

# Watford Grammar School for Boys

**Address:** Rickmansworth Road, Watford, Hertfordshire, WD18 7JF

**Unique reference number (URN):** 136276

## Inspection report: 14 April 2026

|                    |                                                                                   |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Exceptional        |  |
| Strong standard    |  |
| Expected standard  |                                                                                   |
| Needs attention    |                                                                                   |
| Urgent improvement |                                                                                   |

### Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

### How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

# Exceptional ●

## Achievement

Exceptional ●

Pupils at this school consistently attain the highest grades in their examinations at GCSE and A level. Disadvantaged pupils attain more highly than non-disadvantaged pupils do nationally. Their high performance continues into the sixth form. External students who enter the sixth form with lower average GCSE grades are in receipt of excellent support. They rapidly make the gains to attain high grades alongside their peers who have been at the school since Year 7.

The richness of the curriculum is reflected in pupils' conversations. Pupils are articulate, knowledgeable and interesting to talk to. They consistently produce high-quality work across the curriculum. Pupils also win international competitions, such as in mathematics and robotics. Many pupils with education, health and care plans achieve their targets as well as attain the highest grades. Those pupils that need support with their literacy and numeracy get the help they need to succeed. All pupils and students in the sixth form attain their next steps in education, training or employment.

## Curriculum and teaching

Exceptional ●

Leaders have insightfully refined the curriculum over many years. Curriculum thinking reflects both academic ambition and character development. The curriculum and its delivery is underpinned by extensive educational research and intellectual rigour. Additionally, the curriculum cultivates a love of learning and discovery. High-quality concepts are taught early on. Teachers ensure that no pupil, regardless of the barriers they face, gets left behind.

Teachers are well grounded in educational research. They learn from other international education systems and consider how well they provide for boys' education. Teachers make intelligent decisions about how to deliver the subject curriculum in the best way so that pupils achieve highly. For example, they innovate and make research-informed adjustments so that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities have the support to work out and understand complex problems and concepts. Sixth formers who support in classrooms are taught how best to guide younger pupils, for example with their comprehension when reading.

Assessment is used meaningfully. It empowers pupils to take ownership of their learning and progress in ways that align with their interests, talents and future aspirations. For example, teachers look closely at how well pupils debate and intellectually challenge one another. Their continuing work on the development of pupils' subject-specific vocabulary and oracy has been shared internationally.

## Inclusion

Exceptional ●

Pupils, regardless of the barriers they have to their learning, thrive in this highly inclusive environment. Their achievement bucks national trends. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, those who are disadvantaged and those known or previously known to social care are fully integrated into school life. They benefit from the multitude of

programmes and activities that are on offer. Many undertake leadership positions, such as contributing to the school's equality, diversity and inclusion committee.

Leaders are meticulous when they consider how best to cater for pupils' needs. The identification of needs and the support for them is highly effective. For example, leaders adapt pupils' strategies for support according to how they may best perform in a subject or extra-curricular activity. They consider carefully how pupils experience education. This is not just in terms of academia but also the development of socialisation and civic engagement. For example, the use of alternative provision is well considered. It is specifically used for an area of need. Pupil premium funding is regularly reviewed in terms of its success with academic outcomes as well as how well pupils feel they belong to the school community.

Leaders support unstintingly pupils' mental health. Their work on this aspect is shared nationally. Leaders check closely when pupils may have low mood and ensure that a wide range of services are available, including through their close work with NHS professionals. Sixth-form youth ambassadors also support younger pupils with learning about techniques such as mindfulness.

## **Leadership and governance**

**Exceptional** ●

There are remarkably high standards of leadership throughout the school. At all levels, leaders have a substantial impact on the lives of the young people they serve. They leave no stone unturned to improve the school. Leaders seek out best practice internationally and make adroit decisions as to what to implement. Staff share in the school's vision. They enthusiastically engage with educational research. They want to be the best they can be for the good of the school. Parents and carers are highly appreciative of the work that staff do.

