training so that they are well equipped for their roles. Governors understand the changes occurring in school and the rationale behind them. Governors ask relevant questions based on the information that leaders provide to them. They are curious and hold leaders to account in most areas. However, governors' monitoring and challenge linked to pupils' progress is not as sharp as it could be. This is because leaders sometimes provide governors with information that does not clearly evaluate pupils' achievement.
- Governors have contributed to recent improvements in pupils' behaviour. They supported leaders in the restructure of pastoral leadership and governors are heavily involved in meetings with pupils to discuss behaviour. Governors visit the school regularly and observe the work of leaders. They observe leaders during meetings, observations, work scrutiny and discussions with pupils. Some governors use skills from their own work to mentor or coach pupils. This personal approach means that governors are able to share first-hand experiences with the rest of the governing body during meetings.

## Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders ensure that the safety of pupils and staff is the top priority.
- Leaders ensure that all staff are appropriately trained and can identify the signs that a pupil is in need of support. There are clear systems in place to report any concerns. Inspection evidence demonstrates that staff report all 'nagging doubts'. Those staff with responsibility for safeguarding swiftly follow up every referral.
- The vast majority of pupils who responded to Ofsted's inspection questionnaire said that they feel safe. However, despite a large number of support programmes, a small minority of pupils and parents were unclear about the systems in place to help them if they had concerns.
- Through a range of tutorial lessons and personal, social, health and economic education programmes, pupils learn how to stay safe. Pupils are aware of the dangers they may face when using social media. They can describe in detail the steps they need to take to ensure that their own personal information remains private.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

**Good**

- Teaching, learning and assessment have improved considerably in the last 12 months and are now good. This is because leaders have worked closely with teachers, and support staff, to establish a consistent approach to the planning and assessment of pupils' work. Pupils receive astute feedback from teachers that helps them to improve.
- Following the poor GCSE English results in 2017, leaders quickly sought advice and guidance from a local teaching school. Following this specialist support, the quality of teaching in the English department has improved. Inspection evidence demonstrates that most teachers provide pupils with challenging content. Pupils in key stage 3 have the confidence to complete work that is much more demanding. For example, in a Year 7 English lesson pupils were successfully analysing the character Hagrid from the Harry Potter books. The teacher provided further challenge for the pupils who finished this work by asking them to analyse the war poem 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' by Wilfred Owen.
- Most teachers have a good understanding of pupils' different needs. Lessons include activities that motivate and engage pupils. The most able pupils said that they feel challenged in all of their lessons. This is because teachers usually provide opportunities for them to apply their reasoning skills in different contexts. However, sometimes pupils do not attempt work that is suitable for their stage of learning. Teachers often provide pupils with a range of activities that vary in difficulty. However, when the teacher does not direct pupils to an appropriate activity some will opt to complete the easiest task. This slows the pace of learning for those pupils.
- Leaders expect disadvantaged pupils to be at the forefront of teachers' minds when they plan a lesson. Disadvantaged pupils play an active part in most lessons. Often, they will lead group discussions or play the role of the teacher in a warm-up during physical education (PE) lessons. Disadvantaged pupils' progress is now good.

- Teaching in mathematics, humanities, science and art is strong. In most lessons teachers use time efficiently so that no learning time is lost. Pupils are not afraid to make mistakes, nor are they concerned that their errors may be used by teachers to explain misconceptions. Pupils' generally positive attitudes to their learning, and effective relationships with the teachers, lead to a cooperative climate for learning. For example, in a Year 8 history lesson pupils were excitedly debating the pros and cons of Martin Luther King's leadership. One pupil confidently disagreed with the majority and clearly articulated his reasons why.
- The development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills beyond English and mathematics lessons is well established. The recently extended school day provides pupils with additional time each morning to improve their spellings, or creative writing, and apply mathematical concepts to everyday situations.
- While stronger teacher assessment is helping pupils to understand how to improve in the short term, some pupils are unsure how well they are doing or are unclear about the targets they should be working towards. Assessment information, especially in key stage 3, is not providing clarity for pupils. At present, some individual progress information and targets are not routinely shared with pupils and parents. Teachers use two tracking systems. Both pupils and teachers suggest this aspect of the school's work could be improved.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The headteacher's ambition to nurture successful and caring pupils is shared by everyone. Pupils, in all year groups, participate in a wide range of projects with professionals from the health, social care and arts sectors. By working closely with healthcare professionals, leaders identified a need to provide pupils with an increasing support network linked to social, emotional and mental health issues. Pupils told inspectors that they particularly valued the drop-in sessions and specialist advice which are available to them now.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is developed very effectively. Pupils take pride in their charity work and last year they managed to raise over £20,000 to support the fight against cancer. The recently formed 'Rainbow Society' effectively supports and promotes the awareness of lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) issues. Pupils, and staff, regularly lead assemblies to celebrate diversity. When asked by inspectors to describe the best thing about coming to this school, one pupil responded by saying that 'you can be who you want to be and you do not get judged by others'.
- Pupils who spoke with inspectors indicated that bullying does occur on occasion, but they are confident that staff deal with it in an appropriate manner. However, a small minority of parents and pupils said the opposite. Accordingly, inspectors looked at this aspect of the school's work in detail. Behaviour expectations are shared with pupils frequently. Pupils are taught appropriately about the different forms of bullying and the impact bullying can have on an individual. Pupils have the opportunity to share

