

Waterside Academy

Address: Rowans, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, AL7 1NZ

Unique reference number (URN): 145257

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.

Strong standard

Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard 

Pupils attend school regularly. They recognise the clear link between high attendance and successful learning. Leaders make sure that parents and carers understand the importance of regular attendance from the early years. Staff work proactively with families to remove barriers that may affect this. The personalised strategies used to support attendance are effective. The school has secured a clear reduction in persistent absence.

The school is a purposeful and respectful place where pupils get along very well. Pupils concentrate and contribute fully in their lessons. They are kind and polite to each other. Relationships between pupils and staff are rooted in mutual trust. Pupils know that staff care about them and feel confident seeking any additional support should they need it.

The school rules underpin the positive ethos of the school. Pupils have a secure understanding of them. Their importance is regularly reinforced, such as in assemblies. Pupils and staff celebrate the positive behaviour they see in others. Staff apply behaviour systems with consistency, fairness and clarity. This helps pupils understand and meet the high expectations of them. If behaviour falls short, pupils know there are consequences, which they believe are fair. Bullying is not tolerated. Those who need additional support receive effective, tailored strategies. This helps sustain a calm learning environment.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard 

Generally, pupils have the skills and knowledge they need to be ready for the next stage of their education. From their various starting points, pupils usually progress well. This begins in the early years, where basic skills are established.

The school's recently introduced phonics curriculum and focus on staff training have helped to improve the phonics screening check outcomes in Year 1. In 2025, they were above the national average. Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are consistently achieving close to their peers nationally in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2.

Where pupils have regular opportunities to address gaps in their learning, they build securely on their previous knowledge and skills. This approach helps pupils develop greater confidence and prepares them well for their future learning. However, there are some inconsistencies in this aspect of the school's work. Leaders are working to secure this effective approach across the school.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have recently updated aspects of the curriculum to ensure that it is broad, balanced and carefully designed. Staff demonstrate secure subject knowledge when delivering

lessons. This helps to capture pupils' interests and deepens their understanding. These improvements are making a difference, with pupils knowing and remembering more.

There is a clear and sustained focus on developing pupils' basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics. Reading is prioritised from the early years. In Nursery, children begin to develop a love of stories and books. This is supported by a clear focus on developing communication and purposeful interactions that build their vocabulary and language. The systematic teaching of phonics supports early reading and spelling. This helps pupils develop confidence and enjoyment as readers. Vocabulary is taught and revisited across the school, with clear links to the topics pupils' study. Handwriting has been a recent focus for leaders, and they continue to prioritise improving the consistency in pupils' letter formation. Pupils benefit from a broad range of high-quality resources that deepen their understanding and support secure learning in mathematics. However, because the ambitious curriculum is relatively new, some pupils have gaps in their learning. Leaders are refining how staff identify and address these gaps.

Staff identify precisely the areas where pupils need further development. They make a range of well-chosen adjustments and adaptations, particularly for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This helps all pupils to access the curriculum successfully.

Early years

Expected standard 

The early years environment stimulates children's curiosity and encourages them to explore ideas. By building on their interests, the curriculum helps children deepen their understanding, develop language and engage enthusiastically in purposeful play. Children are generally engaged and sustain concentration in their activities. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities benefit from timely support. Leaders are enhancing how they monitor its impact to ensure that provision helps children progress quickly.

Staff are attentive to children and use high-quality interactions to introduce and reinforce new vocabulary and basic skills. For example, carefully designed activities to develop children's fine motor skills enable children to count carefully and compare amounts while staff reinforce vocabulary such as 'more' and 'less'. The importance of reading is made clear from the outset. Each child receives a book to enjoy over the summer before joining the school. Phonics is a clear priority and is threaded throughout the day. Staff model accurate sound pronunciation, which supports children in their early reading and writing. Children are typically well prepared for the next stage of their learning.

