

Inspection of Waterhead Academy

Huddersfield Road, Oldham, Greater Manchester OL4 3NY

Inspection dates: 18 and 19 October 2022

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Inadequate

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are not getting a good deal at Waterhead Academy. While many pupils behave well in lessons, the poor behaviour of a significant number of pupils is accepted as the norm by staff and leaders. For example, pupils' behaviour on corridors, outside at breaktimes and at lunchtimes is unruly. Pupils' learning is often disrupted because of noisy corridors and pupils' lateness to lessons. Staff and pupils lack any confidence in leaders' ability to improve pupils' behaviour.

Pupils are sometimes exposed to foul and abusive language, as well as name-calling. Occasionally, pupils also experience homophobic and racist language. Some pupils told inspectors that they have come to accept that this type of behaviour is their daily experience of school life. Many pupils said that they are 'fed up' with the situation.

Overall, pupils said that they feel safe. However, many stated that they are unhappy at school. A few pupils said that bullying is commonplace. They explained that when incidents are reported, staff attempt to deal with them. However, staff's efforts are not always as successful as they could be.

Many pupils truant from lessons or choose to enter classrooms late. This happens frequently because leaders and staff do not do enough to challenge pupils when they choose to truant from lessons. If staff do challenge pupils about their absence from lessons, they are either ignored or subjected to pupils' disrespectful comments.

In recent years, leaders have not acted quickly enough to improve the quality of education that pupils receive. Leaders' expectations of what pupils can and should achieve are low. Pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

Pupils are beginning to benefit from the growing range of extra-curricular activities available to them.

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

Trustees, executive leaders and school leaders have overseen a decline in the quality of education that pupils receive at Waterhead Academy. Pupils have been failed for far too long. Their learning is fragile and they underachieve.

The curriculum is inadequate. It lacks ambition for pupils. For example, leaders have not made sure that pupils in key stage 3 have access to the full range of national curriculum subjects. Pupils are ill-prepared for the demands of key stage 4. Previously, leaders' lack of aspiration has been reflected in the low proportion of pupils choosing to follow the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects. However, this number is now increasing.

In some subjects, leaders have not given sufficient thought to the content of the curriculum. They have not identified the essential knowledge and concepts that

pupils must learn. This means that teachers do not know what curriculum content to teach to pupils. As a result, pupils do not develop a secure body of subject knowledge as they progress through the school.

The delivery of the curriculum is ineffective. In some subjects, some teachers lack sufficient subject knowledge to deliver specialist subject content with confidence. In other subjects, the work that teachers give to pupils is not as demanding as it should be and fails to build on previous learning. Too many pupils in key stages 3 and 4 are unnecessarily repeating what they have learned at primary school. Added to this, teachers' delivery of the curriculum is hampered by constant interruptions to lessons because of pupils' poor behaviour around the site. This seriously impedes how well pupils are prepared for the next stages of their education.

Teachers do not use assessment strategies to identify and remedy pupils' misconceptions effectively enough. When teachers know that pupils have missed learning because of absence or truancy, they fail to address the gaps in knowledge that these pupils have.

Many pupils lack the literacy and numeracy skills that they need to succeed in further education, employment or training when they leave the school in Year 11. As a result, pupils are not fully prepared to take their place in modern Britain. This is due to a legacy of low aspiration and ambition. In response to this, leaders have recently introduced a new initiative to support pupils' spoken communication. This is to improve pupils' literacy development. However, this approach is very new and there is currently limited evidence of impact.

More recently, leaders have begun to identify pupils who struggle to read. They are beginning to provide these pupils with appropriate additional support. Staff are using a variety of reading strategies, including the teaching of phonics, to ensure that these pupils become more confident readers. However, it is too early to see the impact of these strategies on pupils' learning and development. This is particularly the case for pupils in key stage 4.

Leaders have taken appropriate steps to identify pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The staff responsible for pupils with SEND ensure that teachers have appropriate information about these pupils. However, pupils with SEND do not achieve as well as they should because they are adversely affected by an ineffective curriculum.