The governing body is highly effective in discharging its role. It is well informed and incisive in its approach to school improvement. For example, governors look closely at how pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities experience school. They track through the impact of support plans in lessons and in extra-curricular activities. Governors consider carefully funding decisions to ensure that the high-quality education that pupils receive is sustained. Staff workload and wellbeing is also at the forefront of their decision-making.

The professional learning for staff is second to none. The school recognises and celebrates staff's achievements and shares them widely with others. For example, early career teachers present their work to schools in other countries and within a global consortium of boys' schools. This reflects leaders' belief that early career teachers can shape thinking beyond their own classrooms and ensures that excellence is noticed and nurtured.

## **Personal development and wellbeing**

**Exceptional** ●

Leaders have intelligently used educational research and their work with universities to inform the design of the school's personal development programme. There is seamless integration of tutor and career programmes, subject curriculums and the extensive extra-curricular offer. Developing pupils' qualities and values permeates the fabric of school life and is well established. Consequently, pupils know and understand the qualities they wish to cultivate to be successful in their chosen careers in later life. The impact of leaders' work is seen in well-rounded, articulate young men who are role models and leaders for others.

The extensive extra-curricular and pupil leadership opportunities provide the mechanisms for pupils to practise what they have learned. Community pupil leaders organise charity fundraising events with other local schools. Academic pupil leaders publish a school magazine to provide guidance on how to learn. Pupils and students run clubs and societies for each other. Younger pupils complete civic projects such as support for refugees. High participation rates in many different sports, music ensembles and outdoor education activities are striking. Such opportunities are also international, for example the senior music tour to Belgium.

Pupils have a deep understanding of what it means to contribute to and live in a multicultural, modern Britain. They appreciate and celebrate difference. The personal, social, health and economic education curriculum provides them with what they need to know to lead safe and happy lives. This includes how to conduct healthy relationships and be safe online. The excellent pastoral care and provision for mental health means that the pupils learn the tools they need to be emotionally resilient in the face of challenges.

The wide-ranging careers programme ensures that pupils are well informed about future pathways to further education, training and employment. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported incredibly well with their preparation for adulthood.

## Post 16 provision

Exceptional 

On numerous fronts, the provision for sixth-form students goes above and beyond what is ordinarily on offer in schools. Consequently, students are passionate about their learning, and their contributions to school and wider society. Students demonstrate maturity, confidence and excellent interpersonal skills.

The sixth form has service at its heart. All Year 12 students undertake an hour of service in school each week. This may be in the form of mentoring, running societies and clubs or actions to help improve the school. Like the staff who teach them, students are actively engaged in research. They avidly read independently about subject content, for example. Additionally, some pupils undertake research with universities on topics such as the effective use of artificial intelligence. The student leadership body conduct research into their areas of responsibility. They lead on key aspects they wish to develop in school. In so doing, they learn how to be agents of change.

The delivery of the curriculum in the sixth form is well informed by subject experts who facilitate deep knowledge and understanding. Teachers are excellent role models in this regard. For example, their approaches are emulated by students who are confident to model complex concepts to one another. Students skilfully synthesise a range of information and demonstrate criticality in their thinking. Teachers expand and deepen students' understanding so they attain the highest grades and achieve their next steps. Many secure places at prestigious universities.

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## Strong standard ●

### Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Attendance is high and has been consecutively so over several years. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged attend well. Persistent absenteeism for all groups of pupils is below that seen nationally. Such positive attitudes towards attendance reflects the boys' enjoyment of school.

Leaders use comprehensive information about pupils and trends in attendance to help inform how to support families. They use a range of strategies that have impact, such as the use of a parent app to combat lateness. Leaders' actions make a significant difference to pupils' engagement with education, particularly so for those who are vulnerable.

