

Inspection of a good school: Whickham School

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

Inspection dates: 17 and 18 May 2023

Outcome

Whickham School continues to be a good school. There is enough evidence of improved performance to suggest that the school could be judged outstanding if we were to carry out a graded (section 5) inspection now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thoroughly enjoy learning at this school. Leaders understand the curriculum very well and how best to teach it. Teachers use methods that help pupils reach their learning goals. They plan lessons that are exceptionally interesting and engaging. Pupils have confidence when talking to visitors and adults about their learning. They are enthusiastic about what they have learned. They feel safe and well looked after in the school.

Staff have very high expectations of pupils. Through the school's values, pupils are encouraged to have empathy and respect for others. They are also encouraged to aspire and to be resilient. Pupils behave very well around the school. They are respectful towards each other. Bullying is rare. If it does occur, leaders address it effectively.

Leaders offer pupils lots of opportunities for learning beyond lessons. They have made sure these opportunities are in place again following the COVID-19 pandemic. Many pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, take part in a wide range of clubs and activities. Examples are residential visits, sports clubs, library, gaming clubs and a law club. Leaders have made sure pupils get the support they might need. For example, they use a range of highly effective strategies to support pupils' mental health and well-being.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have planned a high-quality curriculum. It is highly ambitious for all pupils. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and disadvantaged pupils. Leaders and teachers have thought about lesson content and how to teach it. Pupils build up knowledge and skills in a sensible order. They remember important concepts because of this. For example, in mathematics, pupils practise their knowledge first. Only then do they use this knowledge to have a go at reasoning and problem-solving. This means pupils are well prepared for the high level of challenge

involved in these tasks. In history, pupils study sources and opinions from renowned historians. They then debate their own views with each other.

Teachers use different ways to help pupils to improve their work. In mathematics and English, for example, pupils study high-quality sample answers. Pupils respond to these by improving their own work. These approaches help teachers to identify things that pupils might struggle with. Pupils get the extra help they need, which helps them to be successful in their learning. A minority of pupils have missed work through absence from school. Often, teachers have made sure pupils do not have gaps in their learning because of this. In some cases, they have not been as successful at identifying and addressing these gaps.

Students in the sixth form are also hugely enthusiastic about their learning. They can see how teachers help them to understand and remember subject content. Students in the sixth form are confident learners too. They are willing to engage positively and make valuable contributions to learning discussions.

The support available for pupils with SEND is exceptional. Teachers use detailed knowledge of individual pupils to support them with their learning. One-to-one support in lessons is high quality. Teachers support pupils with SEND individually in the classroom. This helps pupils to overcome any barriers to their learning. As a result, pupils with SEND meet their intended learning goals and make exceptional progress.

Since the last inspection, leaders have made changes to the pastoral support system for pupils. These changes have had a positive impact. For example, the new heads of year have more time to support pupils and work with families. Attendance is improving and instances of unacceptable behaviour are very low.

Pupils behave exceptionally well at Whickham school. Leaders expect pupils to report if other pupils make inappropriate comments to them. This includes any behaviour that makes pupils feel uncomfortable. Such incidents are rare. Leaders take swift and decisive action when these incidents occur.

The school provides a range of opportunities for pupils to learn beyond lessons. Pupils are encouraged to develop their confidence and resilience. Some extra-curricular activities have been organised by pupils themselves. Leaders have also put in place a high-quality programme of careers advice and guidance for pupils.

Leaders are considerate of the well-being and workload of staff. Staff are very positive about working in the school. Leaders have made sure that staff have time to plan and develop the curriculum, for example, through shared planning. This also allows staff to benefit from each other's expertise.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and governors have developed effective procedures for checking, recruiting and training staff. Leaders have worked hard to make sure pupils are supported if they have concerns or worries. Pupils know who to talk to when they have a concern. Staff and leaders take swift action to ensure that pupils receive the help they need. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, including when online. The personal development programme that pupils experience is a strong feature of the school's work.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in March 2018.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	137360
Local authority	Gateshead
Inspection number	10269194
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,677
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	306
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Sasha Ban
Headteacher	Fraser Turnbull
Website	https://www.whickhamschool.org
Dates of previous inspection	27 February and 7 March 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- There is a specially resourced provision based at the school that caters for 16 pupils with autism spectrum disorder.
- A small number of pupils attend registered and local authority approved off-site alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, curriculum leaders and other members of staff. The lead inspector met with representatives of the board of trustees, including the chair of the trust.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school, including at breaktimes and lunchtimes. They gathered pupils' views about the school through formal and informal discussions.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement priorities and safeguarding documents. Inspectors evaluated information relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, along with responses submitted as free text. Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil questionnaires.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, history and science. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

Inspection team

Barry Found, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Moira Banks

Ofsted Inspector

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