

Inspection of a good school: Westlands Academy

Eltham Crescent, Stockton-on-Tees, TS17 9RA

Inspection dates:

23 and 24 November 2021

Outcome

Westlands Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders and teachers provide pupils with a very orderly and safe environment in which to learn. They have high expectations of pupils. For example, teachers expect pupils to try hard in class. They use a range of approaches to assist pupils in attending to their studies. Pupils start the day on a positive note because senior leaders meet and greet them. At the end of the day, staff and leaders check on each pupil's well-being.

Staff teach pupils how to act and speak kindly. This has led to a reduction in incidents of bullying. Parents and carers speak very highly of the care and support provided by the school. One parent praised this aspect saying, 'Westlands Academy is a fantastic school. My son has made massive improvement socially and emotionally. The staff are very supportive to me and my family.'

If pupils struggle to behave when in class, staff are on hand to assist them in managing their behaviour. Staff take time to explain to pupils why their classwork is important. Pupils show interest in what they are learning by asking teachers questions about the curriculum subject. In some classes, pupils do not read enough written material that introduces them to important subject-specific ideas.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders, including multi-academy trust (MAT) leaders, ensure that the school runs smoothly. The tight structures they have introduced help pupils to settle into their work well. Senior leaders, guided by the executive principal, have also improved the curriculum. This includes broadening the range of subjects available in key stage 4. Pupils mostly fulfil their potential in the subjects they take. The number of pupils in sustained employment, training or education has risen over the last three years.

Subject leaders, supported by senior leaders, have developed the curriculum well in the subjects that they manage. Curriculum plans identify the most important knowledge within each subject that pupils need to master in order to move on. Teaching methods

enable pupils to acquire this knowledge well. For example, in science, the curriculum and teaching enable pupils to gain key knowledge about particles. This provides pupils with the foundational knowledge that they need to grasp more complex scientific concepts later on.

Generally, teaching methods meet pupils' needs well. Teachers promote the school's core aims; safety, health, attendance, progress, and employability. For example, in physical education pupils learn about how to use equipment safely. However, leaders have not thought carefully enough about developing pupils' reading in subjects across the curriculum. For example, in some subjects pupils do not undertake enough subject-related reading. This means their knowledge of subject-specific vocabulary, as well as their knowledge of wider vocabulary, is underdeveloped.

Leaders have thought carefully about the procedures that are most important for a calm atmosphere. Staff work well together to ensure that pupils follow agreed rules. For example, pupils willingly hand in their mobile telephones to staff at the start of the day. When reminding pupils of the rules staff adopt a consistent, yet caring, approach. During lesson times, staff are on hand to work individually with pupils who are struggling to manage their own behaviour. This means that disruption to others' learning is minimal.

Pupils benefit from the range of vocational subjects offered in key stage 4. Being able to choose qualifications linked to their next steps motivates pupils. Leaders work closely with local training providers to source appropriate courses. Leaders keep a very close eye on individual pupils who attend alternative provision. For example, they check their attendance and how engaged they are in learning. However, leaders have not reviewed their overall use of alternative provision. They have not evaluated whether or not attending these settings is having the intended impact on pupils' development and learning.

A wide range of additional curricular activities take place on Friday afternoons, before the end of the school day. This is so that all pupils can participate in them. Activities enable pupils to develop their interests in sport, art, and technology. Leaders promote the government's 'relationships and sex education' programme well.

MAT leaders have supported senior leaders in their methodical approach to improvements. They have made sure that time scales for improvements are realistic and enable staff to do a thorough job. Staff say that they feel well supported and that leaders consider their workload and well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Serious local safeguarding issues, such as child criminal exploitation and county lines, affect some pupils. The designated safeguarding leader and the executive principal follow multiple avenues to protect pupils who are vulnerable to being criminalised. For example, they work closely with police officers and the youth offending team. They record all the actions they take in detail. Leaders review these records, checking that no stone is left unturned in protecting pupils.

Recently, leaders have developed the way they work with parents. Trained staff discuss safeguarding issues with families and provide advice.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Reading in subjects is not well enough developed. The curriculum in many subjects does not place enough emphasis on ensuring that pupils read and understand subject-related texts. As a result, some pupils' subject knowledge and vocabulary are not well enough developed. Senior leaders need to establish whole school expectations relating to reading in subjects. Subject leaders need to ensure that they include carefully chosen subject-specific texts in the curriculum. Subject leaders also need to make sure that pupils are taught the subject-related vocabulary they need to understand these texts.
- The school uses a range of alternative provision so pupils can access courses that will assist with their next steps. Leaders have not checked how well the alternative provision they use is working. This means that leaders do not have an overall picture of how alternative provision is impacting on these pupils' learning and development. Leaders now need to evaluate the impact of the alternative provision to ensure that it is fully meeting pupils' needs and is suitably ambitious.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour, or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good on 6–7 December 2016.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	141385
Local authority	Stockton-on-Tees
Inspection number	10206818
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	84
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	David Walker
Executive Principal/Teacher in charge	David Penny
Website	https://westlands.horizonstrust.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	6 – 7 December 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Westlands is an average-sized special academy for pupils with social, emotional, and mental health difficulties. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health, and care plan.
- Westlands is part of the Horizons Specialist Academy Trust.
- There are many more boys than girls in all classes and in all year groups.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is well above average.
- Educ8, Evolve, Redcar Training Centre, Martin Gray Football Academy, Outdoor Ambitions, Actions Training, and Right Trax are used to provide alternative provision for key stage 4 pupils.
- Three pupils access home tutoring supplied by the school full time. Three pupils are tutored at home on a part-time basis.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation
- Inspectors met with the executive principal and senior leaders, the chief executive officer of the trust. Online meetings were held with the chair of the trust and two other trustees, and three members of the academy council, including the chair.
- Inspectors spoke with two groups of pupils and chatted informally with pupils at break times. The lead inspector also listened to pupils read.
- The lead inspector made a telephone call to the designated officer for the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in physical education, mathematics, food technology, computing, and science. For each deep dive, the inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors reviewed documentation relating to the school's curriculum, along with the school's own evaluation and its development plans. Inspectors also sampled education and health care plans for two pupils as well as internal plans detailing the individual support for the pupils.
- Inspectors reviewed responses to Ofsted's staff survey, Ofsted's parent survey Parent View and comments made on free-text by parents.

Inspection team

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