

West Hill School

Address: Thompson Cross, Stamford Street, Stalybridge, Cheshire, SK15 1LX

Unique reference number (URN): 137020

Inspection report: 21 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.

Expected standard

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

School leaders and trustees hold a clear commitment to securing high attendance for every pupil. Pupils' attendance, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged, is consistently above the national average. Persistent absence has reduced year on year. When barriers to attendance arise, leaders work closely with pupils and their families. Pupils enjoy attending school and appreciate the rewards they might receive for doing so. The main factor that makes leaders' work so successful is the high-quality wellbeing, pastoral and emotional support available to all pupils.

Pupils understand what is expected of their behaviour and strive to live up to leaders' high expectations. Typically, they embody the school's 'respect' values extremely well. The school environment is harmonious and purposeful. There is a culture of calmness and politeness which permeates social times and lessons. Relationships between staff and pupils are warm and supportive. Pupils are proud to be members of the school community.

Teaching about respect, tolerance and misogyny is frequent and carefully targeted. For example, on the rare occasions that unkind language is used, staff step in to resolve it sensitively. As a result, bullying is rare and, when it does occur, it is dealt with right away. Pupils are clear that derogatory behaviour and discrimination, including online, are not tolerated.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Since the last inspection, there have been several changes to the leadership and governance of the school. For example, the school has appointed a new headteacher and senior leaders. Furthermore, new appointments to the board of trustees have also strengthened its expertise.

Leaders have acted decisively to raise expectations of what all pupils can achieve. Their vision to raise standards is reflected in deliberate actions taken in the best interests of pupils. Leaders have prioritised the right areas judiciously. This has included stabilising staffing, instilling a culture of professionalism and strengthening subject leadership and the curriculum. Leaders have nimbly controlled the pace of change to ensure recent gains are long-lasting. However, leaders recognise that the school has work to do to fully secure its aspirations for pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They reflect carefully on their work and seek the views of others to inform self evaluation. Leaders act promptly when any area of the school's work does not meet their high expectations.

Trustees are ambitious for the school community. They bring a range of skills that benefit the school. Trustees provide appropriate support and challenge to leaders and fulfil their statutory duties effectively.

Leaders have revitalised staff's morale. Staff are energised to drive the school's improvement priorities forward. Staff, including early career teachers, benefit from research-led professional learning that increasingly equips them to help pupils succeed. Leaders routinely take workload and wellbeing into account when introducing new initiatives. Staff are proud to work at the school.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Leaders have thought carefully about how best to nurture a sense of belonging among pupils. They place the school's ethos of responsibility, care and pride in being a West Hill pupil at the centre of the personal development and wellbeing programme. There is an effective, multi-layered personal development programme that supports pupils to grow into determined, confident and resilient young people. Leaders have successfully provided many opportunities for pupils to discover and develop their talents and interests through extra curricular activities.

The personal, social, health and economic education programme, together with regular 'drop-down' days and assemblies, cultivates pupils' understanding of important topics. These include healthy relationships, financial and family planning and an understanding of risks such as gambling and gangs. Pupils welcome learning about important aspects such as staying safe, both online and offline, and consent. As pupils move up through the school, the detail that they are taught develops in a way that is age-appropriate and responsive to local and national events.

Pupils typically have a detailed understanding of fundamental British values. For example, workshops such as 'learn with lords' and 'magistrates in the community' deepen pupils' understanding of the rule of law. Pupils enact the work of the school's 'cabinets' and demonstrate democracy in action. Pupils are proud of the school council and its impact. They show active citizenship by organising charity events, such as food bank collections, and raising money for local charities.

Leaders raise pupils' aspirations for their next steps through high quality encounters with employers, post-16 providers and 'workplace safaris'. A suitable careers programme is in place. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those who face other disadvantages, receive tailored support. This helps them to make informed decisions about their next steps in education or training. The impact of this support is exemplified by the positive destinations of pupils.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Overall, many pupils achieve well in national examinations. This includes disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, whose attainment is similar to their peers nationally. However, pupils' achievement across the curriculum is inconsistent. Achievement in several subjects, and for some groups of pupils, remains markedly below the national average.

Leaders have put measures in place to strengthen pupils' achievement. These include adapting the curriculum, upskilling staff through professional development and rolling out the school's approach to assessment. In most subjects, pupils' work shows that they are generally making better progress through the curriculum. However, this progress is not yet consistent because misconceptions are not identified and addressed with sufficient precision. It is too soon to determine the full impact of leaders' work on pupils' achievement. Pupils who have gaps in their foundational knowledge of reading, writing and mathematics receive the targeted support they need to secure the necessary understanding for future learning.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

Some pupils' experiences of teaching are not consistent across the school. This means that some pupils do not learn all that they should. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and generally choose activities that help most pupils learn the curriculum well. However, teachers do not use assessment reliably enough to identify misconceptions or address gaps in knowledge. This includes errors in pupils' handwriting, punctuation and spelling that sometimes go unnoticed and uncorrected. In recent times, the number of pupils at the school with special educational needs and/or disabilities has increased. However, teachers do not consistently adjust their lessons to enable these pupils to access the curriculum as well as they could.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have prioritised developing the curriculum. In each subject, the curriculum is coherently designed and sets out the building blocks of knowledge that pupils will learn over time. Leaders are well informed about the quality of teaching and any areas to develop. For example, leaders have strengthened subject leadership and quality assurance processes. Staff benefit from high-quality professional development. However, leaders know that the effectiveness of teaching remains a work in progress. When necessary, the school seeks external guidance to help check for impact and strengthen practice.