From the moment they enter the school gates to the time they leave, pupils are impeccably well behaved. Around the site, pupils conduct themselves with maturity and warmth. Pupils champion each other. They celebrate in assembly and in lessons what is done well. For example, they burst into spontaneous applause when a pupil enters assembly to play the piano. Pupils are highly motivated to learn and want to do well. They listen closely to their teachers and to each other. Pupils enjoy respectful relationships. They understand that bullying and discrimination is not tolerated, including when online. The school has successfully reduced such incidents over time.

## What it's like to be a pupil at this school

This school is firing on all cylinders and the pupils are too. It is a place where pupils' wellbeing and academic excellence go hand in hand. Pupils receive a remarkably high-quality education which enables them to embrace challenge and make the most of the opportunities afforded to them. Almost all pupils participate in the many extra-curricular activities on offer. Under the nurturing guidance of staff, pupils excel. Pupils act with integrity and kindness. If bullying ever occurs, they are quick to report it. Pupils are keen to make school the best place it can be. Hence, younger pupils and those new to the school feel welcomed, accepted and safe.

Leaders are relentless in their quest to remove any barriers to pupils' learning. As such, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged enjoy the same opportunities and rich curriculum as their peers. Pupils are eager to attend school and achieve superbly well. Many give their time to others. For example, older pupils coach boxing to younger pupils.

Sixth-form students play an incredible role in school life. They lead on developments in the school, provide mentoring and support in classrooms, and run numerous clubs and societies. The student leadership team share their leadership practice with other leading private schools. Students have a deep understanding of what civic engagement means. For example, house captains undertake training so they can deliver sessions on character

education to younger pupils. They wear their different leadership ties with pride and help to create house loyalty through the many competitions they run.

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## Next steps

- Leaders should continue to refine their attendance strategy in order to sustain high rates of attendance for all pupils.
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## About this inspection

This school is part of Watford Grammar School for Boys single academy trust which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Andrew Speirs.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OI) who have previously served as HMI.

Inspectors spoke with the chair of the trust board and several members of the governing body, the headteacher, other senior leaders, middle leaders, staff and pupils at the school. Inspectors spoke with a representative from alternative provision.

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.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

At the time of conversion to academy status, the trust decided to keep the title of grammar school even though the school is comprehensive. 35% of pupils are admitted to the school under selection criteria, of which 10% is for musical aptitude.

The school is registered as having a religious character. This is for the Church of England. The school is not in a diocese but as part of their funding agreement they are subject to section 48 inspections with an organisation of their choice. They are currently undergoing such an inspection. The first visit was conducted in September 2025. The second is scheduled for later this year.

The school contributes to education research within a global consortium of boys' schools.

The school currently makes use of one registered alternative provision.

Headteacher: Ian Cooksey

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**Lead inspector:**

Liz Smith, His Majesty's Inspector

**Team inspectors:**

Susan Pryor, Ofsted Inspector

Alexandra Jane Burton, Ofsted Inspector

Daniel Short, His Majesty's Inspector

Caren Earp, Ofsted Inspector

Nicola Ready, Ofsted Inspector

**Facts and figures used on inspection**

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 14 April 2026

**School and pupil context****Total pupils**

**1,610**

Well above average

**What does this mean?**

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,067

**School capacity**

**1,496**

Above average

**What does this mean?**

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,153

### **Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)**

**7.31%**

Well below average

#### **What does this mean?**

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 28.9%

### **Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan**

**3.73%**

Close to average

#### **What does this mean?**

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.09%

### **Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support**

**6.77%**

Well below average

#### **What does this mean?**

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 13.4%

### **Location deprivation**

**Below average**

#### **What does this mean?**

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

**Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)**

**No resourced provision**

**What does this mean?**

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

**All pupils' performance**

**English and maths GCSE**

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

| Year              | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|-------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2024/25 (revised) | 83.3%       | 45.4%            | Above                          |
| 2023/24 (final)   | 84.7%       | 45.9%            | Above                          |
| 2022/23 (final)   | 90.7%       | 45.3%            | Above                          |

