

Whitecross Hereford; High School and Specialist Sports College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116935
Local Authority	Herefordshire
Inspection number	338924
Inspection dates	2–3 December 2009
Reporting inspector	Michael Smith HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	899
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Reverend Brain Chave
Headteacher	Mrs Denise Strutt
Date of previous school inspection	20–21 September 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 41 lessons and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at a variety of documents including policies, minutes and the school improvement plan. They analysed 67 staff questionnaires, 145 student questionnaires and 293 parent and carer questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the accuracy of the school's evaluation of the quality of teaching
- the validity of the judgments made in a survey commissioned by the school in 2008 from an external education consultancy
- the extent to which middle leaders transform senior leadership's ambition to improve the quality of provision and raise standards.

Information about the school

The school moved into new purpose-built accommodation in June 2006. It has specialist status for sport. Local socio-economic indicators are more favourable than those generally seen although some indicate elements of rural deprivation. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is lower than average. The vast majority of students are from White British backgrounds, although the number of students who are learning English as an additional language is increasing as more students start at school who are from an Eastern European background. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average whilst the proportion with a statement of special educational need is average. There are a number of looked after students. In October 2007 the school had a monitoring visit for schools graded satisfactory.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

When the school was inspected in September 2006 and judged satisfactory, the report said it was 'well placed to seize this moment to step up its performance to a higher level.' This it has achieved because it now provides a good standard of education and fulfils its vision to convince 'the students, their parents and our staff that they can achieve more.' Standards are average and improving. Students make good progress. The specialist sports status has been instrumental in supporting the improvements in the quality of teaching, in developing very good links with the local community and raising the self-esteem and motivation of students. It has also been very influential, through its very wide range of extra-curricular activities, in supporting the school's good programme for improving the health of its students. The improved teaching, rising standards, more engaging curriculum, excellent guidance and support, along with the school's accurate self-evaluation, demonstrate a good capacity to improve further.

Behaviour is good; students are polite and considerate to staff and each other and take an active part in their own learning. There are however a few occasions when students become distracted, especially towards the end of double lessons. This is sometimes because teachers do not plan for an appropriate variety of activities to motivate and engage them for the whole lesson. Also, the start of some lessons is not purposeful because some students arrive late. The curriculum is well matched to the needs of the vast majority of students, although some with special educational needs are not fully engaged and they also have more time off school than others. Support for individuals is excellent. Staff know the students very well and are able to offer highly effective guidance. Assessments are usually very useful in supporting students to make further progress. However this is inconsistent and in some lessons students are not always informed of how well they are doing or given suitable advice on how to improve. Students with disabilities, looked after children and students whose circumstances make them vulnerable, are extremely well supported so that, for instance, looked after children attend well and achieve good results. Students make an excellent contribution to the school and the local community. Their contribution to the wider national community is less well developed because they do not have a good understanding of life in a multicultural Great Britain.

The strong drive to improve is palpable from senior leaders and this is converted into actions by subject leaders and pastoral staff. Middle managers have been very successful in some areas in bringing about sustained improvements and the school has rightly identified English and mathematics as needing further improvement.

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Some middle managers have not yet developed their leadership skills sufficiently to consistently bring about the improvements to their subject area. The inspection found that judgments made by the external survey in 2008 were accurate and in some areas the school had improved upon them.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build upon the success to date to increase the proportion of good and outstanding lessons by ensuring:
 - lessons get off to a prompt and purposeful start
 - lessons are structured with a variety of activities which supports students' engagement and concentration, particularly during double lessons
 - assessment, including teacher feedback and marking, consistently identifies and informs students how to improve.
- Fine-tune the curriculum by:
 - extending the range of vocational opportunities for low attaining students which are available on site, including greater opportunities for practical work to capture their interest and maintain their motivation
 - creating more opportunities for students to develop their understanding of life in multicultural Britain.
- Improve the effectiveness of middle managers so they consistently:
 - monitor the quality of provision within their subject area and evaluate its impact upon learning and raising standards
 - identify and overcome any weaknesses in their area of responsibility.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students start at school with standards which are below average. Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 have improved significantly over the last three years and are above average for a number of key indicators. Results in both English and mathematics are average, as is the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics. Results in science and physical education (PE) are very high and the school met its targets in its specialist area. Over time, students make good progress and this is confirmed by observations of lessons during the inspection, which show that learning is good. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities also make good progress with the exception of a very small number who also have poor attendance. Students say they enjoy school because they are successful with their work and achieve well.

