

Inspection of Waterhead Academy

Huddersfield Road, Oldham, Greater Manchester OL4 3NY

Inspection dates:	14 and 15 January 2025
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Requires improvement
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Previous inspection grade	Inadequate

The principal of this academy is James Wilson. The school is part of the South Pennine Academies trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the interim chief executive officer (CEO), Alison Black, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Lisa Fathers.

What is it like to attend this school?

Most pupils are happy to be part of this very welcoming school community. Pupils from a wide range of backgrounds mix well with each other. Staff care for pupils' well-being and safety. Pupils know who to speak to if they are worried or upset.

The school is ambitious for all pupils to succeed, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who are disadvantaged. Pupils benefit from the recent improvements that the school has made to the quality of education it provides. However, pupils learn better in some lessons than in others. This is because the curriculum is not delivered consistently well. As a result, pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

The school has raised its expectations of how pupils should behave in school. Although a minority of pupils struggle to live up to the school's expectations, the majority behave well in lessons and as they move around the school during social times. Pupils appreciate how behaviour incidents are dealt with consistently and fairly by staff. However, a small group of pupils do not attend school often enough and do not benefit from these raised expectations.

Pupils enjoy a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities provided by the school, with sports and performing arts among the most popular. Many pupils relish the chance to demonstrate their leadership skills across different areas of school life.

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

This school has improved considerably since the previous inspection. As a result, pupils' day-to-day experiences are much better than they were in the past. Leaders at all levels, the staff, trustees and members of the local academy board are united and effective in their desire to ensure that all pupils have access to a high-quality, broad and ambitious curriculum. The school has made adjustments to what was previously an inadequate curriculum to enable pupils to study each subject in greater depth. Furthermore, with the support of the trust, it has begun to take effective action to address a legacy of poor curriculum delivery.

The school has considered carefully what pupils need to know and when this content should be taught. Each subject curriculum sets out clearly for staff the essential knowledge that pupils need to learn. Subject teachers have been trained to deliver this content effectively. Consequently, current pupils know and retain more knowledge than they did previously.

Teachers know their subjects well. In many lessons, they provide clear explanations confidently and regularly check that pupils understand what is being taught. However, this is not the case across all subjects and year groups. This leads to variation in the way that the curriculum is delivered. Sometimes, teachers do not choose the most appropriate methods to help pupils understand key knowledge. Some teachers do not check carefully that pupils understand what they have learned before introducing new learning. As a

result, gaps in pupils' learning are not consistently identified and addressed. This disproportionately affects pupils who have the biggest gaps in their learning.

The school identifies pupils with SEND accurately. It has provided teachers with guidance on how to support pupils with SEND in the classroom. However, some teachers do not use the strategies they have been given to the best effect, or they do not use specialist resources as well as they could. Consequently, the achievement of pupils with SEND is variable.

The school has made reading a priority. It has developed effective systems to identify pupils who have gaps in their reading knowledge. These systems enable staff to pinpoint and remedy the specific problems that individual pupils face with reading. However, the reading of a small minority of pupils in key stage 4 is still weak. This is because, in the past, the school's actions to support these pupils with their reading were ineffective.

The vast majority of pupils benefit from positive relationships with staff and their peers. Typically, they behave well and enjoy learning and socialising together. They understand and follow well-established routines. Older pupils recognise that behaviour in the school has improved. However, there remains a small minority of pupils who do not conform to the expectations set by the school. This means that, occasionally, pupils' education or other experiences are spoiled by the poor conduct of this minority.

Recently, there has been a significant reduction in the number of pupils who are regularly absent from school. This improvement in attendance rates is a result of the school setting high expectations for attendance. It has also created effective processes to explore the reasons for pupils' absence. The school works thoughtfully with many pupils and their families to improve attendance. However, the number of school days missed by some disadvantaged pupils and some pupils with SEND remains high. This means that these pupils miss out on important opportunities for their education and personal development.

Pupils follow a very well-designed programme to promote their personal development. Pupils are knowledgeable about a wide range of matters, including relationships and sex education. They learn about different faiths and cultures. Many are active citizens through involvement in their local community by supporting charity work and food banks. All pupils receive age-appropriate careers education, including independent advice about future careers and further education opportunities.

The trust has supported the school by appointing experienced leaders to key positions. Staff have confidence in the leadership of the school. Recent changes have strengthened the school's capacity for further improvement. Members of the local academy board support the school through their expertise in educational matters. Leaders at all levels are considerate of staff's workload and well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Teachers do not consistently use suitable techniques to help pupils understand subject content. As a result, some pupils have gaps in their knowledge and understanding, which hinders their progress through the curriculum. The school should ensure that teachers are equipped to deliver curriculum content consistently well so pupils know and remember essential knowledge.
- Some teachers do not check that pupils have understood what has been taught before introducing new learning. This means staff do not gain a clear picture of pupils' understanding and what they are ready to learn next. The school should ensure that staff use assessment strategies more effectively to identify and then address gaps in pupils' learning.
- Some staff do not ensure that pupils with SEND receive the support they need in lessons. This means that pupils are not able to overcome barriers to learning. This affects the progress they make through the curriculum. The school should ensure that staff are suitably equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to support pupils with SEND effectively.
- A minority of pupils struggle to live up to the school's expectations of behaviour. This means that, occasionally, pupils' education or other experiences are interrupted by the poor conduct of this minority. The school should further enhance its strategies to challenge and support the behaviour of these pupils.
- The attendance of some disadvantaged pupils and some pupils with SEND is low. As a result, these pupils miss out on important education and opportunities for their personal development. The school should further refine and sharpen its strategies to improve the persistent absence of this minority of pupils.

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	144508
Local authority	Oldham
Inspection number	10348364
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	947
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Lisa Fathers
CEO of the trust	Alison Black (Interim)
Principal	James Wilson
Website	www.waterheadacademy.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	24 and 25 September 2024, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Information about this school

- The school is part of the South Pennine Academies 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 one registered and five unregistered alternative provisions.

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.

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, other senior leaders, subject leaders, staff and members of the local academy board, including the chair of the local academy board.
- An inspector met with the interim CEO of the trust and members of the trust board.
- An inspector spoke to representatives of the local authority.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils about their experience of school and their views on behaviour and bullying. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour during lessons, at breaktimes and at lunchtimes.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of evidence, including the school's improvement plans, records of meetings of the local academy board and analysis of pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record; took into account 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.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in art and design, English, history, mathematics, modern foreign languages and science. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They considered the responses to Ofsted's online staff and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

Timothy Gartside, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Zarina Connolly	Ofsted Inspector
Phill Walmsley	Ofsted Inspector
Neil Johnson	Ofsted Inspector
Michael Pennington	His Majesty's Inspector

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