# Inspection of a good school: Walsall Academy

Lichfield Road, Bloxwich, Walsall, West Midlands WS3 3LX

Inspection dates: 19–20 November 2019

## Outcome

Walsall Academy continues to be a good school.

However, inspectors have some concerns that standards may be declining, as set out below.

## What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy and well cared for in this welcoming school. Pupils feel safe and enjoy attending school. While most pupils behave well and bullying is rare, some choose to mess about in lessons, disturbing other pupils who are trying to learn.

Staff and governors have high expectations of all pupils. Pupils appreciate the many events and activities that the school offers. Parents and carers tell us that personal development opportunities are strong. Pupils can stay at Aberdovey in Wales and also visit the base camp at Mount Everest. Pupils say these sorts of opportunities boost their self-confidence.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) enjoy their lessons. However, some pupils with SEND do not receive effective support in all subject areas. This is not the case in the popular sixth form, where all students, including those with SEND, receive the support they need and flourish. Most sixth-form students achieve well and go on to university or successful employment.

The majority of teaching is effective. However, some pupils cannot remember what they learned previously. This is because the curriculum has not been carefully sequenced. Some leaders do not have a good enough understanding of how well the curriculum is planned.

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

Pupils' personal development is strong. Pupils participate in an exciting range of extra-curricular activities. The school offers over 200 visits for pupils annually. Pupils regularly visit local employers and universities. Some pupils have toured the Houses of Parliament and walked through the Scottish Highlands. These experiences help to broaden pupils' horizons.

Most parents are positive about the school, and say the school is supportive and helpful.

Parents and pupils told us that bullying is rare and is dealt with promptly.

Sixth-form provision is a strength. It helps students to be successful, independent learners. Teachers provide just the right level of support in class. This enables students to attempt problems for themselves first. Some students benefit from bespoke coaching from two national charities. Most of these students go on to further or higher education and employment after leaving the school.

Most older pupils achieve well in subjects, such as business studies and modern foreign languages, because their teachers regularly go over key knowledge. They structure lessons well and motivate pupils to succeed.

School leaders have improved teachers' working conditions. Leaders have reduced the number of assessments and the amount of marking required of teachers. Teaching staff told us that they appreciate this lightening of their workload.

However, senior leaders do not have a good enough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They have not ensured that the curriculum in all subjects is well sequenced and taught so that pupils learn more and remember more. This means pupils do not achieve well in all subjects, especially English, mathematics and science.

Pupils study the full key stage 3 national curriculum during Years 7 and 8. However, this coverage lacks depth and breadth in some subjects and is not well sequenced. Subject leaders do not emphasise what important knowledge pupils should learn. Additionally, teachers do not help pupils to embed knowledge in their memory. Hence, pupils cannot recall knowledge learned during key stage 3 that they need in key stage 4. For example, some Year 10 pupils cannot complete calculations they should have mastered in key stage 3.

Not all pupils with SEND receive effective support. The curriculum is not well planned or ambitious enough for these pupils. Teachers do not make sure that pupils receive the right help to meet their needs. This means these pupils miss out on some valuable learning.

Some pupils' behaviour in lessons is not positive. They often mess around in lessons, disturbing others and shouting out. They chat with their friends about matters irrelevant to the lesson. At times, this interferes with other pupils' learning and means teachers cannot concentrate on teaching. Some teachers told us that they find this low-level disruption frustrating. They do not feel supported by school leaders in managing this behaviour effectively. Leaders do not have a sufficient understanding of how pupils behave in lessons. Leaders were surprised to learn that there was low-level disruption in classrooms.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school pays careful attention to safeguarding. Leaders ensure that pupils are kept safe, in

and around the building. Pupils know how to use the internet and social media responsibly. They know who to go to if they have a problem. They value the on-site mental health and well-being facility, which all pupils can use.

Leaders make sure that staff are trained appropriately to look out for, and raise, any welfare concerns about pupils. Staff receive monthly safeguarding updates. Designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) perform their statutory responsibilities well. They carry out suitable pre-employment checks on new staff, for example.

## What does the school need to do to improve?

- Senior leaders do not have a good enough understanding of how well the curriculum is planned and put into practice. As a result, they do not have an accurate understanding of why pupils do not achieve consistently well in all subjects. Leaders need to ensure that they have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school's curriculum. They can then see more clearly how to make the necessary improvements. They should assure themselves that improvements are implemented successfully.
- Leaders have not ensured that the curriculum focuses well enough on the sequence of what pupils need to learn, especially in key stage 3. As a result, some pupils are not able to learn more and remember more as well as they might. Senior and subject leaders should make sure that there is a clear sequence of learning in each subject for all pupils. This order of learning should identify the essential knowledge pupils need to learn. Senior leaders should ensure that teaching helps pupils remember more in their long-term memory.
- School leaders have not ensured that pupils with SEND are receiving a good quality of education. Teachers do not consistently plan carefully to make sure that these pupils' needs are taken into account in all subjects. Leaders should make sure that teaching addresses the learning needs of pupils with SEND.
- Some pupils do not behave well in lessons. This frustrates other pupils, as well as some teachers. Some pupils and teachers think that leaders are not doing enough to deal with this low-level disruption in lessons. Senior leaders should take appropriate steps to help staff to end low-level disruption in lessons.

## 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 a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good on 19–20 April 2012.

## 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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can complain to Ofsted.

## 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

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| **Unique reference number** | 133697 |
| **Local authority** | Walsall |
| **Inspection number** | 10111736 |
| **Type of school** | Secondary comprehensive |
| **School category** | Academy sponsor-led |
| **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** | 1,328 |
| **Of which, number on roll in the sixth form** | 308 |
| **Appropriate authority** | Board of trustees |
| **Chair of trust** | Roy Harrison |
| **Headteacher** | Simon Rogers |
| **Website** | http://www.walsallacademy.com |
| **Date of previous inspection** | 19–20 April 2012 |

## Information about this school

- The school joined the Thomas Telford Multi-Academy Trust in September 2017.
- Walsall Academy uses two alternative providers. These are The Shepwell Centre in Willenhall and The Ladder School in Walsall.

## Information about this inspection

- We met with a wide range of senior staff. These included the headteacher, shadow headteachers, deputy headteachers and assistant headteachers. We also met with subject coordinators and the special educational needs coordinator. We met with the chair of the governing body and the multi-academy trust executive adviser.
- We focused on English, mathematics, history, modern foreign languages and business studies. We visited lessons and scrutinised pupils' work alongside senior leaders. We spoke with pupils, teachers, subject leaders and senior leaders to consider the quality

of education.

- When we inspected safeguarding, we met with a wide range of pupils, both formally and informally, including those with SEND. We met with the DSLs and checked a wide range of documentation, including survey responses from pupils, parents and teachers.
- We visited the Shepwell Centre in Willenhall. This is an alternative provider used by the school. We visited lessons and we met with leaders and teachers at the centre.

## Inspection team

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|---|---|
| Antony Edkins, lead inspector | Ofsted Inspector |
| Tim Bassett | Ofsted Inspector |
| Elaine Haskins | Ofsted Inspector |
| Richard Sutton | Ofsted Inspector |

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