

Willenhall E-ACT Academy

Furzebank Way, Willenhall, West Midlands WV12 4BD

Inspection dates

19–20 March 2019

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders have started to reverse the decline in standards identified at the previous inspection. Recent improvements are building on a low starting point. Progress and attainment by the end of Year 11 remain below national averages.
- Middle leaders have not yet tackled variations in the effectiveness of teaching successfully. As a result, pupils' progress varies too much between different subjects.
- Teachers do not consistently ensure that pupils are fully involved in their learning or take into account their knowledge and understanding. As a result, some pupils are not benefiting from improvements in teaching as well as they might and sometimes learning is disturbed by low-level disruption.
- Too many pupils are persistently absent, despite marked improvements in attendance since the last inspection.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders evaluate accurately the school's strengths and weaknesses. They plan appropriate strategies to secure improvement.
- Pupils are safe in school. Leaders have put in place wide-ranging and effective measures to ensure that pupils are properly safeguarded.
- Pupils currently at the school, particularly younger pupils, are making better progress because leaders are improving teaching, learning and assessment.
- Leaders have changed the school's curriculum, benefiting younger pupils the most.
- Pupils' conduct has improved noticeably since the last inspection. There are strong, positive relationships between pupils and adults, and among pupils. Pupils are rightly proud to be part of this school community.
- The impact of strategies to support disadvantaged pupils currently at the school is increasingly effective. Previous differences between the attendance, behaviour and progress of disadvantaged pupils and their peers are diminishing quickly.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make sure leaders', and in particular middle leaders', actions tackle variations in subject performance effectively.
- Ensure teaching is consistently good across the school, by:
 - sharing the high standards and better practice evident in teaching and learning in some parts of the school
 - making sure that teachers take into account pupils' knowledge and understanding when planning next steps in learning
 - promoting pupils' active participation in lessons and encouraging pupils to take responsibility for their own learning, thus removing opportunities for low-level disruption.
- Build on the positive relationships that have been established in the school by further improving pupils' attendance and reducing the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school, particularly through engagement with parents and carers.
- Continue to increase the proportion of pupils who make good progress, and raise attainment by the end of Year 11.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders have addressed the decline in standards reported at the time of the last inspection. Concerns around pupils' safety and behaviour were tackled swiftly. However, pupils' outcomes at the end of Year 11 declined further in summer 2017. Outcomes have now started to improve from this low base, although the impact of teaching remains variable.
- Leadership at all levels has strengthened since the last inspection. Middle leaders are now involved in routinely monitoring the impact of teaching in their subject areas and are better held to account. Despite these improvements, differences in the effectiveness of teaching and learning persist. This contributes towards variation in the quality of teaching and outcomes.
- Leaders' actions to track work to support disadvantaged pupils are more robust than at the time of the previous inspection. Leaders know that some of the actions taken last year were not effective in addressing differences in attendance, behaviour or outcomes between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. Disadvantaged pupils currently at the school now benefit from better strategies, including a greater focus on supporting them in class.
- The high mobility of staff at the time of the last inspection has been addressed to some extent. Pupils value the continuity of staff. Pupils feel that this has contributed greatly to improvements in behaviour, but they are still concerned about the number of different teachers they have.
- Leaders have introduced changes to the school's curriculum since the last inspection. These changes have benefited younger pupils the most. Year 11 pupils are still following a curriculum based on some poor previous decisions. As a result, the proportion of Year 11 pupils who are entered for GCSE subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate remains very low. More personalised, appropriate curriculum pathways, such as the nurture curriculum for some Year 7 pupils, now exist to support pupils' achievement. The curriculum is starting to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education more cohesively through a broader range of opportunities than it did before.
- Leaders use the Year 7 catch-up premium well to support pupils who enter the school with weak skills in literacy or numeracy. Support to help these pupils with their reading is working especially well and is helping them to catch up with other pupils at the school. Support in numeracy has recently started to have a similar impact.
- Leaders responsible for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have been well supported by the trust that sponsors the school. The individual support plans that teachers use contain better targets and strategies to help pupils learn. Previous poor rates of attendance and outcomes of pupils with SEND have been addressed and there are no longer any differences between these pupils and other pupils at the school. Leadership responsibility for this area of the school is changing following recent changes in senior leadership roles.
- Leaders have recently introduced a programme of careers information, advice and

guidance into the school. They check that this provision meets the government's benchmarks. It is too early to evaluate the impact of this programme on pupils' destinations.

