

Inspection of a good school: Widnes Academy

Cholmondeley Street, Widnes, Cheshire WA8 0EL

Inspection dates:

21 and 22 March 2023

Outcome

Widnes Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), enjoy attending Widnes Academy. There is a strong sense of community. Parents and carers value the approachability of staff. The cheerful greetings extended by the staff each morning help pupils to feel positive and secure as soon as they arrive. Pupils get on well together and play happily with their friends at social times. They understand that everyone should be treated with respect, regardless of their differences.

Pupils said that staff are kind and caring. They are confident that if they reported any worries, staff would do their best to help them. Leaders act decisively to resolve any concerns about bullying. This helps pupils to feel safe.

Pupils understand that leaders want them to do their best. Pupils generally behave well and work hard in lessons to meet their teachers' high expectations.

Pupils appreciate the wide variety of extra-curricular activities on offer, such as circus skills, choir and dodgeball clubs. Many pupils go on regular residential visits from Year 2, which helps them to develop their independence. Pupils are eager to contribute to their school by taking on special responsibilities, such as being anti-bullying ambassadors and school councillors.

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

Leaders have designed a broad, ambitious and interesting curriculum for all pupils, including those with SEND. For each subject, leaders have identified the important content that pupils should learn from the early years to Year 6.

In most subjects, leaders have given careful consideration to the order in which important knowledge should be taught. This ensures that when teachers introduce new ideas, they build well on pupils' previous learning. However, in one or two subjects, the essential knowledge and when pupils should learn it are less clear. This hinders leaders and

teachers from checking that pupils are gaining all the knowledge they need as a foundation for their future learning.

Subject leaders have strong expertise and provide guidance and support for teachers in the effective delivery of the curriculum. In most subjects, teachers make use of their secure subject knowledge to explain new learning clearly. They use assessment strategies to check pupils' understanding and address any misconceptions promptly. As a result, pupils, including children in the early years, progress well through the curriculum in many subjects. That said, in one or two subjects, teachers' understanding of the most effective teaching approaches to deploy is not as well developed as it is in other subjects.

Leaders have placed a high importance on pupils learning to read well. Children start to learn sounds and letters as soon as they start in the reception class. All staff have received training in delivering the clearly structured phonics programme. This helps to ensure that the phonics curriculum is delivered as intended. Leaders keep a close check on pupils' progress in reading and make sure that staff provide prompt additional support for those pupils who fall behind. As a result, almost all pupils learn to read fluently and accurately by the end of Year 2.

Older pupils continue to benefit from a well-considered reading curriculum. They hone their comprehension skills by accessing a wide variety of carefully selected texts.

Staff in the early years ensure that they focus sharply on developing children's spoken language and vocabulary. Children learn to socialise well and develop their independence. They enjoy learning and achieve well. Leaders ensure that pupils' additional needs are identified early. Staff are well trained in adapting their teaching approaches to ensure that pupils with SEND access the same ambitious curriculum as their classmates.

The atmosphere in school is calm and supportive. Pupils show respect in their interactions with staff and each other. Although most pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning, from time to time, a few pupils lose focus and need reminders to listen attentively. This can lead to pupils' concentration being disturbed and occasional disruption to learning.

Leaders provide pupils with meaningful opportunities to broaden their horizons, both within the local community and beyond. Pupils learn that people have different families and backgrounds. Representatives of different faiths have visited the school to teach pupils about different world religions. This helps to prepare pupils well for life in modern Britain.

Leaders communicate and engage well within the community. Parents hold the school in high regard. Staff value the support and development opportunities they receive. They also appreciate the approachability and support of leaders, who are considerate of their workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that staff receive regular safeguarding training so that they remain alert to pupils who may be at risk. Staff understand their responsibilities for keeping children safe and follow the school's clear procedures for reporting their concerns.

Leaders act with urgency to address any concerns raised. Leaders engage constructively with a range of local agencies to access the help that vulnerable pupils and their families need.

Pupils are helped to develop their understanding of how to keep themselves safe online and in the community. For example, pupils take part in workshops about the risks of anti-social behaviour with community police officers.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a few subjects, the most important knowledge that pupils need to learn and when it should be taught is not made clear enough to teachers. At times, this can result in important knowledge being omitted, which prevents pupils from developing their understanding of some important concepts over time. Leaders should make sure that teachers are clear about the essential knowledge that pupils need for subsequent learning.
- In one or two subjects, teachers do not choose the most appropriate teaching methods to help pupils learn the curriculum as intended. This prevents some pupils from achieving as well as they could. Leaders should ensure that teachers develop their expertise and confidence in selecting the most appropriate approaches to deliver these curriculums as intended.
- A few staff do not ensure that routines and expectations of pupils' learning behaviour are established and consistently applied. This means that pupils experience occasional disruption to their learning. Leaders should ensure that all staff are supported to deal with pupils' behaviour consistently well.

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 an ungraded inspection and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good on 23 and 24 January 2018.

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	141538
Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	10268843
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	162
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of governing body	Christine Fone
Principal	Karen Highcock
Website	www.widnesacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	23 and 24 January 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school runs a breakfast club.
- The school does not currently make use of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector held discussions with the principal and other leaders. She spoke with subject leaders and other members of staff.
- The inspector spoke with two members of the local governing body, including the chair of governors. She spoke with the chief executive officer and the lead primary principal as representatives of the multi-academy trust. The inspector also spoke with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms and corridors, at breakfast club and at lunchtime. She spoke with different groups of pupils to discuss their views of the school, their learning, their behaviour and their safety.

- The inspector checked the arrangements for keeping children safe. She reviewed documentation, including information about attendance and bullying, and spoke to leaders, governors, staff and pupils.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics and physical education. For each deep dive, she discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and reviewed samples of pupils' work. The inspector observed pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- The inspector met with leaders responsible for the provision for pupils with SEND and reviewed samples of documentation relating to SEND, including pupils' support plans.
- The inspector considered parents' views, which were shared through Ofsted Parent View. This included the free-text comments received from parents. The inspector also reviewed the responses to Ofsted's survey for staff and for pupils.
- The inspector considered a range of documents provided by school leaders, including the school development plan, external reports and audits, the minutes taken at governing body meetings and leaders' self-evaluation documents.

Inspection team

Janette Walker, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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