**Attainment 8**

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

| Year              | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|-------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2024/25 (revised) | 68.9        | 46.0             | Above                          |
| 2023/24 (final)   | 66.5        | 45.9             | Above                          |
| 2022/23 (final)   | 68.8        | 46.3             | Above                          |

**Progress 8**

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

| Year            | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|-----------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2023/24 (final) | 0.72        | -0.03            | Above                          |
| 2022/23 (final) | 0.75        | -0.03            | Above                          |

## Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

### Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

| Year              | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|-------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2024/25 (revised) | 56.5%       | 25.8%            | Above                          |
| 2023/24 (final)   | 78.6%       | 25.8%            | Above                          |
| 2022/23 (final)   | 64.3%       | 25.2%            | Above                          |

### Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

| Year              | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|-------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2024/25 (revised) | 52.3        | 34.9             | Above                          |
| 2023/24 (final)   | 61.8        | 34.6             | Above                          |
| 2022/23 (final)   | 47.7        | 35.0             | Above                          |

### Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

| Year            | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|-----------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2023/24 (final) | 0.29        | -0.57            | Above                          |
| 2022/23 (final) | -0.29       | -0.57            | Close to average               |

## Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

### Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

| Year              | This school | National non-disadvantaged score | School disadvantage gap |
|-------------------|-------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 2024/25 (revised) | 56.5%       | 53.1%                            | 3.4 pp                  |
| 2023/24 (final)   | 78.6%       | 53.1%                            | 25.4 pp                 |
| 2022/23 (final)   | 64.3%       | 52.4%                            | 11.9 pp                 |

### Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

| Year              | This school | National non-disadvantaged score | School disadvantage gap |
|-------------------|-------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 2024/25 (revised) | 52.3        | 50.4                             | 1.9                     |
| 2023/24 (final)   | 61.8        | 50.0                             | 11.8                    |
| 2022/23 (final)   | 47.7        | 50.3                             | -2.6                    |

### Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

| Year            | This school | National non-disadvantaged score | School disadvantage gap |
|-----------------|-------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 2023/24 (final) | 0.29        | 0.16                             | 0.12                    |
| 2022/23 (final) | -0.29       | 0.17                             | -0.46                   |

## Destinations after 16

### Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

| Year                       | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|----------------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2023 leavers (provisional) | 99%         | 91%              | Above                          |
| 2022 leavers (revised)     | 99%         | 93%              | Above                          |
| 2021 leavers (revised)     | 99%         | 94%              | Above                          |

## 16 to 18 performance

### A-level average point score

The average points that students achieved per A-level entry.

| Year              | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|-------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2024/25 (revised) | 39.56       | 34.99            | Above                          |
| 2023/24 (final)   | 41.99       | 34.38            | Above                          |
| 2022/23 (final)   | 40.10       | 34.16            | Above                          |

## A-level value added

A score showing students’ progress between the end of key stage 4 and the end of their academic qualification studies.

| Year              | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|-------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2024/25 (revised) | -0.1        | 0.0              | Close to average               |
| 2023/24 (revised) | 0.1         | 0.0              | Close to average               |

## Absence

### Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

| Year             | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2024/25 (2 term) | 5.7%        | 8.1%             | Below                          |
| 2023/24 (3 term) | 6.8%        | 8.9%             | Below                          |
| 2022/23 (3 term) | 6.7%        | 9.0%             | Below                          |

### Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

| Year             | This school | National average | Compared with national average |
|------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2024/25 (2 term) | 13.6%       | 21.9%            | Below                          |
| 2023/24 (3 term) | 21.3%       | 25.6%            | Close to average               |
| 2022/23 (3 term) | 20.1%       | 26.5%            | Below                          |

## Our grades explained

Exceptional 

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

## **Strong standard** ●

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

## **Expected standard** ●

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

## **Needs attention** ●

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

## **Urgent improvement** ●

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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