



QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW

REVIEW REPORT FOR WHITSTONE SCHOOL

Name of School:	Whitstone School
Headteacher/Principal:	Guy Swallow
Hub:	Wootton Bassett Hub
School phase:	Secondary
MAT (if applicable):	N/A

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	Effective
Date of this Review:	29/11/2023
Overall Estimate at last QA Review	N/A
Date of last QA Review	N/A
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Good
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	26/04/2022

Quality Assurance Review

The review team, comprising host school leaders and visiting reviewers agree that evidence indicates these areas are evaluated as follows:

Leadership at all levels	Leading
Quality of provision and outcomes	Effective

AND

Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs

Area of excellence	Accredited
Previously accredited valid areas of excellence	N/A
Overall peer evaluation estimate	Effective

The Quality Assurance Review estimates are not equivalent to Ofsted grades. The QA Review uses a different framework to Ofsted and the review is developmental not judgmental.

The school requested that we evaluate the impact of recent initiatives in teaching and learning, including provision for disadvantaged students and reading across the school. Leaders also identified staff development as a potential area of excellence.

1. Context and character of the school

Whitstone School is an 11-16 secondary school with a strong community ethos centred on inclusion and staff development. Its roll is smaller than average, enabling leaders and teachers to know their students well and provide a personalised education. Values are a fundamental part of its ethos; ambition, respect and excellence run through all that the school strives to achieve. These qualities find expression in several current initiatives. A vertical house system has been introduced to enhance the school's nurturing approach. Tutors are responsible for "aspire" groups of students within this structure, while support for behaviour and learning needs is delivered through the "ambition zone". The "Whitstone Lesson" epitomises the school's work on "inspiring futures" and is clearly informed by inclusive thinking. Teachers explore a range of pedagogies and are expected to adopt adaptive practice in their classrooms. They are required to know the needs of their students and develop a toolkit of proven techniques. These range from a retrieval repertoire to sophisticated scaffolding methods. The headteacher is proud of developments in this area and keen for current and prospective parents to see them for themselves. His mantra is "open the doors, open the gates".

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- The headteacher has a notable clarity of vision and a grasp of the reality for the school. The language of leaders is characterised by ambition. This is reflected in the school's values and in the competitive stance on the school's performance versus that of neighbouring schools.
- An ethos of inclusivity permeates all aspects of the life of the school. This is demonstrated by the care the school takes to provide a diverse and accessible curriculum. The position of leaders is: "We are all Whitstone".
- The new house-based pastoral structure provides opportunities for a wider range of staff to experience leadership roles. The four new house leads, for example, are accountable for ensuring that pastoral care is responsive to students' needs. In house assemblies visited, students reflected on role models and were rewarded for improved attendance.
- Leaders celebrate the successes of teachers. Excellent practice is recognised through "I spy an excellent..." calling cards left by visiting senior staff on observing classroom teachers in action. Staff feedback in surveys is consequently strongly supportive.
- Leadership is devolved to students as well as staff. They are encouraged and trained to become listening buddies, tour guides and anti-bullying mentors.

The students themselves embody the values of the school in the respect they show to visitors and the pride they show in their school. Disruptive behaviour is a rarity. On the student-led tour, they spoke with confidence about how quickly they have settled in and were clear about the about the wide range of support for their learning available to them.

- Leaders speak of “curating” a sense of pride in the local standing of the school. This is reflected in its growing reputation for inclusive provision and the increase in families applying as a first choice. It is also committed to a range of outreach activities, showing how its leadership extends beyond the school gates. The support it provides for music in a local primary school is a strong example of this.
- There is a concerted focus on boosting recruitment and retention, partly by including aspirant senior leaders in the wider leadership group and also by identifying talent within the teaching team. A teacher recruited through Teach First is now second in the mathematics department team and is developing middle leadership skills already. The headteacher encourages other senior and middle leaders to take ownership of aspects of whole school strategy.
- The central role of the business and office managers to the school’s leadership are clear signals of the value of support staff to the wider organisation. They lend a crucial perspective to strategic decision making.
- Key governors are described as “flagbearers” of current strategy on the curriculum, pastoral systems and staff development. Their expertise in areas such as students with special educational needs (SEND) and their unity of approach in maintaining the school’s current standalone trust status signify the school’s success in governor recruitment and development.

2.2 Leadership at all levels - Even better if...

- ... the approach to coaching was further developed so that the needs of the school and its staff were fully aligned.
- ... ownership of teachers’ leadership development journey was balanced by effective monitoring for consistency.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- The Whitstone Lesson initiative provides all teachers with a comprehensive toolkit of pedagogical techniques. They select from these to enable adaptations to teaching to meet the needs of specific groups of students or individuals. The school has no preferred style but has high expectations of teachers’ willingness to experiment and reflect on practice.

