

Whitefield School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101347
Local Authority	Barnet
Inspection number	307661
Inspection dates	11–12 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Gill Close HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	785
6th form	163
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Lewis
Headteacher	Mr Peter Blenkinsop
Date of previous school inspection	7 February 2005
School address	Claremont Road Cricklewood London NW2 1TR
Telephone number	020 8455 4114
Fax number	020 8455 4382

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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

Whitefield School welcomes students from a wide range of ethnic groups, the largest of which are the quarter with African heritage and the one sixth who are White British. A large number join the school after the start of Year 7 and one third of students are refugees. Two thirds of the students speak a first language other than English and a quarter of students join the school with little or no fluency in English. The proportion of students with learning difficulties or disabilities is twice the national average, although the percentage with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average. The school has designated provision for students with a physical disability and is fully accessible for wheelchairs. Many students experience difficult socio-economic or personal circumstances. The proportion of students eligible for free schools meals is three times the national average. There are more boys than girls in each year group. The school became a specialist sports college in 1999 and is a full service extended school offering a range of community services. It achieved national Healthy Schools status in 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Whitefield is an outstanding school. Leadership and management are excellent. The headteacher has led the way forward to create an exceptionally inclusive school where all students are supported to do well. The excellent care, guidance and support helps students to deal with many difficult circumstances and increase in confidence. As a result, their personal development and well-being are outstanding. They feel very safe and understand extremely well how to follow a healthy lifestyle. They make an excellent contribution to the community. The support for students with learning difficulties or disabilities gives them very good access to lessons, and students at an early stage of learning English receive excellent induction and support. Students who may be at risk are monitored closely and are very well supported. The advice, support and activities provided through the full-service extended school make a real difference to students and their families. All students are given equal access to the full range of the outstanding curriculum through substantial support in lessons and increasingly tailored courses as they grow older. There is very high participation in the wide range of extra curricular activities, particularly the sports. The school's work to increase attendance and punctuality has been effective and it rightly aims to improve these further. Students really enjoy coming to school and get on very well with each other and their teachers.

Students join the school with standards that are well below average. They make good progress to reach standards that have recently risen substantially to broadly average. The school's efforts to raise standards to give students access to the next steps in education or employment have been successful. Nevertheless, there is room for its evaluation and planning to focus more sharply on students' progress. In some areas, such as English, students make outstanding progress. The school's data show that students are on track to make much improved progress this year in science, but in mathematics progress is improving more slowly from below average at all key stages. Teaching and learning are good, with many activities that challenge and interest students. Inspectors saw several outstanding lessons, but there are some lessons which do not meet every student's needs so well, such as in mathematics. Frequent observation of lessons and associated professional development have contributed effectively to improvement in teaching quality, although there is not an emphasis on all students' progress when evaluating lessons.

The school effectively carries out regular and accurate self-evaluations of its performance that have identified the key areas for improvement and led to well targeted actions. It has a comprehensive development plan that has good contributions from all areas of the school. It demonstrates a clear vision of what it needs to do to improve and in most cases has defined clear measures of success. There is scope for greater involvement of governors in this. The school's assessment system effectively keeps track of students' attainment against their targets in every subject each half term, and regularly informs teachers and students, although it does not speedily provide analyses of the relative progress of individuals and groups. The school's improvement since the last inspection and its systems that underpin sustained improvement provide it with outstanding capacity to improve further.

The specialist sports college status has had a major impact on the school. There is a wide range of activities within physical education (PE) and for enrichment that students eagerly take up. These help raise their self-esteem and confidence, and keep them healthy, all of which contribute well to their enjoyment and progress. Through their whole school responsibilities, PE staff have made a major contribution to driving improvements in teaching and learning, and leading

continuous professional development. The PE department has good curriculum links with science which are being used as a model for promoting collaborative working across the school. Academic and community targets have been met, except for those at Key Stage 3.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form provides a haven for the personal development and well-being of students, many of whom have recently arrived from overseas. It provides excellent nurture and support, raising their confidence and independence, and preparing them well for the future. Together with good teaching, this helps them to make good progress across a broad range of courses and for the vast majority to move on to further or higher education. Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding, and they contribute particularly well to the school community, such as through supporting reading, clubs and behaviour. The school customises a highly personalised curriculum to meet a diverse range of needs. It provides a wide range of subjects and courses at various levels. It has successfully increased the range at AS and A level and recognises the need to offer more lower level access courses. It enables students to take longer than normal to complete their studies, and for some this has provided a route to higher education. New courses such as BTEC in sports studies have also been introduced to improve access to higher education. Students welcome the support they receive in their applications to university. Last year, 17 students from homes with no experience of higher education entered university.