Parents and carers are actively involved from the beginning. Leaders have worked creatively to support the process of children joining the school, for example by hosting a meeting in a local park alongside school visits.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Staff are well trained to identify pupils' needs accurately, whether they are special educational needs and/or disabilities or other needs. When staff require support to understand pupils' increased needs, they work with leaders or external professionals to ensure these are identified correctly. Staff deliver a range of targeted support skilfully, which helps to support pupils' learning. However, leaders' checks on the progress of pupils who

receive targeted support are not as rigorous as they could be.

External professionals, staff and parents and carers work together to reduce pupils' barriers to successful learning. This may include pastoral support or adaptations to the curriculum that help pupils learn. For some pupils, this involves using alternative provision that leaders select with care. Leaders work closely with these providers to ensure that pupils receive the right support.

Leaders work well with parents so that they understand the provision in place for each pupil. Leaders listen to parental feedback. As a result, they have recently introduced events to support parents and help them with their child's learning.

Leaders use additional funding to address the needs and experiences of the pupils who receive it. Leaders plan this work carefully. They base their decisions on accepted research to ensure this funding has the greatest impact.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

New leaders, appointed since the previous inspection, know the school well and clearly understand its context. They have a clear direction and explain priorities so that staff understand the purpose behind each change. Staff work together to implement the changes and recognise that the school is improving as a result. Leaders provide focused training to strengthen consistency across the school, for example in the use of systems for managing pupils' behaviour.

Leaders set high expectations for pupils and staff. They understand these expectations and work hard to meet them. Leaders, governors and the trust operate as a united team. They evaluate decisions with a firm focus on pupils' needs and outcomes. They give leaders support and challenge in equal measure, which aids school improvement work. Leaders, including those responsible for governance, act in the best interests of pupils.

Leaders prioritise the workload and wellbeing for staff. For example, they cut unnecessary tasks and streamline processes so that staff can focus on teaching. Regular communication helps staff feel informed and heard. Leaders respond to feedback and follow up on actions quickly. Staff feel trusted, valued and motivated to improve their practice.

Parents and carers generally speak positively about the school and the progress it is making. Leaders strengthen relationships with families through purposeful activities. They invite parents to information sessions in school and offer online workshops that widen access. This partnership supports learning at home. It has a clear impact on pupils' confidence and readiness to learn.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Leaders have put in place a clear personal development programme that meets pupils' needs. Leaders and staff identify barriers and adapt the programme for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities so that all pupils access learning that supports their wider development. The programme links with other curriculum areas so that pupils can apply their learning in different contexts. For example, reading books across the school

promote cultural diversity and include content linked to personal traits that are protected by law from discrimination.

There is an appropriate health and relationships education curriculum in place. Pupils learn how to keep themselves physically and mentally healthy, as well as how to stay safe online. This is taught in an age-appropriate way. Leaders regularly introduce new sports that appeal to pupils who feel less confident in physical activity. For example, pupils have recently learned to skateboard. Leaders also deliver workshops on safe gaming, so pupils know how to behave responsibly online and stay safe.

Pupils across the school benefit from educational visits that widen their experiences. These include visits to museums and different places of worship. Pupils also learn from visitors who share their faith and lead drama workshops. Enrichment activities include clubs, sporting activities and musical experiences. Leaders work hard to ensure that as many pupils as possible take part, including those who are disadvantaged.

Pupils have many opportunities to take on leadership roles, such as pride ambassadors, school councillors, house captains and playleaders. Pupils speak proudly about their achievements. Pride ambassadors encourage younger pupils to respect property, and team captains guide peers in positive behaviour. Pupils value these roles and believe they make a real difference. Pupils can access pastoral support when needed. Staff monitor pupils closely and respond to their needs with care.

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

Pupils receive a warm and friendly welcome each day. This helps them to feel secure and valued. They know that staff care deeply about their wellbeing because staff take time to build positive relationships with them. This encourages pupils to attend school regularly.

Pupils show respect for one another and interact with kindness. They speak enthusiastically about the celebration assemblies and enjoy sharing each other's successes. They look forward to it with genuine excitement. Bullying rarely happens, and if it does, staff address concerns quickly so that pupils continue to feel safe.

