

Inspection of Writhlington School

Knobsbury Lane, Writhlington, Radstock, Somerset BA3 3NQ

Inspection dates: 27 and 28 September 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

The headteacher of this school is Keith Howard. This school is part of the Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Alun Williams, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Tony Wells.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school has high expectations for pupils. Pupils understand these. As a result, pupils benefit from a well-rounded education. Relationships between staff and pupils are positive. Staff are vigilant and ambitious for pupils. Pupils feel happy and safe. Students appreciate the community feel of the sixth form.

Pupils learn the school values of respect, resilience, ambition, confidence, kindness and success. Pupils of all ages describe a respectful school culture. Bullying is unusual and the school is prompt to respond to acts of unkindness. Through pupil leadership groups, such as the school council and the sixth-form council, pupils and students share their views on improving the school.

Pupils enjoy the wide range of enrichment activities and clubs on offer. As many pupils travel a long distance to school, the school plans clubs considerately and makes adaptation to ensure there are opportunities for all pupils. From film club to sports clubs, many pupils participate. Pupils from Year 7 to Year 13 run the school orchid project. Pupils travel overseas, exhibit and look after a significant collection of orchids. The combined cadet force has increasing numbers of older pupils participating in training, learning first aid and camping. A music bursary supports pupils to learn a variety of musical instruments.

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

The school has embedded an ambitious and well-sequenced curriculum. Working with trust leaders and other trust schools, the school has precisely identified what pupils will learn and when. For example, in English, the curriculum breaks down what pupils learn for each technical element of poetry from Year 7 to Year 9. Pupils increase their knowledge each time they learn poetry.

A small number of subjects are in the earlier stages of implementation. The modern foreign languages curriculum, for example, is being developed. Previously, fewer pupils chose to continue studying languages in key stage 4. However, this has changed. More pupils now study the English Baccalaureate subjects. This means more pupils will have a broader range of future choices.

Teachers check what pupils understand. They use this information to help pupils secure their learning. Sometimes, this is not done effectively and so teachers do not know how well pupils recall their learning. This means, some pupils develop gaps in their knowledge.

In the sixth form, the school offers a wide range of academic and vocational subjects. As a result, many students go to university or take routes that enable them to follow their future chosen careers. The key stage 5 curriculum builds from key stage 4. Students apply knowledge they have learned before to their new learning. This supports students as they move through to the next stage of their education.

The school places reading and literacy at its core. Pupils understand the value of reading regularly and widely. Pupils read several times a week. Book choices match pupils' abilities and interests. The school is careful to identify what specific reading needs pupils have. Staff plan activities to help pupils who fall behind in reading that are specifically matched to pupils' needs. As a result, pupils can keep up with their peers.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive appropriate adaptation when they need it. Teachers have focused training to enable them to put the right support in place. The school makes sure information about pupils' needs is specific and linked with appropriate strategies. In the sixth form, pupils with SEND continue to be well-supported. Teachers quickly identify any student when they need extra help.

Pupils focus on their learning well. Pupils discuss their learning and explore their ideas. Pupils follow consistent routines. As a result, pupils benefit from a calm and structured learning environment.

Delivered by specialist teachers, the school has a well-sequenced personal, social, health education (PSHE) curriculum. The school especially focuses on teaching pupils to stay safe in the community, and to behave with respect and responsibility. External speakers and charities support the curriculum. PSHE continues in the sixth form, where students learn about employment law, finance and driving. The school ensures there is a well-planned careers programme for all pupils. Events such as visiting speakers, careers fairs and work placements support pupils to make considered choices.

The school is ambitious for pupils. Staff, parents and pupils welcome the improvements at the school. Parents recognise the positive wider experiences their children have.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school does not carefully check how well all pupils recall their learning. As a result, they do not know what some pupils remember. The school needs to ensure all teachers are equipped to check pupils' learning effectively so new learning can build securely on what pupils know.
- A minority of subject curriculums are in the early stages of being implemented. Staff knowledge of the curriculum is not fully developed in these areas. The trust and the school need to make sure staff are supported to implement and improve these areas of the curriculum.

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' is used to mean pupils with SEND; pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	137548
Local authority	Bath and North East Somerset Council
Inspection number	10256711
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	923
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	171
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Tony Wells
CEO of the Trust	Alun Williams
Headteacher	Keith Howard
Website	www.writhlington.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	14 and 15 May 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership.
- The school uses two registered alternative provisions and two unregistered alternative provisions.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

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

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, the special educational needs coordinator, subject leaders, the CEO and a trustee, the chair of the local governing body and a governor.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, science, geography, art and business studies. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also discussed the quality of curriculum in some other subjects.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documentation, including school improvement plans, self-evaluation documents, minutes of governing body meetings and records of behaviour and attendance.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record, took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils, and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils from key stages 3, 4 and 5 about their experiences of school and their views on behaviour.
- Inspectors spoke to some of the alternative providers used by the school.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments. Inspectors also viewed the responses to the pupil survey and the responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Rachel Hesketh, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Matthew Collins	Ofsted Inspector
Tom Hill	Ofsted Inspector
Simon Tong	Ofsted Inspector

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