- Leaders respond promptly to any concerns parents raise. Such issues are investigated carefully and thoroughly. Leaders contact parents to share findings as appropriate. The trust checks that school leaders have taken appropriate actions, should parents remain concerned.
- Leaders have introduced a range of systems and approaches to collect valuable information about different aspects of the school's work. This information is used well to identify areas that require further improvement. Leaders are realistic about the impact of the different strategies they implement and are ready to try alternatives if an approach has limited effect.
- Staff say that they value the training and professional development that they receive. They feel that this helps them improve their teaching, and their understanding of other aspects of their responsibilities, including to safeguard pupils. Leaders are establishing opportunities to develop future teachers and leaders at the school.

Governance of the school

- E-ACT, the multi-academy trust that sponsors the school, is responsible for its governance. The trust is well informed about the work of the school through a regular, reliable and rigorous accountability system called the raising achievement board (RAB). The trust successfully identifies strategic priorities and plans actions. These have helped the school improve since the last inspection.
- Members of the RAB have specific areas of responsibility. For example, one member of the RAB takes a lead on how the school safeguards its pupils and checks that the school's procedures and approaches are effective. This ensures that appropriate leaders are held accountable for the impact of their actions.
- The RAB evaluates the impact of the additional funding the school receives. As a result, this funding is targeted at strategies appropriate to support disadvantaged pupils, pupils with SEND and pupils who start Year 7 with low levels of literacy and numeracy.
- The trust welcomes representation from the local authority in which the school is located in the RAB process. This has strengthened communication between the school and local services, which it accesses to support pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have ensured that a vigilant culture of safeguarding exists within the school. Pupils say that they feel safe, and that the staff at the school care about them. Staff say that pupils are safe and their welfare is addressed well.
- Leaders ensure that staff are appropriately trained in their responsibilities to keep pupils safe. The impact of this training is checked and revisited regularly to maintain a high profile on safeguarding.

- Comprehensive and detailed records are kept about pupils who are at risk. Staff use these to check subsequent actions, and to evaluate their impact.
- Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe and well in a range of situations. These opportunities are enriched by using external organisations to highlight key messages, when appropriate. Leaders shape this aspect of the curriculum to reflect issues relevant to pupils and to the local community.
- Leaders check the safety of pupils who attend alternative provision.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved since the last inspection, but remains variable, particularly between subjects. Different groups of pupils now benefit more consistently from teaching than in the past. Senior leaders identify accurately the most effective teaching at the school and where improvement is required.
- Teachers generally assess how well pupils are doing, and so can move learning forward. However, some teachers continue to decide when pupils are ready to move on based on the work they have completed, rather than how successfully tasks have improved pupils' knowledge or understanding.
- Sometimes, teachers do not act sufficiently promptly to re-engage pupils who are reluctant to participate in activities or who are slow to engage with their learning. On other occasions, teachers offer support and solutions to pupils too quickly when they encounter problems with their learning. This reduces opportunities for pupils to find their own solutions. Some teachers do not use the positive relationships that exist to effectively tackle low-level disruption, which interrupts pupils' learning.
- Pupils who start the school with low levels of literacy and numeracy are supported well. Many make rapid improvements and catch up with their peers, particularly in literacy. However, pupils' literacy levels are not consistently taken into account by teachers when selecting texts for pupils to use, which can limit how well texts are used to support learning.
- Pupils say that they value their learning and that their teachers care about how well they do. Older pupils are pleased that they now have more permanent teachers than they did before the last inspection. They are still concerned about lessons in subjects where they have different teachers too frequently.
- Positive relationships exist between adults and pupils in class. This contributes positively to the learning environment. Pupils can work well together, supporting each other's learning, and valuing the contribution their peers make to learning. Pupils benefit from this because their interest in learning is sustained.
- Teachers often focus on appropriate subject-specific and technical vocabulary. They use these terms, and insist pupils use them correctly. This helps pupils to be able to respond to their work with confidence, particularly when discussing what they know about a subject.
- Leaders make sure that teachers have detailed information about pupils' specific learning needs. Teachers' use of this information is improving. For example,

information in individual support plans for pupils with SEND increasingly contains strategies to support pupils to make progress. Pupils with SEND make better progress now because their teachers take these strategies into account.