The school has recently introduced new leadership and management posts to strengthen the capacity to track students' progress and inform the head of sixth form on areas of concern. Measures have been taken to improve performance in subjects and courses where progress was weaker in 2007, and the school's own data show it is on course to be better in 2008. The school has also responded well to student concerns by improving the facilities for independent study. The school has invested considerable resources in its successful efforts to boost sixth form provision and attract more able students, while providing a vast array of support for all.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise progress and standards in mathematics throughout the school.
- Focus more on the progress of individuals and groups in tracking, evaluation, development planning and lesson observation.
- Involve governors more fully in decision-making.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards rose markedly at Key Stage 4 in 2007 and greatly exceeded the school's targets. They are broadly average. Students make outstanding progress in English from their exceptionally low starting points to reach below average standards. In mathematics, students made slow progress in recent years and standards remained exceptionally low. At Key Stage 3, standards were exceptionally low in 2007. For these students, progress was strong in English but below average in mathematics and science. The school's data for current students shows much improved progress in science and some improved progress in mathematics but not at such a fast rate. Progress overall is good with some outstanding elements, and no group underachieves.

The high quality support that students with learning difficulties and disabilities receive provides them with particularly good access to the lessons so they make similar progress to others. The school has put in place effective strategies that are raising the progress of White British students, a group that has been making less progress than others. Students with difficulties in language acquisition are monitored regularly and provided with step-by-step guidance that improves their vocabulary and understanding and enables them to make good progress.

Students enter the sixth form with attainment well below national average, and some speak little English or have little previous formal schooling. The school's data show that students are on track to reach below average standards, which are higher than in 2007. Records show improved progress during this year in subjects where students made weaker progress in 2007. From their wide range of starting points, students make good progress across a broad range of courses. The school successfully provides access to courses for extended periods to enable students to complete Level 2 accreditation, such as GCSE, then move on to Level 3 qualifications, such as A level, and gain entrance to university.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Outstanding personal development and well-being are spurring students on to make greater progress in most subjects. The hugely diverse school community very much enjoys coming to school. Staff and students get on very well together. Students feel very safe. They trust their teachers and know they can approach adults in the school to help solve problems. Behaviour is good across the school and generally enables students to make progress without disruption. Race equality issues are monitored well and acted upon effectively. Regular reviews involving parents celebrate the achievement of students with learning difficulties or disabilities and successfully raise their self-esteem.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Students grow enormously in confidence and develop a clear sense of self. Their reflection on moral and social issues in many lessons has a positive impact on their attitude to school. The school holiday programme and personal, social and health education lessons strengthen students' moral code and help to create a harmonious community both in and out of school. Students know very well how to lead a healthy life. Their regular involvement in physical activity is further strengthened by their increasing emotional health, ably supported by counsellors and mentors. The school's vigorous efforts are leading to rises in attendance and punctuality, and the school rightly has these areas as a priority for continued improvement. Health and safety procedures are excellent, for example small groups of students have been involved in video-conferencing across Barnet, and wider afield, to share anti-bullying strategies. Students make an excellent contribution to their school community. They participate in charity work and peer support, such as through the sports leader awards. They are well known in the community, for example they organize the senior citizens' Christmas party. School council members, ably led by sixth formers, have a clear vision of how they can contribute to the development of the school and have done so very well. The school has appropriately planned for greater student involvement in decision-making. Enterprise and work-related learning, as well as regular involvement in group activities, develop well many of the skills needed for future economic well-being, although students' relatively slow progress in mathematics holds them back.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good, and inspectors saw some outstanding lessons. Learners at all levels make good progress. Students relate very well to their teachers and have good attitudes to their work. Teachers show good subject knowledge and use an effective range of teaching strategies to present their lessons in an interesting and varied way. They also take into account students' verbal and non-verbal skills in choosing appropriate activities. Good use is made of new technologies. Students especially enjoy learning where lessons are practical and they are given the opportunity to find things out for themselves.

Most lessons are well planned to provide an appropriate level of challenge for a wide range of learners. However, there are weaknesses in some areas, for example, mathematics. The assessment and monitoring of students' work is thorough, consistent and regular. Students know the levels or grades they have attained in each of their subjects and the target levels or grades they have been set. Teachers use pen portraits of class members along with other prior attainment data to inform the planning and delivery of lessons that generally meet students' needs well. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Sometimes lessons do not meet everyone's needs so effectively, for example when there is a lack of extension work for gifted and talented students. Teachers plan work and support well to meet individual needs, using regularly updated individual education plans for students with learning difficulties or disabilities and information about students' language levels. Teaching assistants are well informed and in most cases deliver effective strategies to support learning. Induction sessions for students learning English are taught well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. The school is justly proud of its provision of a curriculum that is increasingly tailored to students' individual needs and aspirations as they move through the school. From Years 7 to 9, the school provides strong in-class support to help all students access a common curriculum, with additional opportunities for study outside the school day. The sports specialism provides a very wide range of activities within PE, including archery and climbing.

