

Whitley Bay High School

Whitley Bay High School is a mixed 13-18 comprehensive school. The school has grown considerably in size over the last decade, and is heavily oversubscribed each year. Currently the roll is 1596, with 535 in the Sixth Form. There are 167 members of staff, 108 teaching and 59 support staff.

The school buildings were first opened in 1962 and a much needed programme of renovation of the site has been progressing over the last few years. 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. Within the last two years 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. Increased Adult and Community activities also take place in this new building and the Community aspect of the school has grown substantially with new appointments and facilities which include floodlit multi purpose games pitches and a new changing room block. One development of particular interest to staff is that we expanded and renovated the staffroom recently to create more comfortable and welcoming facilities for all who work here. The school is identified in North Tyneside's Building Schools for the Future bid to receive £24 million rebuild/refurbishment.

The school underwent a two day Ofsted Inspection in November 2006. The Report can be read on the Ofsted website and I hope you will look at it. We were generally very pleased with the outcomes and staff rose to the challenge in fantastic fashion. Important as the Report is, we were also very pleased to see our own self evaluation endorsed, as we remain suitably self critical and set our own challenging agenda for change rather than jumping on every new bandwagon that comes over the horizon.

Two key milestones in the school's recent development have been 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 comes 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. The first year of the status has been a resounding success.

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 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 is already developing our practice still further.

A key characteristic of this school is its emphasis on staff induction and professional development. In-house training is very popular and is a real strength according to evaluations. So popular was the voluntary CPD lunchtime programme that we decided to make it an entitlement for all staff, support as well as teaching. We now have an hour's dedicated in-house CPD every Tuesday when students finish early. Once a month this is collaborative training with the staff of Monkseaton High School and St. Thomas More, North Shields. In addition we frequently lead CPD work for the Local Authority. This training gives many colleagues the opportunity to lead as well as participate in CPD. Many staff have led sessions recently based on Kagan structures or influenced by Mike Hughes who works with us regularly. 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 has been endorsed by the award of Investors in People.

/PTO

Examination performance is consistently very good by all measures; last summer's results exemplified this:

- At GCSE 77% of the cohort gained 5 A*-C and 99% 5A*-G
- At A2 the average points score per student was 334
- We have a small but steadily increasing number of GNVQ/AVCE students at both Advanced and Intermediate Levels and they have had similarly high levels of success.

These results are reflected in the destinations of sixth formers – every year over 150 students go on to degree courses in Higher Education. The size and success of our Sixth Form is one of the distinguishing features of the school.

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 31 AS/A2 Level subjects and a national certificate in Business. In addition 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 Leisure Studies. However, currently we have no plans to embark on the new diplomas. We have the student base to allow us to maintain both breadth and choice. Sixth Form students have access to both Critical Thinking and a wide ranging Enrichment programme in Years 12 and 13. Increasing numbers are joining from other local 11-16 schools and we are a major player in the local 14-19 Partnership.

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 20 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 through transitions and problems.

The school is involved in two strands of the 'Excellence in Cities' programme: Gifted and Talented Provision and the Learning Mentor strand. These are integrated into our whole school Raising Achievement Strategy which concentrates on improving the quality of teaching and learning and support for all our students. We have also benefited greatly by the significant increase in support staff (which anticipated the National Workforce Remodelling programme) and students work with a rich and diverse range of adults.

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 (7.30) clubs, to after school clubs, matches and national competitions. Music, Drama and Art thrive, recent productions include 'West Side Story', 'Blood Wedding' and 'Calamity Jane' as well as many smaller scale productions in the Drama Studio. There are frequent concerts involving choir, wind band, strings groups and contemporary bands with a strong tradition of Rock Nights. Educational visits and foreign trips are numerous, and clubs and societies abound, reflecting the wide ranging interests of staff and students. Staff give generously of their time and anyone joining the staff will want to contribute to the wider life of the school, which is at the heart of the good relationships referred to earlier.

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.