- Teachers know which of their pupils start learning with different levels of prior attainment. Activities are increasingly planned to match pupils' starting points. As a result, historical differences in the progress made by pupils with different prior attainment have diminished.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement. There have been many recent positive actions to improve this aspect of the school's provision. These are still developing and are not yet fully embedded into the school.
- Teachers do not consistently identify when pupils are less involved in their learning or take swift enough action to address this. Some adults help pupils out rather than assisting them to find their own solutions with learning problems they encounter. As a result, opportunities for pupils to understand how to become successful learners are reduced.
- The school has recently developed and implemented a formal programme of personal, social and health education. Leaders are starting to identify where there are opportunities to systematically promote British values. The school has a well-established programme to ensure that pupils learn about ways to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations. This programme successfully educates pupils about maintaining a safe and healthy lifestyle through assemblies and the tutorial programme. Topics include extremism, mental health and knife crime. These sessions are enriched by outside speakers, where appropriate.
- Leaders ensure that activities introduced to enrich pupils' experiences at the school consider the needs of pupils, for example, how trips to universities may raise pupils' interest in continuing their education. Leaders are still at the early stages of collecting evidence to formally evaluate the impact of this approach.
- The school continues to increase the number of opportunities for pupils to benefit from contributing to the school community, for example through the school council. These opportunities help to develop pupils' sense of responsibility. For example, mental health ambassadors have been trained to support fellow pupils.
- Pupils say that they feel safe and secure at school. They know that there are adults they could talk to if they have any concerns about their welfare. There is an open culture in the school that contributes to creating a safe environment for pupils.
- Pupils say that the amount of bullying at the school has reduced since the last inspection. They are now confident in how staff tackle it.
- The personal development and welfare of the small number of pupils who attend alternative provision are regularly checked by leaders. Leaders ensure that these pupils'

needs are being met.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Leaders have established robust procedures to check pupils' attendance, for example by checking promptly on the whereabouts of pupils if they are not in school. These actions have led to strong improvements in overall rates of attendance since the last inspection. Overall attendance is now closer to the national average than at the time of the last inspection. However, improvements are not benefiting all groups of pupils evenly. For example, although the attendance of disadvantaged pupils continues to rise, a higher proportion of these pupils than other pupils are persistently absent from school.
- When pupils' attendance gives staff cause for concern, support appropriate to particular circumstances is offered. This has benefited many pupils and led to increased rates of attendance. Leaders take more robust action if attendance does not improve. They would prefer to work in partnership with parents to improve attendance, but this is not always possible if parents are reluctant to engage with the school.
- Pupils say that behaviour has improved since the last inspection. They are pleased that staff usually apply the school's behaviour policy fairly and consistently, but are aware of when this is not the case. Younger pupils are particularly motivated by the rewards and incentives they receive for positive conduct and successful learning.
- The proportion of pupils who are excluded from the school remains above the national average, but has decreased markedly since the last inspection. Older pupils who are at risk of being permanently excluded are given the opportunity to attend the Innovation Centre. This provides a supportive learning environment that maintains pupils in education well.
- Staff at the school note that behaviour has improved. They are not complacent and continue to work hard to improve behaviour further. The number of incidents when pupils infringe the school's expectations for conduct is higher than leaders would like, but has decreased markedly since the last inspection.
- Pupils' conduct when moving around the school, and at social times, is positive. They are polite and usually follow the instructions of supervising adults promptly. Pupils have pride in their school, and themselves. For example, they wear their uniforms smartly, and make sure that the school is relatively free from litter. Pupils are polite to visitors and greet them pleasantly.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Actions taken to reverse the decline in pupils' outcomes following the last inspection in March 2017 had limited impact initially. In summer 2017, results declined further, but this decline was reversed in summer 2018. Improvements in progress and attainment continue for pupils currently at the school.
- Pupils' rates of progress and attainment by the end of Year 11 remained well below those of other pupils nationally despite improvements last year. For example, overall

progress was two thirds of a grade lower than the national average.

