

Westlands Academy

Address: Eltham Crescent, Stockton-on-Tees, TS17 9RA

Unique reference number (URN): 141385

Inspection report: 18 November 2025

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.

Strong standard ●

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Leaders have had a significant impact on improving pupils' attendance. Leaders work diligently to help pupils reconnect with learning. They provide tailored support. Leaders take a robust, systematic approach. They use strategies such as parental engagement, collaboration with key agencies and staff training to make continual improvements over time. Pupils' individual circumstances are managed sensitively and consistently. This leads to notable gains in pupils' attendance despite the many challenges that pupils face.

Pupils' behaviour improves over time. The school culture promotes calm, respectful relationships, allowing pupils to flourish socially. Leaders analyse behaviour rigorously and adapt provision swiftly. This reduces the number of behaviour incidents pupils experience, helping every pupil feel safe, supported and fully part of school life. Suspensions are used appropriately and only in the best interests of the whole school community. Bullying and discrimination are not tolerated. Incidents are rare and dealt with quickly. Staff apply behaviour policies consistently and adapt approaches for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities very successfully. Pupils feel valued, supported by effective reward systems and strong safeguarding practice. Leaders' relationship-focused approaches create an environment that helps pupils to learn well and supports them to manage their emotions well.

Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Pupils flourish because the school accurately identifies and effectively addresses their needs. Pupils' needs and aspirations are central to the school's work. All staff contribute to and update pupils' targets regularly, ensuring that provision precisely meets pupils' needs. Staff swiftly reduce the barriers pupils face through strategic and inclusive practices. Staff understand how negative life experiences can affect pupils. This helps create a calm and supportive school environment.

Leaders monitor pupils' progress closely, reviewing the impact of interventions and adapting provision when needed. Positive communication with home helps pupils and families to feel welcome and valued. Leaders ensure pupil premium funding has a positive impact on pupils' outcomes. This includes bespoke provisions, such as 'the loft'. Here, pupils with the highest needs receive personalised support while maintaining positive academic standards. These strategies have a clear impact on attendance, behaviour and character development.

Leaders maintain very effective partnerships with many external agencies. Their work with care homes, social workers and multi-agency panels, including targeted work with the police, informs wider practice. The views of pupils and parents are embedded into the school's inclusive approach. For example, transitions in and out of school are managed carefully with families to reduce stress and maintain consistency.

Leadership and governance

Strong standard 

Leaders and trustees have a clear, ambitious vision that prioritises pupils' best interests. They play a key role in the local special educational needs and/or disabilities system. They work with the local authority to respond to demand and develop bespoke provision. Leaders understand the school's strengths and areas for development. They act decisively, investing resources based on trends and ensuring that vulnerable pupils receive support from appropriately skilled staff.

Trustees and governors meet statutory duties and provide robust support and challenge. They monitor pupil premium spending and its impact, review strategy across the trust and scrutinise progress data. Local academy council minutes feed into trust board discussions. This ensures that there are clear lines of communication. Governors and trustees share an accurate picture of how the school is meeting the needs of its pupils. Strategic targeting of developing governors' skills strengthens improvement in post-16 pathways and transition planning.

Leaders ensure that professional learning is coherent, well considered and focused on the school's priorities. They ensure that staff have the knowledge to teach foundational skills, such as reading, writing, oracy and numeracy, as well as meet pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs.

Staff wellbeing is central to leaders' decision-making, supported by a collegiate working environment and the approachable nature of leaders. Staff appreciate this given the specific social and emotional demands of their work.

Leaders show considerable expertise in priorities that matter most for a social, emotional and mental health specialist setting. This includes creating a stable, supportive environment, where pupils build trust in others over time. Where aspects of the school's work are not as well established, leaders have taken highly effective steps to secure rapid improvement.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Pupils generally achieve well across the curriculum. They make positive progress from varied starting points. Staff help them to overcome any barriers to success. Pupils leave with a range of qualifications that build confidence, resilience and a platform for further learning. Pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education, employment or training. The proportion of pupils being successful in their next steps has improved over time. Pupils secure an understanding in important foundational knowledge in communication, reading, writing and mathematics. This helps them learn well across the curriculum.

Leaders monitor pupils' achievement closely against aspirational targets and act swiftly to ensure that pupils progress securely through the curriculum. Many pupils exceed their

original targets. This is reflected in the proportion of pupils successfully completing a range of nationally recognised qualifications.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the curriculum and the quality of teaching. On the whole, the curriculum is ambitious, broad and logically ordered. There are clearly defined end points that build on pupils' prior learning. Leaders identify gaps in pupils' knowledge, such as their literacy and numeracy. Leaders quickly act to close these gaps through targeted interventions delivered by specialist staff. Teachers generally teach the curriculum effectively, using their subject expertise and knowledge of pupils' starting points. Adaptations for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are carefully considered and effective.

Leaders prioritise reading, writing, mathematics and communication, including a recent drive to improve oracy. Pupils who need extra support receive timely phonics intervention, which helps them catch up. Reading for pleasure is promoted well through form-time reading and the school library. For example, Year 8 enjoy reading a book about hope, friendship and homelessness, which reinforces their learning in English. Staff increasingly teach subject-specific vocabulary well. They take time to explore the meanings and origins of words. Checks on pupils' understanding inform teaching. Revisiting and practising core knowledge is embedded in subjects, such as mathematics. However, in some subjects, teaching does not provide pupils with enough opportunities to remember and use key knowledge.