The Key Stage 4 curriculum offers students a broadly open choice beyond the compulsory core subjects. Students can combine the academic and the vocational. Accelerated learning occurs within PE. For example, a group of Year 11 students studies AS level sports science.

The sixth form curriculum is highly responsive to each individual student's needs. A wide range of subjects and courses is offered, and customised. Sometimes this includes a combination of GCSE, vocational and A level courses. Where needed, such as for those who join the school with little recent experience of education, longer time is provided to complete courses.

The curriculum for special groups of students is well conceived because the school works hard on gathering students' and parents' views to ensure it matches needs. Students with learning difficulties follow appropriate courses. Students at early stages of learning English are confident

learners because the school has developed an excellent induction programme to ease their transition into the school.

The enrichment opportunities are extensive and well supported, particularly in sports. The junior sports leadership programme is very popular. Academic support groups are well attended, including Saturday sessions for core subjects and food technology.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The quality of care guidance and support is excellent and has an exceptional impact on students' personal development. The tight knit inclusion team support the staff in creating a safe place for learning. The school launches challenging projects such as 'Boys to Men', 'Girls to Women' and the Refugee Youth Project to give students additional life skills that develop confidence and high self esteem. The ethnic minority achievement team's excellent work with the inclusion team ensures equality of opportunity for all students, and data show these students achieving as well as their peers. Similarly, the care and mapping of support for students with learning difficulties and disabilities is very well targeted; they have well planned and monitored individual education plans that address a wide range of personal development and academic issues. Outstanding guidance for students with barriers to their learning helps them to identify the most successful pathway for their future development. Good careers advice and strong links to faith leaders in the community supplement the guidance that comes from tutors and the pastoral teams.

Safeguarding procedures are in place. The school's exceptional work with external agencies to support well-being is embedded through the many voluntary groups that contribute to the full-service extended school. The Somali Network and the Afghan Association that use the school at the weekend plus parent partnership groups and the Citizens' Advice Bureau are all part of the extensive links with the community that have such a dramatic impact on improving personal development and well-being. Students at risk are closely monitored to aid early identification of issues.

The school has an online system used by all staff for keeping track of students' attainment each half term. One of its strengths is that it enables the high number of students who join without Key Stage 2 assessment results to be set targets and tracked from the moment they join the school. It is used well to provide students and their parents with a record of their attainment, to identify those who need support and to inform staff in their evaluations. However, it does not readily enough quantify individual progress to provide insights into the relative progress of groups of students.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are outstanding across the school as a whole. The headteacher has ably led the school's development and improvement to being exceptionally inclusive. All students irrespective of background or ability can achieve their potential and students' results have improved. Leadership and management of care and guidance are excellent. They are highly

effective in promoting the personal development of learners and ensuring that new approaches to enhancing independence and self-esteem are constantly sought and evaluated.

Most staff have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses; however, some evaluations are not sufficiently focused on students' progress. Senior managers and a new subject leader have made good progress in putting science on track to delivering good achievement. Other subject areas such as mathematics have yet to see the full impact on student achievement of recent changes made by senior management and subject leaders. There are good systems to monitor and enhance the quality of teaching within a culture of support and development. They have contributed to overall improvement in the quality of teaching, although there is room for greater emphasis on students' progress when evaluating lessons.

The school governing body is very supportive of the school and applies good financial controls. Governors meet with parents and students but are somewhat restricted in their ability to monitor, challenge and influence strategy by the difficulty they have in accessing documentation on the school website and their limited understanding of value added achievement measures. Only a few governors use the local authority training support.

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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?	1	2
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?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
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?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

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?	1	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
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	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

27 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Whitefield School, London, NW2 1TR

Thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. You told us that you really enjoy school.

We found that Whitefield is an outstanding school. The way the staff look after everyone so they can do their best is excellent. They take special care to support those of you who need extra help. If you are just beginning to learn English, they make sure that you have a good start to your time in school. You make outstanding progress in your personal development and get on very well with each other and with staff. Sixth formers help younger students particularly well. Most of you have good attendance and are punctual. You told us that you feel very safe and know who to go to for help. You know how to stay healthy and enjoy lots of sport.

Teaching is good. It helps you to make good progress. In English you make outstanding progress but in mathematics it is not so good. You have an excellent range of courses in the main school and sixth form so you can choose a combination that suits you. There are also many good clubs that you go to. Your headteacher and the school leaders know the school very well and have done an excellent job in improving it.

We have asked the school to help you do better in mathematics, to check more on the progress you are making and to involve more people in making decisions.

You can help the school become even better by working hard to improve your progress, making sure you have good attendance and are on time, and contributing your views about improvements.

I wish you success in the future and in helping your school to become even better.

Best wishes

Gill Close

Her Majesty's Inspector