- Improvements in pupils' outcomes in different subjects by the end of Year 11 have been uneven. The strongest gains in 2018 were in the English and mathematics elements of the government's performance indicators. Leaders have now widened the scope of interventions to a greater range of subjects. Although these differences persist for pupils in key stage 4, they are diminishing as a result of these actions.
- Only about 40% of Year 11 pupils in 2018 achieved a strong pass in both GCSE English and mathematics. Although this was below the national average, it was more than double the proportion of pupils achieving this in 2017. Currently, there are further improvements in attainment in English. Recent alterations to groupings of Year 11 pupils are designed to ensure the same in mathematics.
- In the past, pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils have performed less well than other groups of pupils at the school. Actions taken to improve outcomes were less effective for these groups of pupils in 2018 than for other pupils. For example, in 2018, disadvantaged pupils made on average half a grade less progress than other pupils at the school. Recent actions have been more effective, and differences in progress for these groups of pupils and their peers have been reduced. Leaders' analysis of current pupils' attainment indicates that these differences have almost disappeared for younger pupils in English and mathematics.
- Pupils with higher levels of prior attainment have performed less well than similar pupils nationally. Although this difference persisted in 2018, recent work targeted at these pupils has been successful. Leaders' analysis of current pupils' performance indicates that high-prior-attaining pupils are now improving.
- Pupils who attend the school's Innovation Centre benefit from this provision. They follow a curriculum that improves their engagement with learning and helps prepare them well for the next steps of their education.
- The small number of pupils who attend alternative provision follow a curriculum that is suitable to their specific learning needs and enables them to make progress.

School details

Unique reference number	137706
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10056425

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	810
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Michael Wemms
Headteacher	Jenn Wilmitt
Telephone number	01902 368221
Website	www.willenhalle-actacademy.org.uk
Email address	postbox@willenhalle-actacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	7–8 March 2017

Information about this school

- The new headteacher, who has been the acting headteacher since January 2019, was formally appointed to the substantive role in March 2019. A national senior adviser from the trust that sponsors the school had previously taken on the responsibilities of the headteacher in autumn 2018 during a period of absence of the former headteacher.
- The number of pupils on the roll of the school has fallen since the last inspection. This is because there have been fewer pupils joining the school in Year 7. A higher than average proportion of pupils are admitted to the school, or leave, other than at the start of the year.
- Over half the pupils are supported by the pupil premium. This is much higher than the national average.
- An average proportion of pupils with SEND have an education, health and care plan. An

above-average proportion of pupils with SEND are supported by the school.

- The proportion of pupils who enter the school with expected levels of prior attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is lower than the national average.
- There are pupils at the school from a wide range of different minority ethnic heritages. Three quarters of the pupils are of White British background.
- The school operates an Innovation Centre for a small number of pupils in Years 9, 10 and 11 who are at risk of permanent exclusion.
- A very small number of the school's pupils attend full-time alternative provision at Shepwell Short Stay School in Walsall.
- The school has not admitted students into its sixth-form provision since the previous inspection. There are currently no students following 16 to 19 study programmes.
- E-ACT is the multi-academy trust that sponsors the school. The school is governed by E-ACT's board of trustees. A regional team holds the school to account through meetings of the raising achievement board. The school receives additional support from the trust. For example, systems leaders regularly visit the school to provide support on specific priorities.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in 36 lessons; some of these observations were carried out with members of the school’s senior leadership team. Lessons visited covered a wide range of subjects and year groups. Inspectors observed three tutorial sessions. At a recent monitoring inspection, a visit was made to the school’s Innovation Centre. Pupils’ work was reviewed during visits to lessons and pupils also spoke to inspectors about their experiences at school.
- Pupils’ behaviour in lessons and at social times was observed by inspectors.
- Inspectors held meetings with a number of senior and middle leaders and with members of the trust that sponsors the school. A telephone call was held with a representative of Walsall local authority.
- Inspectors evaluated the responses from pupils, parents and staff to the school’s own questionnaires. Inspectors also took account of the views of members of staff through a formal meeting and discussions at other times.
- Inspectors evaluated a range of documents, including: the school’s self-evaluation and improvement plans; minutes of meetings; school policies; and school information about outcomes, teaching and behaviour.

Inspection team

Rob Hackfath, lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Mark Sims	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Bianka Zemke	Her Majesty’s Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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