Pupils enjoy their learning and talk confidently about the engaging activities that help them to stay focused. Many hold high aspirations and work hard. They understand how their efforts will influence their futures. Pupils respond to questions and instructions with enthusiasm and show a desire to learn. When pupils struggle with any aspect of learning, staff provide carefully planned support. This is put in place swiftly so that pupils do not fall behind. Pupils are well prepared for the next steps in their education.

Pupils listen attentively to staff and to each other. This creates a calm atmosphere in lessons and around the school. At playtimes, pupils enjoy a wide range of activities and play cooperatively with their peers. Those who need help to manage their emotions receive timely and effective guidance. Older pupils value their leadership responsibilities and take pride in supporting younger children. This supports the inclusive culture of the school.

Pupils benefit from a rich range of wider experiences, such as museum visits, residential trips and singing in well-known landmarks. These opportunities broaden their horizons and deepen their understanding of the world. Fundraising for local and national charities helps pupils learn to support others.

Next steps

- Leaders should refine checks on pupils receiving targeted support, including in the early years, so that support remains effective and timely.
 - Leaders should develop how staff identify and address gaps in learning so that pupils make consistent and sustained progress.
-

About this inspection

This school is part of Agora Learning Partnership, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Rebecca Daulman, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Carol Shutkever.

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.

Inspection activities:

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, senior staff, teachers, support staff, pupils and some parents during the inspection. They also spoke to representatives from the academy governing body and Agora Learning Partnership Team.

The headteacher has been in position since September 2024.

The school makes use of one alternative provision, which is unregistered.

The school also, under the same registration, runs a nursery. The nursery offers places for children aged 3 to 4.

Headteacher: Kevin Peart

Lead inspector:

Katie Devenport, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Lucille Pollard, Ofsted Inspector

Richard Fordham, 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

177

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: 272

School capacity

210

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: 300

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

48.45%

Well 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: 26.3%

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

5.08%

Above 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: 3.5%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

19.77%

Above average

What does this mean?

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

National average: 15%

Location deprivation

Close to 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

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standards in a combined reading, writing and mathematics measure.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	68%	61%	Above
2024/25 (revised)	64%	62%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	70%	61%	Above
2022/23 (final)	71%	60%	Above

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	75%	74%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	75%	75%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	70%	74%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	82%	73%	Above

Pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	74%	72%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	71%	72%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	78%	72%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	71%	71%	Close to average

Pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	74%	73%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	64%	74%	Below
2023/24 (final)	74%	73%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	88%	73%	Above

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 reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	43%	46%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	42%	47%	Close to average

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	38%	46%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	S	44%	S

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	48%	62%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	50%	63%	Below
2023/24 (final)	38%	62%	Below
2022/23 (final)	S	60%	S

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	52%	59%	Close to average
2024/25 (revised)	42%	59%	Below
2023/24 (final)	63%	58%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	S	58%	S

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	48%	60%	Below
2024/25 (revised)	42%	61%	Below
2023/24 (final)	50%	59%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	S	59%	S

‘S’ in the table above indicates the data has been suppressed, which is usually due to small cohorts. The suppression rules applied by the DfE when publishing the data have been mirrored and applied in the report card.

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 reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics, including the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	43%	68%	-24 pp
2024/25 (revised)	42%	69%	-28 pp
2023/24 (final)	38%	67%	-30 pp
2022/23 (final)	S	66%	S

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	48%	80%	-32 pp
2024/25 (revised)	50%	81%	-31 pp
2023/24 (final)	38%	80%	-42 pp
2022/23 (final)	S	78%	S

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	52%	78%	-26 pp
2024/25 (revised)	42%	78%	-37 pp
2023/24 (final)	63%	78%	-15 pp
2022/23 (final)	S	77%	S

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	48%	80%	-32 pp
2024/25 (revised)	42%	81%	-39 pp
2023/24 (final)	50%	79%	-29 pp

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2022/23 (final)	S	79%	S

‘S’ in the table above indicates the data has been suppressed, which is usually due to small cohorts. The suppression rules applied by the DfE when publishing the data have been mirrored and applied in the report card.

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)	5.5%	5.2%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	5.3%	5.5%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	5.2%	5.9%	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)	19.9%	13.3%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	17.3%	14.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	13.2%	16.2%	Close to average

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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