

Witton Park Academy

Address: Buncer Lane, Blackburn, Lancashire, BB2 6TD

Unique reference number (URN): 140879

Inspection report: 24 February 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.

Needs attention ●

Achievement

Needs attention ●

Some pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, do not learn the curriculum as well as they should. Learning is uneven across subjects. Pupils do not gain the depth of understanding that they need to achieve well. Results of national examinations in several subjects remain below national averages, particularly for pupils with higher starting points. Previous instability in leadership and staffing has contributed to these gaps in achievement.

There are early signs of improvement in some subjects. Targeted support is beginning to help some pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, to access the curriculum more effectively. Even so, this work is at an early stage, and it is too soon to see its effect.

Pupils are beginning to be better prepared for their next steps because leaders have broadened the curriculum and introduced more structured careers guidance. However, these improvements have not been in place long enough for pupils to be consistently ready for education, employment or training.

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention ●

Recent actions to improve attendance have not secured leaders' intended benefit for some pupils, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Although systems to identify and address patterns of absence are clearer, leaders do not reduce barriers to attendance quickly enough. Work with families and external agencies is developing, but leaders do not analyse trends with enough precision to provide support where it is most needed. Some pupils are beginning to attend school more regularly, but improvements are too slow.

Most pupils behave well in lessons. However, behaviour at social times is less consistent. Staff do not apply agreed routines or the school's behaviour systems reliably during these times, which leads to varied experiences for pupils. Suspension rates for pupils, particularly those with SEND, are reducing, although they are still high.

The school is a caring community, and staff respond to concerns about bullying. Most pupils know that bullying is not tolerated. Even so, some pupils, parents and carers lack confidence in how well incidents are handled. Leaders take action, but they do not always record or communicate this clearly. This affects how safe and supported some pupils feel.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention ●

Staff's expertise in adapting teaching for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is developing. However, some staff do not apply these approaches effectively. As a result, some pupils do not access the curriculum as effectively as they should. Pupils with higher prior attainment are also not routinely given tasks that extend their thinking over time.

The interim governing body and the trust have taken steps to address the weaknesses in the curriculum and teaching. In some subjects, leaders have reshaped the curriculum so that pupils' learning builds more logically on their prior knowledge. However, much of this work is new and has not had time to embed.

Leaders have improved professional development so teachers are better equipped to teach their subjects. Even so, this is not reflected consistently in classroom practice. Some teachers do not check well enough whether pupils have understood. This means that gaps in pupils' knowledge are not addressed consistently well.

Leaders' work to secure pupils' fundamental knowledge of writing and mathematics is at an early stage. In contrast, support for reading is more established. This is helping pupils to access the rest of the curriculum, particularly disadvantaged pupils and those who speak English as an additional language.

Pupils currently spend fewer than 32.5 hours in school each week. This limits their learning of the curriculum.

Inclusion

Needs attention 

Leaders do not remove barriers to pupils' learning with enough consistency. Although strategies to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have recently improved, it is too early to see an impact. Some of the long-standing weaknesses in how the school meets the needs of pupils with SEND have not been fully resolved. Clearer processes to identify these needs are beginning to help some staff to better support pupils. However, this practice varies across the school.

Disadvantaged pupils and those known to social care usually receive timely support. Generally, this helps them to learn. Leaders have improved how they check pupils' progress. However, staff do not use this information precisely enough to shape teaching.

Leaders have improved engagement with families and external professionals. This is beginning to shape more appropriate strategies to help pupils with vulnerabilities. Leaders use additional funding well. For example, they invest in digital resources to help reduce barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders also work closely with local authorities to support pupils known to social care. They have improved their oversight of alternative provision to ensure that placements meet pupils' needs. Leaders have also invested in a support unit at the school, which is beginning to help pupils to re-engage with their learning.

Leadership and governance

Needs attention 

Leadership has been through a period of considerable change, and this has affected the consistency and quality of the school's work. Leaders understand the school's strengths and weaknesses and have set out appropriate priorities for improvement. However, many actions are recent and have not yet secured the improvements leaders intend, particularly in curriculum quality, behaviour, attendance and pupils' achievement. Efforts to strengthen middle leadership are underway, yet staffing instability in some areas means this work is progressing unevenly.

The interim executive board and trustees meet their statutory duties and receive regular information about the school. They have strengthened leadership capacity and introduced clearer accountability systems to challenge and support leaders more effectively. For example, they use external reviews and expert advice to shape support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders make decisions with pupils' best interests in mind.

Staff, including teachers at the start of their career, are beginning to benefit from enhanced training opportunities. However, this is not reflected consistently in classroom practice. Some staff are beginning to use new approaches, but these are not widespread. Leaders are increasingly mindful of staff's wellbeing and workload and have taken steps to involve staff in decisions that affect their work. This has supported leaders in managing change more effectively and in beginning to take appropriate actions to raise standards.

Personal development and wellbeing

Needs attention 

Leaders have recently developed a more coherent programme for personal development. Through the 'Witton Way', they have introduced a breadth of activities to develop pupils' understanding of the world. However, this work is at an early stage and many pupils have not benefited fully. As a result, pupils' experiences of the school's programme vary too much across the school.

Some pupils enjoy activities that help them develop new interests, such as boxing, badminton and cooking. Even so, leaders do not track participation closely enough. This means they cannot identify which pupils are missing out or adapt opportunities to meet pupils' needs. As a result, some pupils do not access a wide enough range of experiences.

