

Whitley Bay High School – General Information

Whitley Bay High School is a mixed 13-18 comprehensive school. The school has grown considerably in size over the last decade, and is significantly oversubscribed each year. Currently the roll is 1619, with 568 in the Sixth Form. There are 182 members of staff, 115 teaching and 67 support staff.

Key milestones in the school's development include the award of Leading Edge Status in 2003, one of the first 100 schools nationally to achieve this status, and the successful bid for Specialist College Status which took effect from September 2006. The bid focused on the core subjects – English, Maths and Science, in order to impact on every student in the school. Greater curricular choice, more enterprise and more vocational opportunities came with the status, as well as new initiatives with our partner schools and local community. We aim to produce 'gifted all rounders' who have high levels of literacy, numeracy, oracy and ICT.

More recently the school became one of the country's first Teaching Schools and became a National Support School in 2011. Both of these accolades emphasise our role at the forefront of research and practice in Teaching and Learning, and bring significant responsibilities for outreach work, training teachers at every stage from ITT to prospective Headship and leading CPD programmes all over the country.

The school underwent a two day section 5 Ofsted Inspection in May 2013. This endorsed the previous inspection of 2010 under the old framework, where we were unique amongst maintained secondary schools in receiving outstanding grades in all 31 judgements. This time we were particularly delighted that the inspection team recognised the distinct culture and ethos of the school and reflected that in the report, indeed they said that this is a very special school. We are not, however, in any way complacent and we continue to set our own challenging agenda for continuing change and development.

A key characteristic of this school is its emphasis on staff induction and professional development for all staff - teaching and support. In-house training is very popular and is a real strength according to evaluations. We have an hour dedicated to in-house CPD every Tuesday when students finish early. In addition we frequently lead CPD work for the Local Authority and for other schools. This training gives colleagues the opportunity to lead as well as participate in CPD. Many staff have led sessions recently based on Kagan structures, Guy Claxton, or influenced by Mike Hughes who works with us regularly and with whom we have helped write his most recent book about teaching and learning. There is a strong culture of professional self improvement, and it is important to emphasise that this has developed because staff here enjoy working together, sharing ideas and regularly reminding themselves that teaching children is an exciting and stimulating activity. Students are at the heart of all we do at the school, and building positive relationships is central to our purpose. All of this was endorsed by the re-award of Investors in People in July 2014, (a report well worth looking at to give you a flavour of the school).

The ethos of the school is one which focuses constantly on the learning process. Staff, as well as students, consider themselves as learners and we very successfully include parents in this culture through the use of regular parental workshops. The emphasis is on high expectations through good relationships, and the use of praise and reward. What is happening in the classroom is the key to all our work. Lessons are planned and evaluated to provide a variety of learning opportunities for students, as well as highlighting the development of transferable skills. The opening of our teaching observation gallery in September 2006 allowed us to continue to develop our practice further and is a highly effective part of our process for supporting staff. Several years ago the gallery won national recognition for innovative practice at the annual Leading Edge Conference in London carrying off the most prestigious award on the night.

Examination performance is consistently very good by all measures. This year at GCSE 83% of our students achieved 5+ A*-C grades (a figure which is based on the vast majority of students following a 'traditional' pattern of qualification and therefore not affected by equivalences). Similarly at 'A' level, average points score per entry is usually around 90 (UCAS points) which places us in the top 5% in the North of England. These results are reflected in the destinations of sixth formers – this summer 193 students went on to degree courses in Higher Education – the vast majority to their first choice and around 30% of students go on to Russell Group Universities each year. The size and success of our Sixth Form is one of the distinguishing features of the school and it is regularly rated as one of the best Sixth Forms in the country by the National Press.

Each year about 70% of Year 11 choose to stay on into the Sixth Form and our aim is to continue to provide a fully comprehensive education, which caters for their varying needs. Sixth Form courses currently offered include 30 AS/A2 Level subjects. Four of the AS/A2 subjects are more vocationally based and have a higher percentage of coursework assessment – these are Health and Social Care, Applied Business, Applied Science and Applied ICT. Sixth Form students have access to a wide ranging enrichment programme in Years 12 and 13. A significant number of students join the Sixth Form from other local schools as a consequence of its outstanding reputation.

The pastoral system is very important in developing the ethos of the school and is based on a year structure made up of tutor groups of about 22 students, each team led by a teaching Head of Year. All subject teachers in the school are responsible for a tutor group. Tutor teams work within a structured programme of guidance and support, and Heads of Year and tutors are the key figures for monitoring and raising student achievement, for contact with their homes, and for supporting them throughout their studies.

Much work has developed in recent years to take forward the personalisation of learning. This is particularly evident in the work of the Work Related Learning Team who plan and provide a wide ranging and diverse curriculum provision, some of it vocationally based off site, much of it provided in house by our own team including Learning Mentor, Gifted and Talented Co-ordinator and the Every Child Matters Team. All of this contributes substantially to our whole school Raising Achievement Strategy which concentrates on improving the quality of learning, teaching and personal development of all students.

Students lead very busy lives at this school, and we offer a very wide range of extra curricular activities. Large numbers are involved in a whole variety of sports, from early morning clubs, to after school activities, matches and national competitions. Music, Drama and Art thrive. Recent productions include 'Romeo and Juliet', 'Miss Saigon', 'Grease' and 'Back to the 80s' as well as many smaller scale productions in the Drama Studio such as 'The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui' and 'The Crucible'. There are frequent concerts involving choir, wind band, strings groups and contemporary bands. Educational visits and foreign trips are numerous (Art and Media to New York and History to Russia for example). In 2010 we became the National Champions in the UK Bar Mock Trial competition (the second time in three years), and this is one of many very popular activities led by staff, reflecting the wide ranging interests of staff and students. The school library is at the centre of school life and has a hugely positive impact on learning and teaching. Amongst many activities it runs a week long Literature and Performing Arts Festival every summer. Staff give generously of their time and all who join the staff expect to contribute to the wider life of the school, which is at the heart of the good relationships referred to earlier.

The school buildings were first opened in 1962 and a much needed programme of renovation of the site has been progressing over the last decade. Significant recent improvements have included: modernising the Sports Hall; the opening in September 2002 of a new purpose built teaching block housing Art, Music, Drama, a new Library and Science Labs; the recladding of all the other teaching blocks and extensive internal renovation work to improve facilities for teaching and learning. More recently further major developments have taken place. A new block has been built in the centre of the school which now provides a large Sixth Form Common Room with its own café, dedicated ICT independent study facilities for sixth form students and the Sixth Form Guidance Centre. In the summer of 2008 all English, Maths and Modern Foreign Language teaching rooms were extensively refurbished. 2012 saw a complete refurbishment of the Main Hall and the repainting of all corridors. Most recently, in Easter 2014, we opened another small, purpose built block housing three new Science labs and a new specialist Textiles classroom. The Community aspect of the school has grown with facilities which include floodlit multi purpose games pitches and a changing room block. One development of particular interest to staff is that we expanded and renovated the staffroom to create more comfortable and welcoming facilities for all who work here.

The School benefits from a very committed and forward-looking Governing Body, and Governors take a keen interest (and usually are involved) in staff appointments. Much of the work of the Governing Body is done in its three Committees, and staff and students are often invited to meetings to make their views known.

In conclusion, Whitley Bay High School has an outstanding reputation both in the North East and nationally. The school prides itself on positive relationships and its relaxed but purposeful atmosphere. It is in the middle of exciting and extensive continuing development, and new appointments will have an important part to play in this.