- A strong focus on disciplinary knowledge was evident in Year 11 Biology. The teacher employed “think, pair, share” to give students time and space to retrieve knowledge of key concepts from previous lessons such as “aerobic respiration” and “photosynthesis”.
- External professionals and experts are deployed to ensure access for students to higher level skills and careers guidance. Students were found to be highly engaged in vocational BTEC award activities. The use of a professional chef in a Year 10 catering class to deliver a masterclass in fish preparation provided a strong example.
- Targeted questioning in class elicits strong subject knowledge from students. In Year 10 history the teacher adapted his questioning to encourage the student to delve deeper and provide a stronger response. This enabled the student and the class to gain a deeper understanding of the contrasting approaches to infection control in modern and pre-modern societies.
- Some teachers combined use of mini whiteboards with cold calling to build a strong understanding of their students’ knowledge. In a Year 8 mathematics lesson the teacher targeted questions to establish potential misconceptions. This enabled students to work towards an answer and to practise the skills foundational to the lesson.
- “Do nows” to recap prior knowledge were also well judged and injected challenge across a range of subjects, including geography Year 9. This ensured that retrieval activity was constant, and students were kept on top of new knowledge.
- Formative assessment to check for misconceptions is generally a strength. In Key Stage 4 mathematics, mini-whiteboards were frequently used to embed core learning. In Year 11 classes, teachers employed them to teach about the concept of compound interest in one case and Pythagoras’ theorem in another.
- In English teachers combine a scaffolding approach with retrieval activities to give students a balance of support and challenge to elicit prior knowledge. In a Year 9 class students recalled themes from their earlier reading with some erudition, for example Steinbeck’s technique of foreshadowing key events.
- In Year 8 dance, students could articulate their learning and the process of the lesson. Engagement levels were high because of teachers’ relentless attention to routines and expectations.
- A strong theme in the agenda of curriculum leaders is work scrutiny. The school has established routine work scrutiny through subject-led “book-looks” or thematic scrutiny by senior leaders. Recent themes have included the quality and completeness of exercise books belonging to the disadvantaged

or students with SEND. Leaders identify best practice and share findings in teaching and learning briefings, or with pastoral leads when causes of concern are identified. The process is known as the Whitstone Reporting and Analysis Process ("WRAP").

- New staff induction focusses in a bespoke fashion on assessment, whilst "personalised pathway" (in-house) training sessions also focus on theory and practice in assessment for learning. Other pathways included "being an excellent teacher" and "developing an excellent curriculum". This demonstrates the aspirational nature of the school's culture and its commitment to the wider development of all its staff.
- Enrichment activities are provided for all students, primarily through a post-school ("P6") programme. Activities range from academic support to sport, music and computing clubs. Participation is voluntary, but attendance monitored. This enables the school to track attendance by vulnerable groups of students or the disadvantaged.

3.2 Quality of provision and outcomes - Even better if...

- ... the differences between boys and girls in terms of their academic progress, subject options and participation in enrichment were evaluated for underlying trends and potential cultural barriers.
- ... teacher autonomy in the selection of teaching and learning approaches was balanced with a drive toward enhanced challenge for all, for example through intensive focus on "scaffolding up".
- ... students' workbooks were utilised consistently in providing feedback on learning.

4.1 Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs - What went well

- Academic and vocational curricula are available to all students regardless of need, ability, or disadvantage. The school has taken a strong moral stance in providing the most suitable curriculum pathway for all its students, regardless of the statistical impact of this on, for example, EBacc uptake.
- The school enjoys strong relationships with its feeder primary schools. These underpin a well-planned transition programme from Year 6 into Year 7. The needs of new pupils joining the school are quickly identified and information

about special educational needs (SEND) and education, health and care plans (EHCP) disseminated efficiently to class teachers.

- The school adheres to an “assess, plan, do, review” methodology in supporting students with SEND. Information about students’ needs, including disadvantage and low reading ages, is relayed to teachers by the SENCO. Teachers use the “e-praise” system in their planning to ensure they have an appropriate seating plan which is responsive to students’ needs and clearly linked to recommended adaptive teaching strategies.
- In the best cases, such as in Year 9 product design and Year 11 mathematics teachers used class profiles to support students to best effect. Oral questions were targeted effectively, and modelling of accurate exam technique helped students with SEND progress in line with their peers.
- Leaders consider all teachers to be teachers of SEND. They have high expectations for effective implementation of quality first teaching. Teachers’ continuing professional development (CPD) frequently focusses on this area and the SENCO herself is well supported by a wide range of teaching assistants. A well-qualified and experienced trustee with oversight of SEND also provides the SENCO with effective liaison and support.
- The reading strategy has been reviewed in light of growing numbers of low reading ages coming into Key Stage 3. The school has enhanced its provision of the accelerated reader programme by implementing the Read, Write, Inc phonics-based implementation tool. Students with significant gaps in reading skills have access to timetabled interventions to support the systematic acquisition of necessary phonics knowledge.
- The school collaborates with six secondaries across the county to both share and import best practice in supporting mental health provision. This has led to the development of resources staffed by trained assistants and headed by pastoral leads, such as house leaders. This has helped the school cope with the burdens placed on its SEND and wider pastoral provision by the increasing number of in-year admissions.
- Leaders ensure that the needs of students with SEND, and the disadvantaged are at the forefront of their development of staff and systems. One development pathway in the CPD programme is titled “being an excellent learning support assistant (LSA)” and focusses on mental health and emotional literacy. Recent adaptations to wider support structures have led to the development of a “nest” provision for students with mental health or a related vulnerability, a “compass” area for interventions and support for students with SEND and an “ambition zone” for behaviour support.

