

Inspection of WMG Academy for Young Engineers (Solihull)

Chelmsley Road, Chelmsley Wood, Birmingham B37 5FD

Inspection dates:	1 and 2 October 2024
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Requires improvement
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Good

The Associate Principal of this school is Claire Morris. This school is part of WMG Academy for Young Engineers Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Stewart Tait, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Christine Ennew.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy the opportunities they have at WMG Academy for Young Engineers (Solihull). They especially appreciate the focus on engineering and links with local employers that the school provides. They appreciate being treated more maturely. Pupils also value the opportunities provided by staff, many of which are part of the timetabled day. These include 3D modelling, women into engineering events, business engagement and reward trips.

The school is reviewing its curriculum to ensure that aspirations are consistently high across the academy and results improve. This has had varied impact so far, and there remain significant inconsistencies within and between subjects, which pupils particularly noted too.

Most pupils behave well at the school, although some, on occasions, find it harder to meet the school's expectations or consistently work to the best of their ability. Attendance remains an issue for too many pupils. Pupils know that if they have a worry, they can raise this with an adult who will support them. Some pupils expressed frustration that the school manages pupil behaviour inconsistently.

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

The school offers a wide range of subjects that tie in with its university technical college (UTC) mission of engineering. It has started to review the curriculum in these subjects. This is at various stages of completion. The key knowledge that pupils need to learn and the order in which it is taught are not always clearly identified. This means that there is often variation in how subjects are taught. This makes it harder for pupils to learn the key knowledge they need, as they are not always clear on how it fits in with previous learning. This sequencing of learning is more secure in the sixth form, where the school has a clearer understanding of the key knowledge that pupils have to learn and the order in which it should be covered.

At key stage 4, the tasks selected generally build on pupils' prior learning. When this is not the case, pupils struggle to link new information with what they already know. The school's checking of pupils' understanding is very inconsistent, leading to misconceptions that are missed, gaps in understanding, or incomplete work. In the sixth form, this checking is more secure, so misconceptions are generally addressed in a more timely way. Across the school, staff receive information on how to adapt the curriculum for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, often this information is not used systematically, meaning pupils with SEND do not achieve as well as they should.

The school's work for pupils' personal development is a strength at WMG Academy for Young Engineers (Solihull). The curriculum gives pupils a clear understanding of healthy relationships, fundamental British values, other cultures or religions, and how to keep themselves safe and healthy. There is a range of extra-curricular opportunities, mostly aligned to the school's UTC status. At key stage 4, leaders are starting to monitor the uptake of these opportunities. In the sixth form, there are a range of clubs and wider

opportunities, with leaders monitoring participation and working to increase engagement. Careers information, advice and guidance are significant strengths across the school. Pupils are exposed to a wide range of progression routes and opportunities. This means that destinations are positive at all levels, including strong access to apprenticeships, university courses and employment.

Pupils' attendance has dropped significantly over time. The school has recently adopted a more strategic approach, which has led to some improvements. The school is now embedding and refining this strategic approach to further improve pupil attendance. Although most pupils generally behave well, there are inconsistencies in approaches to managing behaviour, which pupils readily remark on. Some pupils occasionally disengage in class and struggle to show resilience in completing the work set.

The school's evaluation process lacks the precision needed for governors and trustees to be clear about the impact of their work and the necessary next steps. Nevertheless, the governors remain committed to the school's mission of developing young engineers. They fulfil their role appropriately, offering challenge and support to the school. Staff report that leaders are mindful of their workload, and they are positive about the opportunities the school provides for professional development. The new training programme is logically planned but is still in its early stages. Parents speak positively about the opportunities the school provides and the links with local employers.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The way the school currently monitors attendance for vulnerable pupils might not always give a complete picture of their well-being when they are not in school. This means there could be times when the school is not fully aware of their welfare during absences. The school is now aware that by using quicker and more proactive methods it could improve how it checks on these pupils, ensuring their safety and well-being even when they are not present.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There remain too many pupils who are absent from school too often. This means these pupils miss too much school and learning. The school should continue to implement and refine its strategic approach, working closely with parents and external agencies, so recent improvements in pupils' attendance continue.
- The school's overview of the attendance of vulnerable pupils does not provide it with a clear oversight of these pupils' well-being when not in school. This means the school does not have assurance of the well-being of vulnerable pupils who are absent. The school should ensure that there are timely checks on the well-being of vulnerable pupils who are absent to provide greater assurance of their well-being.

- The curriculum does not define consistently enough the important knowledge that pupils need to learn. This means that some teachers are unclear about the order in which the curriculum should be taught, and pupils struggle to link the key knowledge they need to be successful. The school should ensure that the curriculum in all subjects is clearly defined, sets out the key knowledge that pupils should learn and the order in which this should be taught.
- Pupils' understanding is not checked systematically, which means that activities are not adapted well enough to meet pupils' needs. This includes some pupils with SEND. This means that some pupils do not successfully build their learning on what they already know, and gaps in their knowledge or misconceptions persist. The school should ensure that all teachers use assessment effectively to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and then adapt the curriculum to ensure pupils learn the key knowledge they need to build successfully on their prior learning.
- The school is not accurately evaluating the impact of its work in various aspects of its provision. This means that inconsistencies persist, and some leaders do not have clear oversight of the impact of their actions. The school should ensure that the impact of its work is systematically evaluated.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	142900
Local authority	Solihull
Inspection number	10344077
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	University technical college
Age range of pupils	14 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	451
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	156
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Christine Ennew
CEO of the trust	Stewart Tait
Principal	Claire Morris (Associate Principal)
Website	https://solihull.wmgacademy.org.uk/
Dates of previous inspection	27 and 28 February 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is one of two university technical colleges in the WMG Academy for Young Engineers Trust.
- The associate principal was appointed two years ago.
- The school uses two registered alternative providers.
- 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.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- As part of this inspection, the inspectors met with the chairs of the governing board and governors. They met with senior leaders, subject leaders, teaching staff and other employees in the school. Inspectors also talked informally to pupils to gather general information about school life. The lead inspector also spoke with the UTC's school improvement partner by telephone. Governing body minutes were reviewed.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, engineering, mathematics, science and electronics. For each deep dive, the inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work in these subjects. The inspectors also met other subject leaders and visited other lessons.
- The inspectors reviewed the school's extra-curricular activities, enrichment programme, and careers and personal development programmes with leaders and pupils.
- The inspectors reviewed the school's behaviour and attendance records with school leaders.
- A range of documents were scrutinised, including plans to improve the school.
- The inspectors met with members of staff and spoke to pupils, both formally and informally, at various points in the inspection. They took account of responses to the Ofsted surveys for staff and pupils, Ofsted Parent View and the free-text responses as well as other communication from parents.

Inspection team

Andrew Madden, lead inspector

Clare Considine

Tim Bassett

His Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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