

Inspection of a good school: Westlands School

Westlands Avenue, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 1PF

Inspection dates: 14 and 15 May 2024

Outcome

Westlands School continues to be a good school.

The headteacher of this school is Christina Honess. This school is part of Swale Academies Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Michael Wilson, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Paul Goodson.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils value the school's highly inclusive and ambitious ethos. At the heart of this are the schools 'RADAR Values'. These are used to help pupils develop positive, purposeful attitudes to learning which support them to achieve well. The school emphasises the importance of pupils being considerate and kind to others. Around the school, they reflect this through their calm and orderly conduct.

Pupils contribute positively to the school community. Through the range of different leadership roles, they help run events in school. The school council provides pupils with opportunities to discuss issues of importance to them, alongside contributing their ideas about changes to the school. Pupils know they can share any worries with staff in their 'communities'. They are confident they will be listened to and they value the support given by pastoral staff.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular experiences. They proudly talk about participating in activities, such as school productions or helping to look after animals on the school farm. Parents and carers value how these opportunities help to prepare pupils for the future. One parent captured the views of many, saying, 'The school supports pupils to believe in themselves and raises their aspirations.'

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

The school has an ambitious and broad curriculum. Across the curriculum, careful consideration is given to arranging the key knowledge that pupils need to learn. This helps them to make connections between important ideas. They are supported to remember these through the deliberate revisiting of earlier learning across subjects.

Pupils benefit from the breadth of academic and vocational courses offered in key stage 4 and the sixth form. However, the school recognises that the number of pupils pursuing the English Baccalaureate at key stage 4 is too low. The school has been carefully promoting the value of learning modern foreign languages, and the number of pupils taking this set of qualifications is rapidly increasing.

Teachers confidently introduce new learning. Across subjects, they use demonstrations to support explanations of new knowledge effectively. Teachers consistently check pupils' understanding through a variety of approaches, including using questioning. However, in some lessons, this does not pick up when pupils have inaccurate knowledge. As a result, in these lessons, some pupils continue to have insecure understanding. Teachers make effective use of end-of-topic assessment outcomes to reteach areas where pupils have knowledge gaps. Staff use strategies detailed in 'pupil passports' to appropriately adapt learning activities for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This supports all pupils with SEND, including those with more complex needs, to learn well.

Reading is woven through the curriculum. Pupils read a wide range of diverse texts and learn the subject-specific vocabulary needed to help understand these. For those who struggle with reading, sharply focused support helps them to become fluent readers.

Attendance is a high priority. However, too many disadvantaged pupils are regularly absent. Therefore, they do not fully benefit from the school's curriculum. Over time, this absence causes these pupils to develop knowledge gaps, which affect their achievement. The school is taking effective action, with some examples of improvement; however, these are not yet substantial or sustained. The picture differs in the sixth form, where all students attend well.

The school has high behaviour expectations. Pupils know the rules, and the vast majority uphold these. In lessons, they work with focus and follow established routines. If pupils lose focus on their learning, most teachers quickly refocus them. When pupils have more complex behaviour needs, the school provides bespoke support through the 'intensive pupil support provision' and the 'RADAR provision'. Pupils speak highly about how these help them to develop more effective and productive approaches to learning.

Pupils' personal development is well considered. The 'RADAR values curriculum' broadens their horizons and challenges them to explore different perspectives on current issues. This includes looking at how to keep safe in society and online. Through a calendar of themed events, pupils learn about cultural differences, which helps them to appreciate the value of diversity. They are well prepared for their next steps beyond Westlands. The rich careers programme develops their awareness of different study and employment opportunities. Sixth-form students speak highly of how this prepares them to make confident post-18 choices.

The school is highly reflective and carefully identifies further improvements. The trust closely supports this work, providing additional resources when needed. Considerable efforts are made to minimise the impact of changes on staff workload. Staff are positive about how the school prioritises their well-being, which helps them focus on teaching.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some lessons, teachers do not always check pupils' understanding carefully. As a result, some pupils continue to have misconceptions which are not corrected. The school needs to ensure that teachers in all lessons identify less secure aspects of pupils understanding and address these through further teaching.
- Too many disadvantaged pupils are regularly absent from school. These pupils are missing key learning, which affects their achievement. The school needs to embed and further refine its approach to addressing absence so that it can robustly secure improved attendance for these pupils.

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 in February 2019.

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 special educational needs and/or disabilities (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	136286
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10321936
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	1,756
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	184
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Paul Goodson
Headteacher	Christina Honess
Website	www.westlands.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	26 and 27 February 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school joined the Swale Academies Trust in 2010.
- The school provides specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND. This is for 38 pupils with specific learning difficulties and 11 pupils with physical disability.
- The school currently uses three registered alternative providers. Some pupils attend an off-site provision called 'RADAR' in partnership with another school in the trust. This provision was visited as part of the inspection.
- Inspectors were aware during this inspection of a serious incident involving a child who attends this school that had occurred since the previous inspection. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate incidents of this kind, actions taken by the school in response to the incident were considered alongside the evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform inspectors' judgements.

- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Year 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- 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.
- The inspectors met with the executive headteacher, headteacher, deputy headteachers, assistant headteachers, subject leaders, community principals and teachers. The lead inspector also met with representatives from the governing body and the trust, including the chief executive officer.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, history, modern foreign languages, and physical education. 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.
- The inspectors observed break and lunchtime activities.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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.
- The inspectors considered the responses to the staff survey and spoke to a range of staff about their views of the school. They looked at the school's school improvement plan.
- The inspectors took account of the responses to the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire and the additional free-text responses.

Inspection team

Phillip Blagg, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Nicky Archer

Ofsted Inspector

Simon Webster

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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