concerns with their form tutor, head of year and other adults in the school. Pupils also act as 'anti-bullying ambassadors' and they work with each other to promote an awareness of bullying and what to do if pupils are worried. There is a wide range of support in place for pupils if they raise concerns. However, a few pupils and parents are not clear about the mechanisms in place through which pupils can access help and guidance.

- The school has additional provision for 16 pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder. Pupils are taught both within the alternative provision base and in lessons with their peers. They access the same personal development programmes and benefit from one-to-one support when required. Leaders, and support staff, ensure that important pupil information is shared regularly so that teachers successfully build these pupils' confidence and reduce their anxiety.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Leaders have 'raised the bar' in relation to pupils' behaviour. The recently introduced new behaviour policy ensures that leaders track and analyse patterns of behaviour more effectively. Teachers promote consistently high expectations. Relationships between pupils and staff in school are positive and founded on mutual respect. Pupils are polite, courteous and most are able to manage their own behaviour well. Pupils' conduct in and between lessons is mature. They move between the disparate site buildings calmly and quickly. Punctuality to lessons is good. Teachers and pupils agree that standards of behaviour have improved since the previous inspection in 2016.
- Nevertheless, the proportion of fixed term and permanent exclusions has increased since the introduction of the new behaviour policy. Leaders are aware of this and make no excuses for it. Leaders said that they expect behaviour to be better now, but a minority of pupils have not yet improved their attitudes to learning to the same degree as most. In addition, the headteacher continues to take a very tough stance on pupils' conduct outside school. Most permanent exclusions have been for serious misconduct off the school site.
- Attendance rates are at least in line with the national average and improving. This is because of increased support from the new pastoral leaders who are focused on supporting pupils who attend less well. Governors hold attendance meetings with pupils and parents. They request that leaders provide regular attendance information so they can monitor the impact of their work.

## Outcomes for pupils

**Good**

- Significant improvements in the quality of teaching, behaviour and attendance mean that most pupils currently in the school make good progress. In the past, the achievement of disadvantaged pupils was weak. However, inspection evidence demonstrates that they now make much stronger progress.
- Most pupils make strong progress across the school and standards of attainment are above the national average by the time pupils leave the school. In 2017, the achievement of pupils overall in Year 11 was broadly similar to that at the end of 2016.

However, disadvantaged pupils' attainment increased at a faster rate than other disadvantaged pupils nationally. This is because teachers set them demanding targets that are above expected levels of attainment.

- Assessment information gathered by the school shows that current pupils, in all year groups, are making good progress in a wide range of subjects, including in mathematics and English. However, as some assessment information lacked clarity, or was not forthcoming, inspectors conducted additional checks on pupils' work and understanding. Inspectors confirmed that current pupils do make good progress over time in mathematics and English, particularly in Year 7 and 8. This is a significant improvement on previous years.
- Careers guidance in the school is strong. Leaders regularly evaluate the school's work in this area against nationally recognised standards. The majority of pupils who responded to Ofsted's inspection questionnaire said that the school provides them with appropriate information about their next steps. Therefore, nearly all pupils progress to a wide range of educational establishments, employment, apprenticeships and universities at age 16 or 18.
- The most able pupils in the school make strong progress in a wide range of subjects. They are able to reflect on, and successfully refine, their work. The most able pupils use teacher feedback very well to deepen their understanding and extend their written work.
- Teachers lead reading programmes frequently that assess and encourage pupils to read more often. Most pupils participate with enthusiasm and read with fluency appropriate to their age. Some less able pupils have reading ages significantly below their chronological age. Although this information is readily available, some teachers create resources that are far too difficult to read for some pupils. This slows the progress of the less able because they have to seek further guidance and support.
- The progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is improving. Those pupils who have profound learning difficulties, and are supported in the alternative provision, make good progress because they receive specialist support. The pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities who attend lessons with their peers do less well. This is because some teachers rigidly stick to the teaching and learning policy which requires teaching activities aimed at the distinct ability groups. When this happens, some of the additional academic needs of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are missed.

