

Inspection of a good school: Walton Hall Academy

Stafford Road, Eccleshall, Stafford, Staffordshire ST21 6JR

Inspection dates:

5 and 6 July 2022

Outcome

Walton Hall Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy attending Walton Hall. They feel safe because they know that staff care about them. Strong, respectful relationships between pupils and adults are evident throughout the school. Pupils trust staff and know that they will help them if they are worried about anything. Staff provide excellent care and support. They deal with issues, such as bullying, very effectively.

Staff are committed to helping pupils achieve as well as they can. Expectations are high and continue to rise. The curriculum is well planned and adapted for each of the school's three pathways, seekers, explorers and navigators. Staff know pupils' needs and make sure that they take these into account when planning activities. Pupils behave well, enjoy learning and make good progress as a result.

Preparing pupils for their next steps is a top priority for the school. The 'preparation for adulthood' (PFA) programme plays a key role in this. It includes personal, social and health education (PSHE), independence and careers education. Each of these three strands is carefully planned with clear objectives in mind. Pupils grow in confidence and independence as a result. They are well prepared for the transition to their next stage in learning.

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

The school is led well. The principal provides clear strategic leadership focused on further improving the school. She is ably supported by other leaders, staff from the trust and members of the academy council. As a result, the school has improved over recent years. Staff recognise this. They share the principal's vision and they appreciate the support that leaders provide, for example in ensuring their workload is manageable.

The school operates three curriculum pathways, navigators, explorers and seekers. Each pathway operates for eight years, from Year 7 through to Year 14. Navigators follow a broad curriculum, taught largely in subject sets. Explorers follow a similar curriculum, but

mostly taught by their class teacher. Seekers, who have more complex needs, follow a highly individualised topic-based curriculum. Each pathway is planned and sequenced well. Expectations are high. For example, navigators work towards GCSE and entry-level qualifications at the end of Year 11 and Year 14. Explorers work towards elements of these qualifications. For seekers, the curriculum focuses on helping them become as independent and active as possible.

Warm, caring relationships characterise the school. Staff want the very best for their pupils. They provide excellent pastoral care. Pupils trust their teachers and other staff. These positive relationships combined with the engaging curriculum mean that pupils enjoy learning. They look forward to coming to school and behave well. Inspectors visited the school's sports day. It was an afternoon full of fun and laughter.

The school uses assessment well. All pupils have education, health and care (EHC) plans. Staff produce individual learning plans (ILP) for all pupils. ILPs draw upon the outcomes within EHC plans and the school's own assessment information. They are clear and helpful. Pupils' needs are identified accurately, and staff use this information skilfully to teach the curriculum.

The curriculum within individual subjects is planned well. For example, the mathematics curriculum is well planned and adapted to meet pupils' needs. Staff have good subject knowledge, and they explain new content well. Pupils enjoy mathematics and make good progress.

Leaders have rightly identified improving the teaching of reading as their highest priority. Pupils are taught to read, and many become proficient readers. However, some staff lack sufficient expertise in teaching pupils how to read. For example, the teaching of phonics lacks precision at times. Consequently, some pupils do not learn to read as effectively or as quickly as they could.

The school's PFA curriculum is highly effective. Each of its three strands, PSHE, independence and careers, plays an important part in preparing pupils for adult life. Each is carefully adapted to meet pupils' needs and staff deliver it skilfully. It is complemented by the vocational curriculum where pupils choose from a range of vocational options and specialise as they move towards the sixth form.

The PSHE programme is comprehensive. Pupils learn about healthy relationships and how to keep themselves safe, for example when using social media. In independence lessons, pupils learn about how to use public transport. They visit supermarkets and learn how to find healthy foods, asking staff for assistance when they need it.

The careers education programme prepares pupils to play an active part in society. For some pupils, this means securing full-time or part-time paid employment. For others, it means being as active and independent as they can. Sixth-formers complete work placements. All students take part in the National Citizen Service during Year 12.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of keeping pupils safe throughout the school. Staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities because leaders have trained them effectively. Staff know the signs that their pupils might need extra support. They pass concerns on to leaders who deal with them appropriately. The school has good relationships with external agencies and leaders make appropriate use of these.

Pupils are safe and well cared for in school. The site is secure. Pupils know who to go to if they need help. Staff know pupils and their families well. Leaders ensure that pupils get the support they need in a timely manner.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some staff lack sufficient expertise in teaching reading. Teaching sometimes lacks precision and consequently, pupils do not learn to read as quickly or effectively as they could. Leaders should focus on improving staff's expertise in teaching pupils how to read.

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 14 and 15 March 2017.

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	140997
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10227197
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	186
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	47
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Andrew Meehan
Principal	Julie Wood
Website	www.waltonhallacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	14 and 15 March 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Walton Hall is a special school for secondary aged and post-16 pupils who have moderate, severe or complex learning difficulties and autism.
- The school is part of the Shaw Educational Trust (SET).
- The principal took up her post on 1 September 2020, having previously been the school's vice principal.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the principal, other senior leaders and three members of the academy council, including its chair. They spoke to a representative of the Shaw Educational Trust .
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: science, mathematics, and PFA. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited some lessons, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also scrutinised the curriculum in other subjects including reading and English.
- Inspectors considered safeguarding by meeting with the principal, who is also the designated safeguarding lead, and members of the safeguarding team. They scrutinised policies and records relating to child protection and examined the safeguarding checks made on staff before they join the school.
- Inspectors considered the responses from staff to a survey carried out by the school. They met with two groups of staff.
- Inspectors spoke informally with pupils at breaktime and lunchtime. They observed the school at these times.
- Inspectors visited the school's sports day.
- Inspectors considered the responses, including written responses, to Parent View, Ofsted's online inspection questionnaire.

Inspection team

Alun Williams, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Alexander Laney

Her Majesty's Inspector

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