Students feel safe; they behave well and know how to conduct themselves safely in lessons and when using the internet. They have a good understanding of moral issues. Bullying is rare with victims being well supported by staff and perpetrators being helped to see the effect of their actions on others. Students know how to live in a healthy manner, with an excellent attitude to taking exercise and a high uptake of extra-curricular sport and other fitness activities. Strong social development means students make an excellent contribution to the school and wider community, eagerly

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taking on the many opportunities available for them to lead groups, share their ideas and link with other organisations. Students act as junior leaders for sports and other subjects, grow vegetables and herbs which are used in school meals and give staff feedback on the quality of their lessons. They also develop good leadership and team working skills, which, along with above average attendance, prepare them well for their futures. There is a strong spiritual element to lessons in several subjects and in assemblies where students fully appreciate the wonder of the world around them. The school successfully encourages high quality responses to the creative arts and culture although this is not extended to a good understanding of different cultures within Britain. There have been very few racially motivated incidents and students originally from areas of Eastern Europe are well received within school.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Students are able to follow a wide variety of courses in Key Stage 4. These include appropriate vocational courses such as hairdressing and health and social care at other local providers. A very small minority of disaffected students are not fully supported by the vocational opportunities on the school site. Sport is pivotal within the school and all students follow an appropriate PE course including GCSE or BTEC. Sport also provides an extensive range of extra-curricular activities. These are augmented with performing arts and a wide variety of other clubs. Students say they are extremely well supported in making their options and career choices.

The very strong pastoral care ensures students are well supported across a variety of

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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areas. Tutors monitor the progress of students towards their targets and in Key Stage 3 students complete an accredited course to support their personal effectiveness. Pastoral support also ensures that behaviour around the school is good. Lessons are generally engaging, with students making a very clear contribution to their own learning. Students are often seen around school working industriously with no direct supervision. Teachers plan well so that lessons include a wide variety of activities, although in a small minority of lessons attention wavers, especially towards the end of double lessons. The curriculum is used well for students to participate in many practical activities or investigations, lessons are lively and engaging and students enjoy their learning. One lesson was observed when a toy car was used to demonstrate why light refracts when it goes from one medium to another. This imaginative use of resources is common. Lessons are well matched to the range of students' needs within classes and teachers often make very effective use of electronic whiteboards to support students' learning.

Staff within the specialist area have taken the lead in supporting the development of assessment procedures within the school. The inspection found that the practice varies across the school, with some excellent use of assessment to motivate and support students who then make very good progress. These students know how well they are doing and receive regular, effective, and detailed guidance on what they need to do to reach, or exceed their targets. Elsewhere the use of assessment is inconsistent and this leads to some students not knowing how well they are doing or how to improve.

Support for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is very good. These students are often taught in small groups and they follow appropriate courses so that all attain qualifications to support their next stage of education. The school also has very effective systems to support students whose circumstances make them vulnerable and need additional help, often working well with other external agencies. Year 7 students say they were prepared well for school prior to arriving and then supported well when they started in September.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The senior leaders give a strong steer and direction, this is exemplified by the vast majority of staff who completed the questionnaire saying they know what the school is trying to achieve. Senior leaders have a good and accurate overview of the main

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areas within the school. They tackle areas of relative underperformance effectively, so for example science results, which had previously been poor, are now very good. Middle managers have implemented school policies with variable success. In the best examples, there is a clear departmental response to the issues and consistent practice across the department. However, in other areas the changes have not been fully implemented and some subject leaders have not effectively evaluated the impact of developments on the provision within the department or the extent to which standards are rising. For some, this is because they are relatively new to middle management.