## 16 to 19 study programmes

**Good**

- The quality of provision for post-16 students is very good. The strong reputation of the sixth form is well deserved. Student numbers are high and rising.
- Students who completed academic and applied courses in 2017 made progress that was significantly higher than others nationally. Disadvantaged students consistently make above-average progress in a wide range of academic and vocational courses. Students' progress in history, business studies, geography, religious studies, economics, psychology and art is very strong. Students, from their different starting points, achieve well in most A-level and applied general subjects. They progress to a wide range of further educational establishments and universities, including Oxbridge

and other Russell Group universities. Retention rates are very high because pupils receive thorough careers guidance towards the end of key stage 4. The broad curriculum ensures that students study subjects that are well matched to their future career aspirations.

- Students who did not attain grades A\* to C, or 4+, in English and/or mathematics follow appropriate courses. However, only a small proportion of students improved their English grades in 2017. The school's own assessment information indicates that current students' progress in 2018 GCSE resits is not yet strong enough to sustain improved grades in mathematics.
- Teachers regard post-16 students as adults. Consequently, relationships between students and their teachers are extremely positive. Students are punctual to lessons and attendance is in line with the rest of the school and above the national average. Sixth-form students display resilience and an enthusiasm to do well. They are involved in a large number of extra-curricular activities such as debating, Duke of Edinburgh's awards and sports. They take a leading role in most school projects.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is very good. Teachers build on students' prior attainment by planning activities that push them to their limit. Students are active learners and most are keen to 'have a go'. For example, in a Year 12 history lesson students worked well in groups. As a result of the teachers' probing questions, they were able to articulate why they felt support for different political parties had declined.
- Most students research and organise their own work experience in Year 12. Leaders conduct appropriate checks to ensure that work is matched to students' next steps and that they are well cared for and safe. Leaders support the minority of students who are unable to secure work experience by allocating them to a range of employers.
- The leader of post-16 provision is resolute in her quest for further improvement. She knows the strengths and areas for improvement within the sixth form in detail and can express exactly what needs to be done to enhance it further. A governor is assigned to monitor students' progress and leaders meet governors frequently to provide updates on post-16 developments. Leaders have worked tirelessly to ensure that parents and carers are involved in students' studies. They hold parents' coffee mornings to share concerns or celebrate success. Improving parental engagement has led to a significant increase in the number of parents attending sixth-form parents' evenings. If a student loses focus, or misses a deadline, effective channels of communication ensure that both parents and teachers act quickly to resolve the issue.

## School details

Unique reference number	137360
Local authority	Gateshead
Inspection number	10042175

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,579
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	270
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Sasha Ban
Headteacher	Steve Haigh
Telephone number	01914 960 026
Website	<a href="http://www.whickhamschool.org/">www.whickhamschool.org/</a>
Email address	shaigh@whickhamschool.org
Date of previous inspection	12–13 January 2016

## Information about this school

- The school is much larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The vast majority of pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and receive support from the pupil premium is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is below the national average.
- Whickham School converted to become a single academy within its own trust in 2011.

- Responsibility for the school rests with the board of governors. The structure of the trust's governance and management can be found on the school's website.
- A very small number of pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder attend alternative provision within the school.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited a wide range of lessons across the school. Many of the observations in lessons were carried out with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with senior and subject leaders, teachers and governors. At the request of the headteacher, inspectors met with, or spoke on the telephone to, a number of external partners.
- Inspectors held informal and formal discussions with pupils, observed tutorial groups and pupil interactions during social times.
- Inspectors listened to a group of Year 7 and 8 pupils read.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school and scrutinised a wide range of evidence including the school's self-evaluation, analysis of performance information, action plans and evaluations, attendance and behaviour records, safeguarding files, recruitment checks and pupils' work.
- Inspectors took into account the 263 responses from parents who completed Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. Ninety-two members of staff completed Ofsted's online staff survey and 166 pupils responded to Ofsted's online pupil questionnaire.

## Inspection team

Lee Elliott, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Karen Gammack	Ofsted Inspector
John Downs	Ofsted Inspector
Shelley Heseltine	Ofsted Inspector
Geoffrey Lumsdon	Ofsted Inspector

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