4.2 Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs - Even better if...

- ... the use of class profiles was further developed to communicate and embed the required support for students' learning as consistently as possible.
- ... teachers' ownership of their responsibility for the needs of all their students and the necessary reasonable adjustments in class was intensified.
- ... the strategy for phonics-based interventions for the weakest readers was accelerated.

5. Area of Excellence

Staff development ("An investment in people")

Accredited

5.1 Why has this area been identified as a strength? What actions has the school taken to establish expertise in this area?

The school's development of its people is central to its ethos and vision. Its approach is well resourced and well planned. Staff are surveyed regularly about their experience of the school and its training offer. Feedback, notably at whole school inspection in 2022, is consistently positive, both from trainee teachers, including early career teachers (ECT), and middle and senior leaders. Support staff at all levels are included in this process too and are encouraged to participate in whole school and bespoke training. Regarding the school's development and training culture, 83% of staff responded positively or very positively. Equally striking was the finding in the same survey that 98% of staff have a clear or very clear understanding of the school's vision and values. (The response rate was 95% or more, itself an indication of the engagement of staff in self-review processes.)

Teachers at all stages of their professional journey lead training sessions for colleagues and are encouraged to pursue national professional qualifications (NPQs) in education leadership. The school is proud of its personalised training pathways for staff. It shares good practice with other secondary schools within the local area, focusing on staff wellbeing and leadership development. Recently it has also worked with primary schools to disseminate its practice in staff development.

The stated strategy for continuing professional development underpins all the work the school does in this area. This consists of strands such as developing “teaching”, “individuals”, “support staff”, “wellbeing”, “specialisms”, “leadership”. Each of these strands is broken down into monthly workshops which aim to deepen knowledge and widen teacher’s field of expertise. For example, within “being an excellent school leader”, staff have covered “implementing a vision”, “fierce conversations” and “managing people”. Participants are expected to share their knowledge with wider staff at INSET in the summer term.

5.2 What evidence is there of the impact on pupils’ outcomes?

The school’s investment in its staff development programme has been instrumental in extending teachers’ expertise and knowledge in teaching and learning. This is expressed primarily through the Whitstone Lesson methodology and through continuous informal CPD in teaching and learning. This is evident from the content of regular newsletters to staff about research-based thinking in pedagogy and external input via recommended texts or guest speakers.

The impact of this work can be linked to a Progress 8 score of +0.23 for low prior attainment students in 2023, a highly encouraging result. The school also improved on its 2019 Progress 8 score significantly to become the second most improved school in the county on this measure. This improvement in progress and attainment is attributed to the increasingly sophisticated development of colleagues. Finally, the school achieved a “good” rating in its 2022 whole school inspection. Leaders consider this outcome to illustrate the impact of the work on assessment and adaptive teaching in the CPD programme.

Several staff have experienced rapid career progression because of the school’s staff development programme. Members of the existing middle and senior leadership tier either joined the school relatively recently as PGCE trainees or were appointed as unqualified teachers as part of the “Teach First” scheme.

5.3 What is the name, job title and email address of the staff lead in this area?

Laura Hunt

Assistant Headteacher

(Teaching and learning/Continuing professional development (CPD))

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Following the QA Review

The review report is primarily for the school's internal use to support the school's continuing improvement. However, we encourage you to share the main findings with your hub/hub manager so that they can support your hub's activity planning. Challenge Partners will also collate and analyse report content to create an aggregate picture of what is going on across the sector each year.

For further support following your QA Review, schools can access the School Support Directory; the Challenge Partners online tool that enables schools to connect with other schools in your hub and across the national network of schools.

Schools can also attend Sharing Leading Practice (SLP) events where schools showcase excellent and/or innovative practice. Sharing Leading Practice events allow school leaders with specific improvement needs to visit a school or attend an online webinar hosted by a school, with outstanding provision in that area.

Both the School Support Directory and the Shared Leading Practice events can be accessed via the Challenge Partners website. (<https://www.challengepartners.org/>)

Finally, following the QA Review, schools may find it useful to refer to research such as the EEF toolkit to help inform their approach to tackling the EBIs identified in the report

(<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit>)