Governors are very supportive of the school and have appropriate structures in place. They challenge the school and evaluate the impact of their policies. For example, they have been very rigorous in ensuring safeguarding procedures have been fully implemented: consequently these are good. Governors have also been very active in ensuring the school supports the local community well. For example, very good use is made of the school's mobile fitness suite to support local schools, local residents who have suffered a stroke or other medical issues or local youths who have been issued with an anti-social behaviour order. The school also has well formulated international links, including with a school in India, but less well developed links across Britain.

The comprehensive analysis of examination data and the identification of underperforming groups have supported the school in ensuring good equality of opportunity. This comprehensive analysis includes the performance of different groups with special educational needs, students from different ethnic backgrounds and with different levels of attainment when starting at the school. The school also effectively monitors the progress of students as they pass through their GCSE years to ensure they are on track to meet their challenging targets.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

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Views of parents and carers

A high number of responses were received indicating the effective links between school and home. Responses from parents and carers were generally very positive, with the very large majority saying that their child enjoyed school. Good support for students was often identified as a strength of the school and one parent commented, reflecting the views of others, 'The school has helped my son to flourish with excellent teaching, which has helped him cope with severe learning difficulties.'

Poor behaviour in a few classes and bullying were raised as issues by a very small number of parents. The inspection team found behaviour to be good, although they were aware from students that there are very rare incidents of inappropriate behaviour. Students said very infrequent incidents of bullying were effectively dealt with by staff and at the time of the inspection the school was gaining the views on bullying from Year 7 and Year 9 students through a questionnaire.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Whitecross Hereford; High School and Specialist Sports College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 293 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 899 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	85	29	180	61	25	9	3	1
The school keeps my child safe	105	36	175	60	6	2	1	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	97	33	180	61	13	4	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	84	29	186	63	19	6	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	70	24	197	67	17	6	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	55	19	203	69	26	9	1	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	54	18	191	65	36	12	3	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	63	22	200	68	12	4	1	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	68	23	200	68	15	5	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	66	23	179	61	32	11	8	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	46	16	188	64	31	11	5	2
The school is led and managed effectively	81	28	189	65	11	4	1	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	93	32	180	61	17	6	1	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

4 December 2009

Dear Students,



Inspection of Whitecross Hereford; High School and Specialist Sports College, Hereford, HR4 0RN

When I visited your school recently with my colleagues, we met some of you at lunchtime, and talked to others in lessons and at break. We were impressed with how well you behave and the outstanding contribution you make to the life of the school and local community. We agree with those of you who told us that you feel safe in school. As one of you said in your questionnaire 'I enjoy most of the lessons and therefore learn a lot, teachers make lessons enjoyable', although some of you commented that the school could do more to improve behaviour in some classes.

We have judged that your school is good and that you make good progress. Results in your examinations are improving and standards are average, and above average in some areas, like science and PE. We observed nearly all teachers and we judged that teaching is good. You really enjoy lessons which involve you with areas like investigations, practical work and group work. We have asked your school to improve the teaching so more lessons are like the best, which start purposefully and engage you for the whole time. You can help by ensuring you move quickly from one lesson to the next. We were very impressed by how many of you took part in the extra-curricular sports available. We also saw some very good assessment including good questioning and teachers' feedback and marking. However this is not consistent and we have asked the school to make sure assessments are used consistently to identify and inform you of how to improve.

Staff care for you very well, and make sure you are able to go forward to the next stage of your education as well as helping you to settle at the start of Year 7. You enjoy the social side of school as well as being a sports college. One of you said, 'Our PE lessons are fun and challenge us, also we have great facilities.' You can follow a wide variety of courses. To help more of you feel fully engaged we have asked the school to extend the vocational courses available and provide more opportunities to develop practical skills. You have a very good understanding your local area but you are less aware of what it is like growing up in other areas of Great Britain. We have asked the school to help you gain a wider perspective. Your headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteachers have a clear understanding of what needs to be done and they are very determined that these improvements will be made. They are supported by some good subject leaders but this is inconsistent, so that in some areas improvements are not progressing as well. Again, this is an area we have asked the school to improve. We wish you well at this very supportive school.

Yours sincerely

Michael Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector

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