

Inspection of Willenhall E-ACT Academy

Furzebank Way, Willenhall, West Midlands WV12 4BD

Inspection dates: 13 and 14 December 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Previous inspection grade

Requires Improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

This is an improving school. The new headteacher has brought stability and higher expectations. This is helping to raise standards academically and in pupils' behaviour. There are much clearer routines in place throughout the school. Both staff and pupils appreciate this.

Pupils are generally well behaved and feel safe in school. In lessons, most pupils participate positively and are keen to do well. At social times and at lesson changeover, there is a calm and orderly environment. However, when some pupils do not meet staff expectations and experience sanctions, they miss some of their learning. Bullying does occasionally happen, but staff deal with this quickly.

The curriculum offers a broad range of subjects for pupils to study. Leaders have carefully planned what topics pupils learn and when. However, there remains too much variability in how the curriculum is taught. This does not help pupils make the progress of which they are capable.

Leaders provide many opportunities to broaden pupils' personal development. There are several different extra-curricular clubs that pupils can attend, including a girls' Royal Air Force cadets club. The entire school recently participated in a remembrance service alongside members of the British Legion. Pupils have also supported the wider community with collections for a local food bank.

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

Trust leaders have an accurate view of the school. They recognise that, since the previous full inspection, the school has not progressed as quickly as it should. The new headteacher, together with other senior leaders, has begun to make changes that are having a positive impact on the school across all areas. However, the impact of some of this is still at an early stage and there is more work to do.

Leaders have put in place an ambitious curriculum. They have appropriate plans to increase the number of pupils completing the suite of subjects which form part of the English Baccalaureate. The curriculum is structured and sequenced effectively. Subject leaders have thought carefully about the order in which topics are studied and how this helps pupils build on what they know. Most subject leaders have also considered what smaller blocks of learning pupils need in order to understand more complex ideas and concepts.

Leaders have ensured that most lessons follow a similar structure. There are clear routines where 'do now' tasks at the start of lessons help pupils to recall previous learning. Teachers generally model activities well and use questioning effectively. However, in some lessons, teachers do not consistently check pupils' learning to spot errors and misconceptions quickly enough. Additionally, pupils are not given enough opportunities to practise what they know and can do. This does not help them to develop their ability to complete tasks with increasing independence and confidence.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported. There are clear processes in place to help identify pupils who may require additional support. Leaders regularly review learning plans and produce 'pupil passports' to ensure teachers know the most effective strategies to use in the classroom.

Leaders have recently introduced a new reading strategy. Pupils have been assessed on their reading age and have then been put into form groups with others of a similar ability. However, the assessments that leaders use do not precisely identify what gaps pupils have in their reading knowledge. Pupils are not given appropriate opportunities to practise and develop their reading fluency. Furthermore, interventions that are used for the weakest readers do not address the specific gaps some pupils have in their phonic knowledge sufficiently well.

Pupils are generally well behaved in lessons. They have positive relationships with their teachers and enjoy their learning. However, the number of pupils suspended from school remains high. There are also too many pupils out of the classroom spending time in the school's reflection room due to poor attitudes to school.

Leaders recognise that pupils' attendance needs to rapidly improve. They have used support from the trust and put in place a range of interventions to support key groups of pupils. This also includes rewards for positive attendance. While there are some signs that attendance is beginning to improve, absence and persistent absence remains high.

Leaders have shaped a cohesive and well-sequenced personal development curriculum. Key topics, linked to overarching themes, are revisited and deepened to ensure pupils develop an understanding of different topics in an age-appropriate way. For example, pupils learn about consent and healthy relationships through personal development lessons, assemblies and enhanced curriculum days. Leaders provide effective advice and guidance around pupils' next steps and future careers, such as through the school's recent careers fair. There are also other opportunities for pupils to engage with the world of work. Pupils speak positively about the support they are given in this area.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure all appropriate recruitment checks are carried out on staff before they begin work at the school.

Leaders have a strong understanding of the community they serve. They recognise the local risks and ensure that staff receive appropriate training and weekly briefings on emerging issues. Staff are clear about what they should do if they have a concern about a child. Leaders act swiftly to ensure that any child that needs help gets this in a timely and appropriate way.

Pupils learn to keep themselves safe through personal development lessons, form-time sessions, assemblies and curriculum days. This includes issues arising through social media and how to stay safe online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Pupils do not get enough opportunities to work independently in lessons. This means that some pupils struggle to use and apply what they learn with increasing fluency and ease. Leaders should ensure that teachers provide more opportunities for pupils to develop their independent understanding of the learning so that their confidence to apply their knowledge and understanding increases.
- Leaders are not providing enough support to pupils who struggle with their reading. Leaders do not accurately assess and pinpoint specific gaps in reading knowledge well enough or provide the precise support needed. This does not help pupils who struggle to read to catch up with their peers. Leaders should ensure that the assessment of pupils and subsequent reading intervention strategies help pupils to improve their reading skills effectively so they can successfully access the curriculum.
- Too many pupils are suspended from school or spend time in the school's reflection room. Sometimes, this is because they have a poor attitude to school. This means that a significant minority of pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND, miss out on learning in the classroom. Leaders should ensure that pupils' attitudes to school improve so that the number who are suspended or spend time out of lessons reduces.
- Too many pupils do not attend school as often as they should. This does not help them with their learning and build the skills needed for later life. Leaders should continue to take action to ensure that absence and persistent absence reduces.

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	137706
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10256927
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy special sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	907
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Lord Jim Knight
Headteacher	Sarah Murcott
Website	https://willenhallacademy.e-act.org.uk/
Date of previous inspection	26 January 2022, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher was appointed in May 2021.
- The school uses four registered alternative providers.
- The school has a registered sixth form but there were no pupils on roll at the time of this inspection.

Information about this inspection

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

- 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 focused on the following subjects: English, mathematics, science, history and art and design. Inspectors examined leaders' curriculum plans, visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and talked with pupils about the way these subjects are taught. They also looked at other subjects to check how they are planned and taught.

- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documents. These included information about behaviour, attendance, the school curriculum and improvement planning. The school website was also checked.
- Inspectors talked to staff and leaders about safeguarding arrangements. They examined how leaders make employment checks on staff and scrutinised further safeguarding records. They also asked how incidents reported by pupils are recorded and analysed.
- Inspectors observed informal times of the day to evaluate safeguarding and pupils' behaviour.
- Inspectors held a telephone call with the chair of the trust, and meetings with leaders of the trust, the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, teachers and pupils. They also talked informally to pupils and staff to gather general information about school life.
- Inspectors considered responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and free-text comments. Inspectors also considered responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Mark Howes, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Nicola Beech	His Majesty's Inspector
Tim Bassett	Ofsted Inspector
Graeme Rudland	Ofsted Inspector

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