Leaders have put in place effective plans for pupils' personal development. Pupils benefit from learning about healthy relationships. They are developing their understanding of harmful sexual behaviours. However, some teachers do not deliver this aspect of the curriculum consistently well. This hinders how deeply some pupils understand these issues.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Overall, the arrangements for safeguarding are effective. However, there are some weaknesses in leaders' response to how well pupils behave during social times.

Staff receive regular training and information about safeguarding. They know how to act and whom to speak to if they have a concern that a pupil may be at risk of harm. Leaders and staff act upon any concerns that they have about pupils. Leaders ensure that those pupils most at risk receive timely and appropriate support.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe in the local area. For example, pupils learn about the dangers of online abuse, drugs and alcohol misuse.

Governors provide effective oversight of safeguarding policies and procedures. Leaders work well with a variety of external agencies to meet the needs of pupils. However, leaders have not done enough to ensure that all pupils attend lessons during the school day.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Trustees and executive leaders have not acted quickly enough to tackle the weaknesses in the quality of education. They lack ambition for pupils and they have not held school leaders to account. As a result, pupils, including those with SEND, have been let down and many underachieve. Those responsible for governance must provide more effective levels of challenge to leaders to secure swift improvements to the quality of education that pupils receive.
- The curriculum is inadequate. It does not develop pupils' subject knowledge effectively, including basic literacy and numeracy skills. The curriculum lacks ambition and it does not cover the breadth of the national curriculum. Overall, pupils are not well prepared for the next stages of their employment, education or training. Leaders must ensure that the curriculum is coherently designed and that it includes all the essential content to enable pupils to achieve well.
- Some adults do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve, and some teachers are lacking in subject knowledge. Added to this, pupils unnecessarily repeat work that they have completed in primary school. These issues prevent pupils from achieving well. Leaders should ensure that staff have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Furthermore, leaders must ensure that staff have the appropriate subject knowledge to deliver the curriculum.
- Teachers do not routinely use assessment information effectively enough to check that pupils' learning is secure. This prevents pupils from learning effectively. Leaders should ensure that teachers know how to use assessment strategies to check that pupils understand and remember more of the curriculum.

- Leaders' expectations of pupils' behaviour are too low. Some pupils are exposed to homophobic and racist language. Behaviour on the corridors and around the school site is unacceptable. Too many pupils truant from lessons regularly. Staff do not routinely challenge poor behaviour, because they lack confidence in the policy and practice of managing behaviour. Leaders must act with urgency to ensure that staff have the confidence and expertise to tackle poor behaviour.
- Leaders have not ensured that staff have the confidence to deliver the wider personal development curriculum as effectively as they should. This means that some pupils do not understand the impact of the derogatory language that they use or why it is inappropriate. Leaders should ensure that staff are well trained to deliver the wider personal development curriculum so that all pupils learn about the impact of their words on others.
- Having considered the evidence, we strongly recommend that leaders and those responsible for governance do not seek to appoint early career teachers.

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.

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	144508
Local authority	Oldham
Inspection number	10244611
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,358
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mick Kay
Headteacher	Darren Lyon
Website	www.waterheadacademy.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	3 and 4 April 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the South Pennine Academies Trust.
- Since the previous inspection, there have been considerable changes in staffing. New senior leaders have been appointed and the headteacher took up his post in July 2020.
- Leaders make use of three registered alternative providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause. This means that pupils in Years 8 to 13 receive information about the full range of education options available to them. This includes opportunities for a range of education and training providers to speak to pupils about technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

- 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 headteacher and other senior leaders. They also met with the new chief executive officer and the director of standards for the multi-academy trust. Inspectors spoke with the chair of the governing body, subject leaders and groups of staff and pupils.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in mathematics, history, science, English, physical education, and art and design. In these subjects, inspectors held meetings with subject leaders, visited lessons, reviewed pupils' work and held discussions with teachers and pupils.
- Inspectors held meetings with the leaders responsible for safeguarding. They also scrutinised leaders' safeguarding records, including the pre-employment checks on staff. Inspectors evaluated leaders' procedures for keeping pupils safe.
- Inspectors spoke to a range of staff about their well-being and workload. They considered the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff.
- Inspectors spoke to a range of pupils from different year groups. They considered the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for pupils.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments.

Inspection team

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