In lessons and assemblies, pupils explore moral issues and consider different viewpoints. Some pupils take part in activities that help them to work with others and contribute to the school community. They value leadership roles, such as mental health ambassadors and prefects, which help them develop a sense of responsibility. Pupils also build their understanding about healthy relationships and online safety. Leaders use external specialists to teach pupils about risks in the community, including knife crime and vaping.

Leaders have recently strengthened careers guidance for pupils. As a result, pupils are beginning to benefit from more encounters with employers, which helps them gain a deeper insight into different career pathways. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are starting to receive more tailored support to help them to prepare for adulthood, independence and future learning.

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

Pupils enjoy positive relationships with staff and benefit from some enriching experiences. However, they do not receive a consistently well-taught curriculum. Teaching varies too much across subjects, which means that pupils do not build their knowledge securely over time. As a result, their achievement is uneven and some pupils are not well prepared for their next steps.

Although some pupils enjoy their learning, this is not the case across all classes. Staff training has increased recently, but some staff still do not adapt their teaching well enough for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This limits how successfully these pupils access the curriculum. Pupils are beginning to value the new 'Witton Way' curriculum, which includes enrichment activities such as careers fairs, theatre trips and museum visits. These opportunities aim to widen pupils' experiences, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. Even so, many of these activities are new and are not yet fully embedded.

Most pupils behave well, and bullying is usually dealt with appropriately. However, some pupils and their parents and carers lack confidence in how leaders handle certain incidents, partly because communication from school to home is not always clear. While overall attendance is close to national averages, leaders do not remove barriers to attendance for some pupils with SEND effectively enough. These pupils miss too much learning, which affects how well they achieve.

Relationships between pupils and staff are generally positive. Pupils are beginning to benefit from wider opportunities such as taking on ambassador roles, charity work and helping to improve the school and local environment. These experiences help pupils develop communication skills and work respectfully with others. As such, pupils are increasingly well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that teachers are equipped to teach the curriculum well and match learning activities to pupils' needs and starting points, including any special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), so that all pupils build a deep body of knowledge and achieve highly.
- Leaders should ensure that teachers check pupils' understanding effectively so that learning is adapted in response to gaps in pupils' knowledge and that these gaps are addressed promptly and securely.
- Leaders should improve how they support pupils who have difficulties in writing and mathematics so that these pupils can access the curriculum with confidence.
- Leaders should analyse attendance patterns with greater precision and work more effectively with families and other agencies so that barriers to attendance, particularly for pupils with SEND, are identified and reduced more quickly.
- Leaders should ensure that behaviour expectations are applied consistently well by staff so that behaviour at social times is respectful, and suspensions, especially for pupils with SEND, reduce over time.
- Leaders should ensure that responses to bullying incidents are handled consistently well by all staff and that actions taken are communicated clearly so that pupils and parents have greater confidence in how concerns are managed and how safe pupils feel.
- Leaders should track pupils' participation in personal development opportunities more carefully so they can identify gaps, adapt provision and ensure that all groups of pupils, including those with SEND, access the full offer.

- Leaders should ensure that staff professional learning translates consistently into classroom practice by securing full staff engagement so that agreed approaches are implemented reliably.
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About this inspection

This school is part of the Achievement Through Collaboration Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Jane Chambers, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Hollings.

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 (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, school leaders, the CEO, trustees, members of the interim executive board and representatives from alternative providers and the local authority during the inspection.

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:

Since 2024, the school has had an interim academy management committee, which is chaired by Alison Gormally.

There have been substantial changes to the staffing and leadership of the school in the past 12 months. This includes the appointment of a new headteacher and several new senior and middle leaders.

The school uses 5 alternative provisions, 2 of which are registered.

Headteacher: Martin Knowles

Lead inspector:

Amina Modan, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Thomas Fay, Ofsted Inspector

Tuesday Humby, Ofsted Inspector

Lynsey Gobin, Ofsted Inspector

Adele Quarless, 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 24 February 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

1,312

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

1,230

Close to 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)

39.48%

Above 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

1.52%

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

17.38%

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

Well 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)	36.6%	45.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	31.3%	45.9%	Below
2022/23 (final)	33.3%	45.3%	Below

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)	40.3	46.0	Below
2023/24 (final)	36.0	45.9	Below
2022/23 (final)	38.3	46.3	Below

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)	-0.70	-0.03	Below
2022/23 (final)	-0.70	-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)	16.5%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	26.2%	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)	31.5	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	28.9	34.6	Below
2022/23 (final)	31.9	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)	-1.17	-0.57	Below
2022/23 (final)	-1.11	-0.57	Below

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)	16.5%	53.1%	-36.7 pp
2022/23 (final)	26.2%	52.4%	-26.2 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)	31.5	50.4	-18.9
2023/24 (final)	28.9	50.0	-21.2
2022/23 (final)	31.9	50.3	-18.4

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)	-1.17	0.16	-1.33
2022/23 (final)	-1.11	0.17	-1.27

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)	87%	91%	Below
2022 leavers (revised)	92%	93%	Average
2021 leavers (revised)	89%	94%	Below

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)	8.4%	8.1%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	9.1%	8.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	10.3%	9.0%	Close to average

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)	23.8%	21.9%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	26.8%	25.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	34.5%	26.5%	Above

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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