Inclusion

Needs attention 

Leaders have not fully ensured that all pupils with additional needs receive consistent support. Despite clear systems for identifying pupils' needs, staff sometimes do not receive precise and effective information about how to reduce barriers to learning for some pupils. Generally, leaders have prioritised training to help staff understand how best to support pupils who find learning more difficult. However, this is still in an early stage of development. Some staff do not have the necessary knowledge that they need and, as a result, there are inconsistencies in how well they support pupils' learning in the classroom. This hinders how well some pupils achieve.

Leaders have a secure understanding of disadvantaged pupils' needs and use evidence-based approaches to inform their pupil premium strategy. This helps staff to meet these pupils' needs well on the whole. Typically, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils is in line with national averages.

Leaders regularly review pupils' progress through the curriculum. They use this information to plan support that improves pupils' wellbeing and to identify when pupils may benefit from

extra help with their learning. Leaders' use of alternative provision is thoughtful and in the best interests of the pupils who attend.

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

Pupils feel happy, safe and valued at this welcoming school. They enjoy coming to school as they know that it is a place where nobody is left out. The school has a friendly atmosphere where pupils benefit from excellent relationships with staff.

Pupils are proud of the inclusive nature of their school community. They value that everyone has the right to be themselves and they show genuine respect for one another. Bullying is rare and addressed swiftly if it happens. The school's high expectations for positive behaviour, the 'West Hill Way', are supported by clear routines. Pupils attend school regularly and behave well.

Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged or have special educational needs and/or disabilities, have benefited from leaders' focus on inclusion. Pupils' wellbeing is supported effectively, including for those who may be more vulnerable. However, the school is less effective at overcoming barriers to pupils' learning. Information shared with staff about pupils' learning needs lacks precision. As a result, teachers do not adapt their teaching consistently well to meet these needs.

Pupils typically enjoy their learning and demonstrate positive attitudes in lessons. Leaders have strengthened the curriculum so that it is broad and ambitious. However, the quality of teaching varies. At times, pupils' misconceptions are not picked up precisely enough. As a result, some pupils develop gaps in their knowledge. Although many pupils achieve well overall, achievement for some groups of pupils in some subjects remains below the national average.

Leaders have vastly increased the breadth of experiences available to pupils beyond the classroom. Pupils relish attending an array of sports competitions, creative and musical clubs and educational visits. They benefit from a thoughtful programme of opportunities to develop leadership skills and character. For example, having a place in the school's cabinet leadership team or being a member of 'eco club' enables pupils to develop their debating skills effectively.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that teachers have the information, expertise and knowledge to adapt their teaching effectively. This will help to support pupils, including those who face barriers to their learning, to deepen their skills and knowledge across the curriculum.
- Leaders should ensure that teachers use assessment techniques effectively in order to check for gaps and misconceptions in pupils' understanding, including any gaps that

pupils have in their foundational knowledge of reading, spelling, punctuation and handwriting skills.

About this inspection

This school is part of the West Hill School Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is a single academy trust overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Tilbrook.

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 (OIs) who have previously served as HMI.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher and other senior leaders during the inspection. Inspectors also spoke with a representative of the local authority, the headteacher of the virtual school and members of the board of trustees, including the chair of the trust.

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 school makes use of 3 alternative provisions, including 1 which is unregistered, for a very small number of pupils.

The school has undergone a significant change since the last inspection. There have been changes to the senior leadership structure and new appointments have included the headteacher and deputy headteacher. In addition, there has been a change to the chair of the trust and several new members of the board have been appointed.

Headteacher: Claire Cronin

Lead inspector:

Kate Bowker, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

David Roberts, Ofsted Inspector

Christopher Beard, Ofsted Inspector

John Cowper, Ofsted Inspector

Eleanor Overland, 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 21 April 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

853

Below 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

850

Below 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)

29.54%

Close to 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

1.64%

Below 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

16.65%

Above average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 13.4%

Location deprivation

Above 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)	38.5%	45.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	36.9%	45.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	39.1%	45.3%	Close to average

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)	43.5	46.0	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	44.3	45.9	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	44.1	46.3	Close to average

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)	-0.31	-0.03	Below
2022/23 (final)	-0.33	-0.03	Below

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)	25.0%	25.8%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	24.2%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	23.8%	25.2%	Close to average

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)	37.4	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	39.4	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	36.1	35.0	Close to average

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)	-0.44	-0.57	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	-0.74	-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)	25.0%	53.1%	-28.1 pp
2023/24 (final)	24.2%	53.1%	-28.9 pp
2022/23 (final)	23.8%	52.4%	-28.6 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)	37.4	50.4	-13.0
2023/24 (final)	39.4	50.0	-10.6
2022/23 (final)	36.1	50.3	-14.2

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)	-0.44	0.16	-0.61
2022/23 (final)	-0.74	0.17	-0.90

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)	92%	91%	Average
2022 leavers (revised)	92%	93%	Average
2021 leavers (revised)	93%	94%	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)	6.1%	8.1%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	5.8%	8.9%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	6.8%	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)	14.1%	21.9%	Below
2023/24 (3 term)	12.3%	25.6%	Below
2022/23 (3 term)	16.0%	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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