Leaders make sure that staff have the knowledge and expertise to teach the curriculum well. This helps ensure that teaching meets pupils' varied needs and supports their next steps.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Staff demonstrate commitment to pupils' personal development and wellbeing. They prioritise creating a safe, nurturing environment, where pupils feel valued and supported. Relationships are consistently positive. Pastoral care is effective and targeted, underpinned by expertise across the school and trust.

The personal, social, health and economic education, alongside the personal skills and qualities curriculums, cover all statutory requirements and are adapted for the school's individual context. These curriculums help pupils learn about relationships and sex education, as well as learning about life in modern Britain. Pupils explore risks they may face within their communities, such as knife crime and online safety. Leaders enrich personal development through partnerships with external agencies. For example, they draw upon charities linked to key topics, such as racism. This helps enrich staff knowledge and brings difficult topics to life for pupils. The importance of contributing to society is further emphasised through projects, such as working with the food bank. Pupils learn important financial knowledge and employability skills across all year groups. Pupils value learning that connects to real-life issues and prepares them well for life beyond school and adulthood.

Further enhancements to the personal development programme include well-planned outdoor education and summer camps. Pupils also enjoy the recently introduced 'SHAPE

50', which encourages them to complete 50 diverse activities before they leave school. Pupils speak positively about rewards systems, enrichment and improved physical education provision, which all promote confidence and teamwork. Careers education supports pupils well into next steps with development planned for appropriate work experience.

While leaders have lots of success in nurturing pupils' personal development, the school does not have a strategic overview of pupils' participation in the personal development programme. It is unclear which pupils benefit from the full range of opportunities, including cultural and arts provision, that are on offer. This makes it difficult for leaders to see their impact on the provision and adapt it to meet the needs of pupils.

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

Pupils at Westlands Academy thrive because of targeted care and a positive culture of inclusion. Every pupil faces unique challenges. Most pupils have an education health and care plan for social, emotional and mental health. Pupils attend regularly and succeed because staff act quickly to remove barriers. For many pupils, the school is a safe haven, a place where they feel secure and belong. Bullying is rare.

The curriculum helps pupils understand risks and consequences in the wider world. For example, pupils discuss the impact of knife crime with trusted adults. These conversations build empathy, understanding and confidence to explore ideas.

Staff create a positive learning environment that helps pupils to achieve well. Clear routines and respectful relationships support pupils to meet high expectations for their behaviour and progress through the curriculum. Although pupils generally achieve well, there are some occasions where key knowledge is not revisited systematically enough. Some pupils struggle to retain their learning over time.

Pupils take pride in their achievements. They enjoy rewards assemblies and earning 'Westies' to spend in the school 'tuck shop'. They collect points to access enrichment activities at the end of the week. The school's systems help pupils develop their character and aim high in their learning.

Pupils leave school with qualifications beyond their initial expectations. Despite challenges, most pupils are ready for their next steps in education, employment or training. The school shapes the curriculum around pupils' aspirations and local labour market needs. Subjects such as construction and hospitality are popular choices.

The personal development programme is effective and includes enrichment built into the school day. Pupils are beginning to play a role in their community, including organising a local food bank.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that teaching provides more opportunities for pupils to systematically revisit prior learning across the curriculum and to practise this learning to secure their long-term understanding.
 - Leaders should strengthen their analysis of pupils' participation in the personal development programme to ensure that all pupils benefit fully from an extensive, tailored range of experiences.
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About this inspection

This school is part of Horizons Specialist Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Elizabeth Horne, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Walker.

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 principal, executive principal, vice-principals, chief executive officer, deputy chief executive officer, human resources manager and trust safeguarding lead during the inspection. They also spoke to the wider staff and pupils.

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:

All pupils that attend the main school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Pupils' primary need is social, emotional and mental health (SEMH). The school also has an additional resourced provision. This is called the pathway development centre. This provision has space for six pupils whose primary need is also SEMH but do not currently have an EHC plan.

The school makes use of three alternative provisions, including three that are unregistered.

Principal: Stephen Thomas

Lead inspector:

Hannah Millett, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Mary Cook, His Majesty's 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 18 November 2025

School and pupil context

Total pupils

83

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.

School capacity

85

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.

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

81.93%

What does this mean?

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

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

98.80%

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.

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

1.20%

What does this mean?

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

Location deprivation

Well 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)

Resourced provision

What does this mean?

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

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

SEMH - Social, Emotional and Mental Health

What does this mean?

The type of Special Educational Needs provision provided at the school (if applicable).

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
2022 leavers (revised)	78%
2021 leavers (revised)	56%
2020 leavers (revised)	30%

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
2024/25 (1 term)	29.1%
2023/24 (3 term)	26.6%
2022/23 (3 term)	29.5%

Persistent absence

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

Year	This school
2024/25 (1 term)	51.7%
2023/24 (3 term)	60.5%
2022/23 (3 term)	55.4%

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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